

PostExilicProphets 21-08-26a

Good evening, welcome to the Thursday night study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in the book of Zechariah. We've come to chapter eight.

We're looking at the prophetic oracle announcement that follows the eightfold vision that Zechariah had received a couple of years earlier. And they are connected in many ways, but it is particularly pertinent and relevant to us as recent history and current events unfold. And we anticipate the active intervention of God in human history, whether it is to preserve his people in times of stress or to pull us upward and outward from it so that the denouement of human history can unfold, whatever it may be.

These words provide comfort and encouragement, and it's a really interesting section. And we're going to take it up in some detail tonight. Let's begin by asking God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll get started.

Father, the exhortation that we remember from these post-exilic prophets that is not by our might or by our power, but by your spirit that life is lived and your will and purpose are accomplished in us, through us, and around us. We're grateful to be aware and informed, to have the opportunity to see your actions in the past, in the present, and look forward to what you have promised to do in the future. We pray that as we examine these things in the light of this chapter in Zechariah, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to each one of us, help us to see the traction that these truths have in our lives, in our thoughts, in our fellowship with each other and with you.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. It's been a couple of weeks, so let's review the passage. Let's read Zechariah chapter eight.

I'm reading it out of the New King James. And following the word of the Lord that came to Zechariah in the last part of chapter seven, we have this section in chapter eight. We'll be coming back to the end of chapter seven, so I'm not gonna read it right now, that section in verses eight through 14, but it pertains to what we're going to see here.

So in chapter eight, verse one, again, the word of the Lord of hosts came saying. Now, if you wanna save yourself a little bit of time and you've got something to write with, you notice the phrase, thus says the Lord of hosts in verse two. The word of the Lord comes.

This is sort of the, this is the book title, if you will. Thus says the Lord of hosts. This is the chapter title, and this is number one.

So the word of the Lord of hosts came saying, thus says the Lord of hosts. This is the first instance of this phrase, which is gonna recur throughout our chapter. So I've got a little pound sign one in the margin next to this.

Thus says the Lord of hosts. I am zealous for Zion with great zeal. With great fervor, I am zealous for her.

That's the whole chapter. That's the whole saying for number one. Thus says the Lord in verse three.

That's number two. Thus says the Lord, I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth.

The mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. Verse four, thus says the Lord of hosts. That's number three.

Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Verse six, thus says the Lord of hosts.

That's number four. If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in my eyes? Says the Lord of hosts. Verse seven, thus says the Lord of hosts.

That's number five. Behold, I will save my people from the land of the East and from the land of the West. I will bring them back and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

They shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and in righteousness. Verse nine, thus says the Lord of hosts. That's number six.

Let your hands be strong. You who have been hearing in these days, these words by the mouth of the prophets who spoke in the day the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord of hosts that the temple might be built. For before these days, there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast.

There was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in. For I set all men, everyone against his neighbor. But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts.

For the seed shall be prosperous. The vine shall give its fruit. The ground shall give her increase and the heavens shall give their due.

I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these. And it shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, oh, house of Judah and house of Israel. So I will save you and you shall be a blessing.

Do not fear. Let your hands be strong. Can see there's a clue of a chiasm there.

How did it start out in verse nine? Let your hands be strong. How does it finish in verse 13? Let your hands be strong. For thus says the Lord of hosts in verse 14.

That is number seven. Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, says the Lord of hosts. And I would not relent.

So again, in these days, I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear. These are the things you shall do.

Speak each man the truth to his neighbor. Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace. Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor and do not love a false promise, a false oath.

All these are things that I hate, says the Lord. Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, now see, that's a new, that's a book break there. We have this seven fold subsection set.

Now we've got a new word of the Lord. And so the thus says the Lord's reset. The word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, thus says the Lord of hosts.

In this section, that's number one. The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, the fast of the 10th shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore, love, truth, and peace.

Verse 20, thus says the Lord of hosts. That's number two in this section. Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities.

The inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, let's continue to go and pray before the Lord and seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go also. Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the Lord.

Verse 23, thus says the Lord of hosts. That's the third one in this section. In those days, 10 men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man saying, let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you.

That's the chapter. What should we take away from this chapter? It seems like there's an awful lot to do with the house of Israel, the house of Judah, with God's treatment of their fathers in the past and his promise of future treatment. The past, they were judged and cursed.

In the future, they will be guarded and blessed. So really, this began in chapter seven and I'm not gonna review too much about chapter seven except to remind us that in verse two, the people had sent Cherezer and Rejah Melech and his men to the house of God to pray before the Lord. Remember, that's how our section in chapter eight finishes.

Let us go with you. We wanna pray before the Lord in verse 22. So there's a large symmetry here in chapter seven and chapter eight.

I could give you a lot of details about this symmetry, but we're gonna take this the way Zacharias hearers would have heard it. We're not gonna dissect it. We're not going to overanalyze it.

Just observe the symmetry. This section, after chapter six with the vision of the branch and the memorial crown and all of that, in the fourth year of King Darius, you have this fresh set of words from the Lord and they don't come in vision form. They come in prophetic oracle form and they seem to have been sparked or initiated by these emissaries that are sent to ask a question.

They have come to the house of God to pray before the Lord in verse two. And you can write out beside that chapter eight, verse 22, people who will come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and pray before the Lord. So there's gonna be a contrast between what is currently happening, these guys that are coming up to pray, but based on their question and response and some of the other comments in this section, we realize these do not appear to be sincere seekers of God.

They want permission to quit some religious practices that they themselves or their fathers initiated that had nothing to do with God, the word of God, the prompting of God, the instruction of God, any prophecy from Ezekiel or Jeremiah or Isaiah or anyone else. They started up these observances and now they wanna know if they can quit. Well, God has an answer for them that is going to betray their complete off-basedness.

