

Return And Be Restored

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as we look at Zechariah this evening, I wonder if you've ever read the book of Zechariah before? Or maybe if you've turned to it, you've kind of read the first few chapters like we did now and thought, what on earth is going on and then flicked quickly to a gospel?

I thought, I don't understand what's going on here. The book in some ways, at least the first six chapters especially, might sound strange to our ears. The first six chapters are full of visions that Zechariah is giving, visions of mountains made of bronze, of horses of different colors, of a woman in a basket that's carried along and flown through the air by people.

It's got a flying scroll, it's got horns that are charging around as we just saw and we think, what on earth is going on? It's a book full of colorful and dramatic scenes that are meant to make us sit up and pay attention to go, what on earth is going on here?

That's what we should be, a world from God's perspective that Zechariah is going to draw us in and help us see things, see this world from God's perspective. The best thing in Zechariah though isn't just that all of the amazing pictures that are drawn for us.

The best thing is that all of these point in one place. This is ultimately a book that is all about Jesus. So for example, you might know how when Jesus in the Gospels, all the Gospels record Jesus riding into Jerusalem in a donkey.

[1 : 2 5] Why does he do that? Why does Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey? Well, it's because Zechariah said he would do it. And Zechariah prophesied that God's coming king would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Or why did Judas get paid 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus? That's again, that's there in Zechariah 11. Or why does it speak, Jesus speak when Jesus is arrested and his disciples scatter.

Jesus says, strike the shepherd and his sheep will be scattered. That's Zechariah again. In other words, Zechariah is packed full of things that point to Christ or quoted or maybe are more subtle references.

But altogether it's a book that will help us to understand more about who Jesus is, his person and his work. So it's a book that's immensely relevant to us.

If we want to understand more about who Jesus is, if we want to understand our New Testament better and understand how God is working in this world, then this is a book for us to read and pay attention to.

[2 : 3 2] Zechariah is a book about what God has done, what he is doing and what he will do through Jesus Christ. And so it's a book for the church in every age. Just a bit of background, it's written by Zechariah who's a prophet.

That means he spoke as God's representative, not just foretelling the future, which he does in some ways, but also foretelling, telling people about calling people back to obey God's word as we'll see he comes and tells people to repent.

But we also see when is it written? Well, in verse one we see it's written in the second year of Darius, king of Persia. So that's about 520 BC. So just to kind of align ourselves if we're thinking of the history of Israel. Israel has and Judah have been plundered by the Assyrians and then the Babylonians have been kicked off into exile. But after 70 years in exile, God has brought his people back from exile in Babylon, back to Judah. As Babylon is taken over by the Persians and it comes over a new rule, the new regime allows people to return. So exiles have just returned to the Promised Land and they're sitting among or standing whatever, among the piles of stone and rubble and they're thinking what on earth is we going to do now? What on earth is happening here? This isn't, I thought when we got back it would be better than this. Where are all of God's promises of Jerusalem being restored? Of God wants more coming to dwell with his people? Where are all these promises that God's made of restoration? And they're a bit confused and the temple's flattened and they're thinking where on earth is God? We might think it's a bit surprising given that the people have just returned to the Promised Land. That Zechariah's prophecy begins with the command to return to me. You see it there in verse 3, thus says the Lord of hosts returned to me.

The people are back in the land so it's clearly talking about more than a physical return. It's a word that that word return can also be translated repent. It's the same language, return, turn around as we were thinking this morning. Repentance is all about turning back to Jesus. It's a language of restoring relationship with God. It's like God in some ways is telling his people, okay look you've come back in person to the land but are your hearts back with me?

Have you come back to commit yourselves to me? Zechariah's aim is that people would return to God in this whole book and that makes it again incredibly relevant for us. We began our service with Jesus' words, the time has fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel. That call to repent, well we begin the Christian life repenting by turning away from sin and turning to Christ but it's not just the start of the Christian life, repentance is the whole life of a Christian. One of continually turning away from anything else that would distract us and get in the way of our relationship with God and committing ourselves to Jesus.

[5 : 44] In other words Zechariah begins his book by calling us to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to God, all that we are, whether it's for the first time or each day as we seek to follow Jesus.

Now we all know that's hard and we all know that there's lots of things that can make us struggle to wholeheartedly follow Jesus or indeed start following him in the first place. I already mentioned that for Zechariah's readers they're back in the Promised Land and they're looking around and thinking what on earth is God doing in this right now? We've come back here but where's God? What's he doing? Has he abandoned us? We're just sitting around in the rubble. What is God up to?

