

Message: Zech 10:6-12

Actual Message:

Introduction:

Well Smoky Row, my friends, it's an honor to speak to you again. I went with my brother's family to their church service this past Sunday, and it was fine. It was charming, and they are doing good things in the world, but I was just sort of like, meh. I prefer Smoky Row. So it's good to be home.

We're continuing to talk about Zechariah today. Last week, Rudy talked to us about Zechariah 7, and justice, mercy, compassion in community.

And the text that drove Rudy's message came from that First Part of Zechariah. Remember this outline?

1-8: During Temple-Building

1:1-6: Introduction

1:7-6:15: 8 "Night Visions" & Crowning

7-8: Four Messages on Spiritual Renewal & Obedience

9-14: After Temple-Building

9-11: God's Arrival as King (1)

11:1-3: Interlude**12-14: God's Arrival as King (2)**

Zechariah really has two parts; a before-the-Temple's-rebuilt Part, and one that comes after. Rudy spoke to us on a passage that comes from a section all about Israel's need to pursue spiritual renewal by way of trusting obedience.

Today:

Today, we're leaving that first Part of Zechariah behind us, and moving into this Second Part. We'll talk about this section of Zechariah in general: What's true about it, why it mattered for Israel and why it matters for us. And we'll talk in particular about that bit of it that was read to us this morning. I hope at the end of this, we'll understand Zechariah better than we do right now, and we'll get a glimpse of how worthy God is of our worship.

Let's pray!

Prayer:**Part Two:**

(What follows is indebted, here and there, to Hwang,

2016). So, again, we've left Part One, and the basically hopeful (Hwang, 2016) apocalyptic visions Zechariah has there, which are followed by the calls to renewal that Zechariah gives. Those calls, one of which Rudy walked us through last week, were centered around the promise God makes to Judah, tiny and powerless though they feel, that "They shall be my people, and I will be their God."

And I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that Zechariah really does change after chapter 8; it's Second Part is so different that some people wonder if it was written by someone else. It's written after the Temple has been rebuilt, Zechariah seems to be older, shaped by time and work that was, you know, largely successful.

9-11: God's Arrival as King (1)

11:1-3: Interlude

12-14: God's Arrival as King (2)

This Second Part of Zechariah is split into two, with a small interlude in between. The tone, the presentation, of Zechariah's oracles is totally different. We're told, simply, at 9:1 and 12:1 that what follows is "a prophecy," although it's better translated, "burden." And in knowing that, we do get an insight into

Zechariah. What he has to give God's People isn't grace and light; it's a burden. It's something that Judah has to carry, that he has to carry.

Here's what we'd see if we walked through each passage:

We'd see:

9:1a: A "Burden"

9:1b-8: A promise of judgment on all the historical neighbors of Judah:

@8: "But I will encamp at my temple to guard it against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch."

9:9-13: A promise of a peaceful king's arrival

@9b: See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

9:14-17: A promise of God's arrival following the king's arrival

@16: The Lord their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.

10: Various displays of God's providence

@1: Agricultural fruitfulness

@3: Bad leaders punished

@8: Exiles brought home

11:1-3: Interlude condemning Persia by comparing it to Israel's engagement with Canaan

11:4-17: Apocalyptic recollection of Israel's history that sets us up for Chapter 12

12:1a&b: Another Burden re: Israel's enemies

12:1c-9: Apocalyptic/Eschatological promise of judgment on Jerusalem's enemies

@9: On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

12:10-14: Apocalyptic/Eschatological promise of mourning

@10: They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

13:1-6: Apocalyptic/Eschatological cleansing of sin, false prophets, idolatry

@1: On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and

impurity.

13:7-9: Apocalyptic/Eschatological winnowing of Israel, with only 1/3rd remaining:

@9b: They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

Thanks for that, I guess...

Why walk through this? I want us to see that this Second Part of Israel has to do with things God promises are going to happen in Israel's life. Most of what we see in the prophets is stuff that is happening, right? We can go to Kings and Chronicles and make connections between what the prophets say and how the people are living. Zechariah's "burdens" in the Second Part of his book are what we think of when we think of prophecy: Mostly stuff to come, and most of that, stuff to come someday, way down the line.

