

“Turn to the Lord” (Zechariah 1:1–6)(8.22.21)

Zechariah 1:1–6 (NIV84) *A Call to Return to the Lord*

1 In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:

² “The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. ³ Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the Lord Almighty. ⁴ Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.’ But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. ⁵ Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers?

“Then they repented and said, ‘The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.’ ”

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Turn to the Lord”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

When I was a child, my family often took drives. Sometimes it was to a specific destination and at other times it was only for recreation. Gas was only a quarter a gallon, so it was an inexpensive way for a family of six to do something together. And no, there were no seatbelts in the back seat.

There is a family story that has been told many times. We were on one of our Sunday afternoon adventures. My Dad had taken a wrong turn, then two; subsequent wrong turns get easier and easier to make. As you know, most men don’t want to stop and ask for help, to ask for directions. Dad began to get perturbed and had started muttering and cursing about being lost. My sister Lynda, who was about six or seven years old said, “I know what to do Daddy.” My Mom asked her what that was. In a very sweet voice, Lynda said, “Let’s just go back home and start over.”

That sounds like a simple thing to do. In effect, that is what the Israelites had done; although, they could not return home until after 70 years in exile in Babylon. That is what is being referred to here in the book of Zechariah – their forefathers had not listened to the prophets’ continuous call to repentance. Generation after generation stubbornly refused to obey God’s call to return to their Covenant God – they kept making wrong turns. Therefore, the Lord Almighty used Babylon’s army as an instrument of wrath. They were conquered and exiled.

Finally, Almighty God brings them back home. Unfortunately, only a remnant came back to Jerusalem. They start rebuilding the Temple of God, the place of His presence; but, their enthusiasm waxes cold. Their concern for God’s purposes become displaced by their own agendas. So, once again, our patient, loving, and long-suffering Lord sends prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to turn the people back to God and God’s work. Zechariah is a very popular Jewish name in our Bible and it means the Lord remembers. One of my favorite old-time preachers, Alexander Maclaren, concluded his sermon on this passage with this: “THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THESE SOLEMN THOUGHTS. I want to urge upon my brethren in the ministry that they should, in all their utterances, try to realize that they are prophets, dying, with a message to dying men. There is a great deal of modern preaching clever, eloquent, cultured, ingenious, which seems to have utterly forgotten that it has got a message of forgiveness and of cleansing by the blood of Christ to proclaim to men. And how these thoughts should influence **hearers!** How you would listen if you knew that this was your last sermon!”

My charge to you now is listen as if this was the last sermon you will ever hear.

BODY:

For our Special Music, John played and sang “Turn, Turn, Turn.” I love that song. It was actually written by Pete Seger in the late 50’s before being made famous by pop artists like The Byrds in the 60’s. The

fact that is mostly scripture makes it especially attractive to me. Of course, it is from Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

It is when the human addition is made that it goes wrong. Pete Seger of course put the words to music, but he also added the chorus. What happens when you turn, turn, turn? You get dizzy and you fall down. We are called to turn to the Lord and to do it once and for all. Yes, it is true that when we backslide or fall from faith that Almighty God, the Lord of Hosts, desires that we return, that we repent. But, the desire of the Lord's heart is that his children always continue to walk by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In my Wesley Study Bible, it gives Repentance as a Core Term with this definition: "Repentance represents godly sorrow for one's sin, confession of it, **and the resolve to turn from sin**. It involves more than just confessing sin. Repentance involves sorrow over betraying God and others, and it results in resolve not to continue sinning. Wesley considers repentance an act of faith that leads to conversion. Repentance includes turning away from sin and toward God. Thus, it should become a lifelong habit of holy living. Sanctification heightens one's sensitivity to and conviction of sin and the need to repent of sins – sins of commission and omission, personal and social sins, and so on.

The Bible contains wonderful promises to those who repent. Penitents receive, for example, comfort and answers to prayer. Most important, they receive pardon from sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. Zechariah speaks of the need for repentance and of the just consequences of not repenting. Certainly, God responds compassionately to all who truly repent."

To all who truly repent. Well, I came across a negative illustration of this in an unexpected way this week. Recently, I read an article that called on pastors to read fiction. Although I read a fair amount, I have hardly read any fiction in the last fourteen years. It seemed frivolous when there are so many books about faith, prayer, and the Bible.

The author of the article argued that quality literature will enhance a pastor's ministry and preaching. Quality literature will expand your view of the world; provide the nourishment of relaxation; and, see truths of the human condition lived out. I happen to have a complete collection of Ernest Hemingway short stories; so, I started reading them.

In 1918, Ernest Hemingway served with the Red Cross in Italy as the war raged on. Though still only eighteen years old, he experienced WWI firsthand. When a mortar shell landed just feet from him, he took 227 shards of metal in his flesh. Most of the rest of the war, he spent in the hospital. Death, fear, courage, and love are the mainstays of his stories.

Here is an introduction to one of his chapters:

"While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed, "Oh Jesus Christ get me out of here. Dear Jesus please get me out. Christ please please please Christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed, I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear Jesus."

The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody."