Well to show us what returning looks like to encourage God's people, he gives Zechariah seven night visions and in these first three night visions he particularly addresses that question what is God up to in the world? I wonder if you've ever wondered that yourself, what on earth is God up to? We see all kinds of things going on in the news, we see war, we see people starving, we see in our communities, in our families all kind of hurt and pain, we see the church in different countries persecuted, people thrown in prison, buildings burned and we think what on earth is going on? Where is God? Well these first three visions in Zechariah answer that question what is God doing in this world? And so let's look at each one of them in turn, what is God doing? First in the first vision we see that God is a God who sees, God sees.

Let me read again from verse seven on the 24th day of the 11th month which is the month of Shabbat in the second year of Darius. The word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah the son of Berakai, the son of Edo saying, I saw in the night and behold a man riding on a red horse, he was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen and behind him were red, sorrel and white horses. Now as dreams go you probably think well this is bizarre, you might have had some weird dreams but maybe nothing like this. Zechariah sees this man on a red horse and he's standing among these myrtle trees and behind is this army on horseback and Zechariah in verse nine asks the question that we are all thinking. He says what are these my lord? I'm really glad that Zechariah is thinking the same thing as us and I'm not the only one wondering what on earth is going on.

And the angel replies to him and the angel who replies to him he's called the angel who talked with me and that angel is going to appear all throughout Zechariah's visions and if you want to think of him in some ways as Zechariah's tour guide. As Zechariah explores this tapestry of pictures that is teaching him about the world the angel is there as his tour guide explaining these pictures explaining what is going on and the angel is really helpful because while there's a lot of symbolism here and we can dig into the nitty-gritty and we're happy to talk more about some of things afterwards in tea and coffee there we don't get time to cover. The key thing that the angel does is focus us on the main thing each vision is telling us and he does that he says in verse nine he says in verse 10 rather these are they whom the lord has sent to patrol the earth.

[9 : 13] So it's just like the Persian army would have sent out riders throughout the empire to check out what's going on to bring back a report of the state of the land so in a similar way Zechariah is getting, God gives Zechariah this image of of God's patrol as it were that has gone out into the world and is bringing him a report of what is going on and they give their report in verse 11 to the rider on the red horse who in verse 11 we see is called the angel of the Lord the one who's standing among the myrtle trees. Now this angel of the Lord figure is a figure who comes out throughout the Old Testament. He appears to Abraham later on he appears to Joshua as the commander of the Lord's army and he isn't an ordinary angel because he speaks with the authority of God and as we and if you were to look up the references to the angel of the Lord throughout the Old Testament this is an angel who people respond to with fear saying we have seen the Lord and and they and who this angel speaks with God's authority is responded to as people respond to

God and so for many reasons and this and many reasons more people think that it's that this angel of the Lord is an appearance of God in physical form as it were whether that's and even some would say this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ so in other words before Jesus' incarnation his birth this is an appearance of Jesus in human form. Anyway the point though is that God is receiving a report on the world that's the main thing if you're getting lost that's the main thing. God is receiving a report on the world God sees. Have you ever looked around the world and wondered does God know what's going on? Does he see these people suffering? Does he see my I don't know my husband my wife my child? Does he see the distress that they're going through? Does he see my son who's being bullied at school? Does he see the suffering of of these people in this country? Does he see this this church that is having to meet in a hidden place because they're oppressed? Does he see what is going on in the world with all the atrocities?

And the answer is yes like an army general receiving constant reports from his scouts God knows what's happening on the ground he sees. God is not as someone see him a divine watchmaker who puts this world together winds it up and then has nothing more to do with it.

God is intimately involved in this world he is active in the world. Jesus has worked in stop when he ascended into heaven. In the book of Revelation we see that Jesus is on the throne he speaks he is he is standing he knows what is happening with his people he is involved in his church we don't have an absent God we have a God who is present who is in control who is sovereign as he rules this world. Back to the horsemen though they report that the earth is at rest you see that at the end of verse 11 and now this isn't a good rest you might want to think of the kingdom of Persia like a fat cat that has just raided a bird's nest and is now sitting back to enjoy its supper. Persia has as Darius has just come on the throne he's just put down lots of different rebellions and so this is a land that is at rest because all opposition has been squashed.