Thanks: Themes: Hope

Rather than focus on particulars, though, there are major themes here. God promises that there will come a time when Israel fully says "The Lord is our God" as a response to God saying "They are my people." Zechariah's ultimate promise is that Israel--what's left

of them, anyway--will be God's People as they were always meant to be. They will live for God; God will live for them, and the promises God made to Abraham will be realized through them. Zechariah ends on hope.

Thanks: Themes: End Times! Yowza!

Over and over in this Second Part we see God say "on that day," and we've already talked about the way "on that day" is a marker, a phrase that we are meant to know means this is ultimate stuff, what happens when the world comes to an end, stuff about final judgment and final reward.

And over the years we've noted dozens of times the basic theological concept the New Testament presents, which is that the end of the world, the age to come, the final countdown, the Day of the Lord, as the prophets called it, dawned in Jesus--started at Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection--but won't close, nightfall won't fall, until Jesus returns. "That day" that Zechariah references over and over started in Jesus, but hasn't ended yet. The end of the world wasn't just one moment, but cut into two, and we're in the space between.

And the reason that the New Testament authors came to this conclusion, which wasn't entirely novel in Jesus' world, but centering it on Jesus was, was simply because some of what Zechariah and others seemed to say came true...and some of it didn't. We're still waiting on, for example, death to end, evil to be completely eradicated, sin to be completely removed from creation.

Thanks: Themes: The Land, The City, The Temple

And beyond this, so much of the Jerusalem-centric promises, the land promises that Zechariah was burdened by, seem to be revisited by Jesus and, frankly, removed. Christians are sent out into the whole world; Christians become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Jerusalem itself is re-envisioned, in Revelation, as the church, "new" and overtaking Jerusalem. It's not Mt. Zion, but the Church that is the "light of the world," the "city on the hill." Jesus expands the great Jerusalem and Judah-centric promises of Zechariah out into the whole world. The Land became the world; the city and Temple became us. And this was, really, this was a new thing, a thing probably only the Messiah could have set up, pulled off, claimed.

Thanks: Themes: Lying?

Does this mean God was lying to Zechariah? To those who carried his burden? I don't think so. Over and over, as far as the Bible puts it, God wisely, creatively, lovingly reacts to the failures and rejection of Abraham's descendants in order to keep his promise that through Abraham, the world would be blessed. There's development in Israel's understanding of God, and how God relates to the world; and Jesus clarifies, informs, and redirects enormous amounts of the energy of God's People.

So Zechariah is promising a world in which God's People are God's People, in which sin is forgiven, a world in which Jerusalem, with its Temple, is at the center, in which all the enemies of God's People have their antagonism returned to them. Jesus redefines this: the land around us is all over the world now, we go to it instead of others coming to us. We're the Temple of the Living God, but we are God's People in a way Zechariah couldn't have guessed, Jews and Gentiles both, waiting for Jesus' return, death and sin's end, and everything set right.

Today's Passage:

And today's passage, we might remember, is part of these displays of providence God promises Judah. In

Chapter 9, God promises that Zion, Jerusalem, will receive a peaceable king, whose arrival launches demilitarization, all the Israelites who are prisoners of war will be freed and get reparations. Judah will grow. And God Himself will appear, like a shepherd, gathering them in fighting off some sort of foe. He'll be a good shepherd, we read, as we go into today's passage. He'll give rain for food; he'll scatter those who have shepherded poorly. He'll empower Judah to be, basically, impossible to win against, if anyone tries to fight them.

And then we read:

***“I will strengthen Judah
and save the tribes of Joseph.
I will restore them
because I have compassion on them.
They will be as though
I had not rejected them,
for I am the Lord their God
and I will answer them.
7 The Ephraimites will become like warriors,
and their hearts will be glad as with wine.
Their children will see it and be joyful;
their hearts will rejoice in the Lord.***

God promises that Judah will be strengthened, saved, restored, answered. They'll become warrior-like, drunk with pleasure, joyful, and the kids will notice it.

***8 I will signal for them
and gather them in.***

***Surely I will redeem them;
they will be as numerous as before.***

***9 Though I scatter them among the peoples,
yet in distant lands they will remember me.
They and their children will survive,
and they will return.***

God will gather them in, and for those exiled, he'll draw them back, and they don't have to fear the death of their children.