Does it sound like this unnamed soldier truly repented? Obviously, he did not. Do you think he meant his promise when he pleaded with God in prayer? I believe that he did. Clearly, he had an intellectual understanding of who Jesus is; the need for obedience; and, the expectation to share the good news of Jesus. What kept him from living up to his covenant with the Lord? It appears, his love of sin outweighed his love for Jesus.

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. O soul, are you weary and troubled?

No light in the darkness you see?

There's light for a look at the Savior,

And life more abundant and free!

Refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

2. Thro' death into life everlasting,
He passed, and we follow Him there;
O'er us sin no more hath dominion--
For more than conqu'rors we are!

Refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

3. His Word shall not fail you--He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

Refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Our God, Lord Almighty, Lord of Hosts, is huge on communication. In these first six verses of Zechariah, this truth cannot be missed: once - tell the people; twice - declares the Lord Almighty; three times - says the Lord Almighty. He sent the prophets to speak on His behalf. They gave us God's words, decrees, and commands. We and our forefathers were supposed to listen and pay attention to our God. Then in the fullness of time, the Lord Jesus was sent so that we could know God.

There is a poem, "**The Hidden Line: The Destiny of Men**" by J. Addison Alexander

There is a time, we know not when,
A point we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men
To glory or despair.

There is a line by us unseen,
That crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath.

To pass that limit is to die,
To die as if by stealth;
It does not quench the beaming eye,
Or pale the glow of health.

The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirits light and gay;
That which is pleasing still may please,
And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God has set
Indelibly a mark,
Unseen by man, for man as yet

Is blind and in the dark.
And yet the doomed man's path below
May bloom as Eden bloomed;
He did not, does not, will not know,
Or feel that he is doomed.
He knows, he feels that all is well,
And every fear is calmed;
He lives, he dies, he wakes in hell,
Not only doomed, but damned.
Oh! where is that mysterious bourne {boundary}
By which our path is crossed;
Beyond which, God himself hath sworn,
That he who goes is lost.
How far may we go on in sin?
How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end, and where begin
The confines of despair?
An answer from the skies is sent;
"Ye that from God depart,
While it is called today, repent,
And harden not your heart."

Likely, you know that plants turn towards the sun. Likewise, we should turn towards the Son. Out in our lobby there is a large plant, that I believe is called a Christmas Cactus. If you look at it now, it looks kind of deformed; almost like it is leaning so far inward it would fall over. The reason is because not long ago, it was turned around from facing the sun. It had grown so far towards the sun that its shape was completely transformed. Has our faith changed our form?

'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty. What a blessed promise that is for us. Recently, I was watching a couple walk together side by side. The man was larger and he was closer to me. The couple walked together in a synchronized way such that at first I thought the man was walking by himself. Are we in step with Jesus so that others first see Him?

CONCLUSION:

The Lord Almighty makes it plain that every person will die, even the prophets. In contrast, the Word of God always comes to fruition. Whatever God says, comes to pass. Because of God's love and forbearance, people in the past and today, think that God's word is impotent. Here He tells us that just as My word overtook your forefathers, stand warned yourself. Then the people repented.

Today, we celebrated the blessing of baptism. As a congregation, we renounced sin and renewed our commitment as children of God in the Church of Christ. We have died with Jesus and been raised with Jesus. If you have not yet confessed with your mouth AND believed in your heart that Jesus is Lord, don't let another day go by. There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die.

The book of Ecclesiastes ends with these two verses: Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 (NIV84)

¹³ Now all has been heard;

here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.

¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

Scriptural Prayer for Revival from Praying with Fire

Compassionate Father, I so need to hear Your Word, and heed Your Word. Call out and raise up mighty and bold preachers of the gospel; as Haggai and Zechariah were Your preachers, we need bold preachers today. Show me any area where I have substituted my will for Your will. Teach me that the time is now to be about Your kingdom work (Haggai 1:2).

Please give unction to Your preachers, Your prophets. Let them proclaim Your Word with boldness and power, bringing glory to You (v. 3). Father, do I allow Your temple to lie in ruins, in need of repair, while my home is pampered? Oh, Lord, let me consider my ways (v. 4). Show me where I am investing my time and resources. Do I have true satisfaction, or do I get and get and yet still am not satisfied? Am I content with what I have? In what am I trying to find satisfaction? Food and drink? Money? Entertainment or sports? Things of the world (v. 6)?

Let me be careful to consider my ways before You. If my ways are not in complete alignment with Your ways, please forgive me. Show me where I need to change, and let me quickly adjust to You (v. 7).

Father, place strong preachers in my life, as Zechariah was in Israel's life (Zechariah 1:1). Speak to me, Lord, and let me know my heart. Open my eyes, letting me see my true spiritual condition. Keep me sensitive to Your Word that I may live daily under repentance.

Teach me Your sovereignty, for You are the Lord of hosts. Revive me through Your Word. Let me return to You at Your bidding (vv. 2–3). Lord, do not let me excuse the way I live based on the way my parents lived. Let me not ignore Your words of warning or rebuke. May I heed Your Word. Let me run to You and repent of my sin. Teach me to hunger for Your preached Word. May Your prophets and preachers be bold in proclamation (vv. 4–6). Deal with me according to my ways. Father, send revival (v. 6).

In Jesus' name, amen.