There's peace but it's a peace that comes from oppression and many of the Jews in sitting in Jerusalem would have felt that as I mentioned they're sitting among the in the rubble of Jerusalem and this they know that this is not how it should be they've read their Bibles they've read the prophecies of of Isaiah of Jeremiah that promise that when God God's people return from exile then it's going to be like heaven on earth God's king will be on the throne and God's glory will return to the temple there'll be peace from enemies there'll be abundance of blessing but the reality that they're finding is that there's there's no king they're ruled by Persian governors the temple's still in ruin they face oppression and um an opposition and they're just about scraping by each day financially and so they're wondering what on earth is God doing where are God's promises and maybe you look at the world so I was saying earlier wonder the same thing what is God doing maybe we see the maybe we look out at the state of the church in Scotland for example and you think what's it's a fraction of the size of it what it once was and it's a fraction of the size of what it should be as we have as we desire to see churches all across Scotland and people packing in the seats and the pews we think what is what is God doing on the in this world are we on the are we on the losing side are we disillusioned and so maybe we ask with the people of Zacharias day what is God doing where is the kingdom God promised how long oh lord will you allow this world to be in the state it's in and amazingly um the the angel of the Lord in verse 12 echoes those questions echoes those cries you see in verse 12 we read the angel of the Lord said oh

[14 : 54] Lord of hosts how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah with which you have been angry these 70 years God and God sees God knows God understands the angel of the Lord vocalizes the people's concerns and their and their worries in verse 13 we read the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked to me so the Lord so the angel who talked to me said to me cry out thus says the Lord of hosts I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion I don't know if you ever thought about God as jealous and when we did a video um a couple weeks or months back now of each of each of us saying something about God I didn't know one said God is jealous I don't think we said we talked about Jesus as a good shepherd we talked about God being merciful and gracious not sure anyone said God is jealous but actually that's a very appropriate word to describe God in fact I'd say it's a beautiful way to describe God because it speaks of his love for those of you who are married if you saw another man put his arm around your wife's waist or if you're a woman if you saw another um um woman put her hand on your husband's chest how would you feel I imagine your jaw would clench your blood would rise you'd be jealous you'd say hands off he she they belong to me and when God sees the state of his people

Israel when he sees them oppressed and impoverished among the ruins of Jerusalem he's jealous he's saying hands off God's God's jealousy is that the right and natural expression of his love for his people who are precious to him now it's worth just to avoid confusion to say that when God says I'm exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion that isn't God saying he loves the nation state of Israel or the the city of Jerusalem first and foremost it's speaking about his God God's love for his people um so in in Zechariah's time that was the Jews who were in Jerusalem however God's plan was never meant to be limited to an ethnic group or a geographical place but rather for his kingdom to cover the whole world and for as we'll see in um the coming verses for it to be filled with a multitude from every nation restoring a physical Jerusalem was never the end goal it was always meant to Jerusalem was always meant to point to the new Jerusalem the new creation that God is building inhabited by people who have not from one ethnic group but by people who have put their trust in Jesus and so we see in this first vision that God sees his people he loves his people on that divine jealousy we see leads to action and we see that in two four parts first of all judgment on the nations which leads to our second point God sees second God judges verse 15

I'm exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease for while I was angry but a little they furthered the disaster now this um verse 15 is some ways is a summary of what is then expanded on in that second vision in verses 18 to 21 um I'll just read the beginning of that I lifted my eyes and saw and behold four horns and Zechariah asks our favorite question he says what are these and the response is these are the horns that have scattered Judah Israel and Jerusalem and in verse 21 we're told these are the horns of the nations that have scattered Judah so that no one can raise their head the nations who have conquered and scattered God's people here are described like horned beasts horns that charge around and crush and toss and gore God's people scattering them far and wide and God sees this and God loves his people and he's angry with these nations now if we find the concept of God being jealous uncomfortable then I imagine it goes with imagine we might find the concept of God being angry maybe a bit uncomfortable we might think doesn't the Bible say God is love however here we have an excellent example about how God's anger in his love are not in any way incompatible anger is the right and just expression of God's love for his people it's just like we are rightly angry when someone maliciously hurts someone we love so God is rightly angry when he sees his people harmed God takes it personally later on in um as a chapter 2 verse 8 he describes when people touch his people it's like them touching the apple of his eye something that's precious to him or even it's an expression of jabbing someone in the eye