Zechariah continues:

***10 I will bring them back from Egypt
and gather them from Assyria.***

***I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon,
and there will not be room enough for them.***

***11 They will pass through the sea of trouble;
the surging sea will be subdued***

***and all the depths of the Nile will dry up.
Assyria's pride will be brought down
and Egypt's scepter will pass away.
12 I will strengthen them in the Lord
and in his name they will live securely,"
declares the Lord.***

Something like Exodus will happen again. The ending of exile will take place. "I will strengthen them in the Lord and in his name they will live securely." To say "in his name" is to give the perspective of those outside these people who have the Lord as their God. They look in, and what they see is people who live in the name of the Lord, and are at peace.

When?

Did this come true? That is, was this historically realized? Did what Zechariah say here come true at some point in history?

And the answer is, maybe? I mean there was a season of return for Israel. Persia did allow them enormous freedom, allow those who wanted to go back to their homelands go. That could have felt like a time in which Israel was on the up and up. But, you know, it'd be hard to say "Yes, this happened" without nuancing it a

little bit. So we can say “Yes, but not entirely.”

If not entirely, we could then say, if we wanted, well: Zechariah is a failed prophet. I do think we miss something there.

Or we say, “Well, it’s yet to happen.” Paul, in Romans 11, seems to suggest that he expects something like this to happen, expects Israelites, God’s People before Jesus arrived, to experience a return to God. Paul seems to expect something like a return from exile to take place for those who are ethnically Jewish. He calls it a mystery; something we can’t explain, but can expect. Unfortunately, the Church has often tried to explain what Paul says, and then arrange it, magically, mechanistically, by making this or that political move. That’s bogus, bad Bible Study and bad politics, both.

I do think that what Zechariah said was for Zechariah’s People; that they were meant to take hope in his words. They were meant to notice this repetitive focus on their children, and believe that their families would find a home in the shadow of this newly built Temple, which did stand for 600 more years, many of those ones in which Israel was practically under its own rule.

And yet, the early church believed that this peaceful king of Zechariah 9 was Jesus, and Jesus march to the Temple is something we remember every Easter. Jesus is presented to us over and over again as the “good Shepherd,” contrasting with all those in the Gospels who have led Israel astray, and in that, he acts just like the Shepherd who scatters those bad leaders of chapter 9. God’s arrival in Jerusalem after the good King’s Triumphal Entry, and God’s promise to be with His People then is echoed in the Holy Spirit coming upon us after Jesus’ resurrection; the promises of strength, of restoration, of being answered, saved, and of course, if we kept reading, of being cleansed from our sin and impurity, all these things are true of those who trusted Jesus. Again: there is no major sign, in the Gospels, that Jesus cared about bringing exiled Israelites home to Jerusalem’s Temple; his concern, rather, was sending God’s People, now the home of God, out. But when Paul goes on to say that God wants to have “mercy on them all,” Gentile and Jew both, and will figure out a way to do that, well: Good.

Here’s what I want to bring us around to, this morning:

Sometimes we’re given this easy “Come to Jesus. Repent. You’ll be saved--from something, sin, hell,

death, guilt, addiction. However it's sold, it's sold easy. And it is: We trust in Jesus' faithfulness; his covenant-keeping has made us members of the family. And I don't want to talk about how that's harder than it sounds, and salvation is so much more, we get that. But I don't think we fully appreciate, most days, just how remarkable it is that we're a part of God's grand, humanity-redeeming efforts. Zechariah didn't know about us; Zechariah didn't care about us. Assyria and Gilead and Egypt and Lebanon; these are places whose names don't exist, and if they do are ideas to us. And yet: Here we are, the benefits of Zechariah's hopes. Here we are, the city on a hill, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, living for the land around us; sent out to where we each go, and for this moment, Sunday morning, gathered together right now.

God has been behind all this; orchestrating, responding. There has been nothing simple about you ending up here this morning. God loves you. God has worked through a thousand historical processes, in places and through people we've never known, and somehow, miraculously, here you are.

So: What will you do with that? Why are you here? What are you here for? Have you experienced

empowerment? Do you feel strengthened? Do you know you are being saved, and will be saved? What do the children around you notice about your joy? And your pleasure and happiness, so good it's like being drunk without any loss of control: Do you see that this is God, active in your life? The Holy Spirit bearing fruit in your life that Zechariah never imagined

There are things God deserves worship for; you, here, right now is the most basic of them. We don't know Zechariah; he doesn't know us. God knows us both, and Jesus has bridged the 3000 years between us, saving us all, and keeping us safe until his return.