God takes it personally when his people are oppressed and harmed and that's not a rash anger with which is lacking self-control God's anger is perfectly sinless and just God's anger shouldn't be uncomfortable but actually comforting do you notice that um I'm looking back in the first vision in verse 14 um where is it verse 13 sorry the Lord answered gracious and comforting words when God speaks about his anger and his jealousy for his people this is meant to comfort them now we might struggle to see that but I'm sure the persecuted Christians around the world wouldn't I was reading just this um just this week about a church that had been um stormed by a Hindu mob a nationalistic mob that wanted wanted to get rid of these Christians and had just beaten people in the church uh willy-nilly with um with sticks and you see the same thing in other places pastors are thrown in jail there's intimidation people are people are sent to work camps Christians are killed for their faith now for those people when they hear that God is angry against those who oppress his people that is a comforting thing it's a comforting thing even for for the kid at school who's getting bullied because they're they're a Christian God sees he knows he loves his people and he is angry with a just anger against those who are harming them while the horns of the nations have scattered the flock of God's people in verse 20 God promises to send four craftsmen to defend these and defend his people and vanquish these horn nations and ultimately we see that in the person and work of Jesus Christ um in Colossians chapter two we read that Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them on the cross um Jesus defeated the the spiritual power satan and all his forces on the cross when he died to take the punishment for our sins he he Jesus describes himself as one who who plunders um satan's possessions

Jesus defeats um those enemies and not only that that work of defeating the enemy and freeing his people comes to completion where Jesus will return one more once more to judge the living and the dead and he will push aside like those craftsmen he will um get rid off all those who have rejected him and his people but hand in hand with this judgment comes rescue that brings us to the third vision rescue and restoration if verse 15 in chapter one is a summary of that judgment verses 16 and 17 look forward to the restoration that is expanded on in the third vision in chapter two let me read chapter one verse 16 again therefore thus says the lord I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy my house shall be built in it declares the lord of hosts and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem cry out again thus says the lord of hosts my cities shall be again overflow with prosperity and the lord again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem first chapter two um that third vision there expands upon this and in this third vision

[23 : 38] Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line and he's you might think of him as a surveyor he's clambering over the rubble of Jerusalem and he's to measure the dimensions for rebuilding Jerusalem but God sends an angel to stop this man in his tracks because it's completely inappropriate to measure these walls why because good God goes on and says run and tell the man verse four Jerusalem shall be inhabited as as villages without walls because of the multitude of people and livestock in it there's no point in measuring the walls of the new Jerusalem because there's going to be no need for walls it's going to be inhabited by so many people a multitude from every nation tribe and tongue that it's going to spill out no man made city can contain the people that God is gathering that's the point now the people um hearing this vision would have thought well how are we going to be protected that's what walls are for aren't they well notice what God continues to say verse five I will be to her a wall of fire all around all around God is promising to gather in his people from every nation and he's promising to protect his people from their enemies you think as the people are sitting and sitting among the rubble thinking what is God doing in this world I think how encouraging that would have been they look around they were struggling to even just populate Jerusalem we know from other books in the Bible that they were having to like encourage people to come and live in Jerusalem just to have enough people to man the walls and guard the gates but here God says I'm going to rebuild Jerusalem in a way that you can't even comprehend or imagine it's it's going to it's a plan that's going to burst any boundaries that they can set and for us it's worth seeing that as well God's plan is far bigger than what we can imagine God's plan for his kingdom is far greater than we can comprehend it's it bursts boundaries it's easy isn't it to clamber over the rubble of

Christian Scotland with our get our tape measure out and think wouldn't be great if God brought back the old days wouldn't be great if all of those seats up there were filled or something like that but in a way that's completely inappropriate because it completely underestimates and puts limits on God God's plan for his people in Scotland in the world far are far bigger than just this many seats in a in a church or even if you add up all the churches in Scotland even the ones that have been turned into pubs because what God is doing in the world what got the the people that God is gathering is gonna is far greater than we can imagine the work that he is doing the kingdom he is building is far beyond our comprehension John sees a vision of it in Revelation he sees all nations tribes and tongues coming around the throne it's a multitude that no one could count he says and they're gathering around praising Jesus Christ so let's instead of looking back and wishing for the good old days let's look forward and let's long for the kingdom the new Jerusalem that God is building from all around the world that's where God reveals his glory and splendor at the heart of at the heart of God's restoration project though we see is the most important thing is it's an end of verse five God says I will be the glory in her midst at the heart of God's restoration is God coming to dwell in his people you with his people you see that promise twice more in verses 10 and 11 God promises I will dwell in your midst all through Israel's history God had dwelt with his people first of all in the portable tabernacle after he had appeared to them on Sinai and later on in the temple that was built in Jerusalem and but the problem was when Israel went into exile

Jerusalem was destroyed the temple was destroyed and God left his people and they were sent into exile and so they had lost both the king and they had lost God dwelling with his people but here God is promising to change that here he's promising once more to come and dwell with his people and Zechariah's readers I imagine were expected that would happen when the temple was complete that once more the cloud of God's glory would come upon the temple but that never happened they would have never guessed that that would be fulfilled not in a building but in a person John begins his gospel verse 14 by saying the word that is Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us he says we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth how does God begin building his kingdom gathering in the exiles and restoring his people it's through the birth of a baby it's through God coming to dwell with his people the fulfillment of Zechariah's vision Jerusalem restored begins with Jesus Christ it is that baby who would drive back the horns of the nations through his work on the cross it was he it's Jesus who will bring back a scattered people a multitude no one could number and he does it all through his death on the cross through taking the sin of his people the sin the exiles as we'll come on to see next week through cleansing his people and making it possible for them to return to God and have relationship once more with them and over the coming few weeks we'll see just how the promises in Zechariah are fulfilled and come to pass in Jesus Christ and what does all this mean for us though well we saw at the start that Zechariah's aim is calling us to return to God to commit ourselves to wholeheartedly following him one reason we might struggle to commit why we might struggle to follow is that we become disillusioned and we think what is God doing in this world is it really worth throwing myself wholeheartedly into serving Jesus well these three vibrant visions show us that actually God is doing an awful lot and actually God is doing the greatest thing we could ever imagine God is this is God's rescue plan is God is this is God's rescue plan far beyond what we could expect God sees he will judge and he will come to dwell with his people to rescue and restore in some ways God Zechariah in these visions is describing what you might describe say as a second exodus you know the first exodus people Israel were in Egypt and God rescued them and he brought them through the Red Sea and he judged the Egyptians brought those plagues upon them and he brought them to Sinai and he came and dwelt with his people and then brought them to the

Promised Land well there's a similar thing really being described in these visions Zechariah is saying God is doing a similar thing God is that God is making a second exodus happen now through Jesus's work he is gathering a people out of exile he's gathering to them to himself so that once more he will dwell with them when he comes again and so the question that we're left with is are we going to be part of that God's plan of gathering his people into his new Jerusalem are we going to be part of it now that we see that in verse 6 of chapter 2 up up flee from the land of the north declares the Lord for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens declares the Lord for Zechariah's readers that would have meant literally leaving the Babylon where they were exiled but Babylon was a picture really of the anti-God world it's a command for his people to step out of this world to stop being part of the world against God and instead be part of God's kingdom to be part of that multitude in pilgrimage gathering to be around Jesus Christ and if you've never come to Jesus before then this is an invitation for you to be come to be for you to be part of God's big plan of renewal that is going to culminate in him making all things new and can I urge you not to reject the invitation because you notice in verse 9 God says that all of those nations all of the people who have rejected him and his king they're going to become they're going to become plunder he's going to shake his hand over them as a picture of his judgment and he's going to destroy them if you are trusting in Jesus then the command up is a wake-up call it's a an encouragement for us to separate ourselves from from the world and live distinctly for

Christ we can it's easy to get too comfortable in this world Jesus calls us to get up to give our lives to loving him and serving him and to building his church as we'll see over the next few weeks to wholeheartedly throwing ourselves into his mission of bringing the gospel to the world the final encouragement for us really though is in verse 13 be silent all flesh before the Lord for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling in c.s. Lewis's well-known book the lion the witch and the wardrobe the children see the icy winter beginning to thaw and they ask what's going on and they're told aslan is on the move the king is returning what is god doing in this world we see all the things going wrong what is god doing in this world well we're given the answer here in verse 13 god has roused himself from his holy dwelling god is on the move god is at work here in Scotland here in lewis in vietnam all around the world god is on the move and he is gathering a people into his new jr. to dwell with them for all eternity god is on the move he sees he loves and jesus will come again to restore his kingdom the question is will we be with him let's pray