That is a word that I have just coined, off-basedness. See it all around us today. More about that shortly.

So should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years? Well, this is kind of like saying, should I dress up in a coat and tie and sit in the fourth pew and put a \$5 bill in the offering plate every time it passes at my church? None of that's in the Bible. So it isn't what you are doing, it is why we do what we do, right? And God is gonna make that point. So you remember this in chapter seven, when you eat and when you drink in verse six, do you not eat and drink unto yourselves is the connotation.

That's why those words are there in italics. You started it, you're doing it for your own purposes. If it's not gratifying you anymore, well, you should send men to yourselves and ask yourselves if you ought to keep doing it, why are you asking me? God says.

So then the word of the Lord comes and this is where we're gonna review this part of chapter seven because it informs chapter eight. The word of the Lord came to Zachariah saying, thus says the Lord of hosts. And there's just one, thus says the Lord.

That's number one for this word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. The question was, do I need to keep weeping and fasting and persecuting myself and thinking back on all the mournful episodes and happenings from 70, 80 years and 90 more years ago? Should I keep lighting a candle for our national 9-11? Actually, it was far worse than 9-11.

It would be if your entire country was the Twin Towers. They were utterly devastated, destroyed

and there was great loss of life. And what they had was irretrievably lost.

God's answer is, you're asking me about whether or not to observe these man-made fasts. Here's what you should do. Perform, execute, implement true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother. This was the word that God gave to their fathers.

Verse 11, they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders and stopped their ears. First of all, when they understood the meaning of those words, they didn't heed it. Then they shrugged their shoulders, which is to disrespect a thing.

And then they stopped up their ears. They don't want to listen anymore. They began by listening and hearing.

They didn't like what they heard. So they braced up their shoulders. This is not shrugging like the Air Force salute.

I don't know, or who knows. Sorry, Air Force, that's an old Navy joke. But this is not so much a shoulder shrug as a squaring of the shoulders to go your own way.

This is like stiff-necked people, people who have turned the neck instead of facing and heeding and humbling themselves before God. They turn around and show him the neck, a disobedient and showing the neck people. Well, this bracing up of the shoulders is kind of like sticking your elbows out and walking away saying, I'm my captain of my ship and master of my fate.

I'll do what I want. So they refused to heed. They squared up their shoulders and stopped their ears so that they could not hear.

We're not listening to any more of that. They made their hearts like flint. Notice God didn't harden their hearts.

They weren't predestined to be hard of heart. They made their hearts like flint. After refusing to heed, squaring their shoulders, stopping their ears, this is retrograde.

They heard the word of the Lord and now they are chopping off and putting greater and greater distance between the word of the Lord and anything that might affect their hearts. Made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by his spirit through the former prophets. This goes back to the first step.

That refusing to hear cascaded in. It's dominoes falling with all of these other behaviors. Now, point of application.

There are times when the Bible class is not scintillating. There are times when it isn't exciting. It's not particularly interesting.

It may have been poorly delivered, may fall flat. It may be something that we just don't feel pertains to us. If you look at the word of the Lord here, that failure or that lack of sparkle can be an excuse to stop listening.

Now, it may be a reason to look around and find something that is more pertinent, more stepping on the toes in its nature. If you hear what is ostensibly teaching or preaching of the word of God, and you don't come away feeling chastened, instructed, rebuked, motivated to make a change, to do different, to think different, to be different. If the word of God as presented doesn't do that, it is not that the word of God has failed.

It isn't that the power of God has diminished. There is a problem either in the pitching or in the catching. And if you are a genuine catcher, and you're willing to feel any ball that even remotely comes your way, that is the word of God, and it doesn't sting in the mitt from time to time, find another source.

Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened.

But the arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save. His ear is not heavy that he cannot hear. And his voice is not muffled that he cannot speak.

Human failure, either in the delivery or in the reception, is the problem. You know this. And if we don't come away changed by the word of God, make a change, do something different.

Heaven knows that God has made many, many shepherds for many, many groups. And by the way, I'm not speaking personally to our group. I'm wonderfully privileged, and this isn't the result of any recent comment that anybody made.

I'm always afraid someone's gonna think, oh, well, he must have. No, this is just a general principle from the word of God. The word of God is like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces.

And if you don't feel lit on fire and your rocks are not getting cracked and smashed, the word of God is not getting in there some kind of way, and we need to figure out how to solve that problem. It's not God's fault. So this is an example of hearers refusing to listen.

In this particular case, it's not the failure of the prophets. Now, we can go to Ezekiel and talk about the faithless shepherds who muddy the water and abuse the sheep and create the problem. In this case, God has delivered his word through the prophets, but these people refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, stopped their ears, made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear.

And I think that that is a significant problem today, certainly in our country and in our culture. There is a great desire to have one's ears tickled, and there's a great desire to be the ear tickler, to be popular, to be recognized, to be listened to, to be spoken well of, to have books on the shelf and resources on the web or whatever it might be. It's an easy, pleasant, honey-baited

trap.

But sometimes, even if the word is sweet in the mouth, it needs to be bitter in our stomach. It needs to be creating some motivation to make a change. These people didn't do that.

Refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by his spirit. This is chapter seven, verse 12. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts.

It was true then, it is true now. Is it any wonder that our country is in such dire straits? You can talk about politics, economics, poor leadership, apathy, indifference in all different quarters, failure of leadership, bungled policies in education and whatever else. But at its core and at its root and at its heart, this is the problem in this country and in any others that you look at that are spiraling down the drain.

We seem to be accelerating in that direction. Great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened that just as he proclaimed and they would not hear, verse 13, so they called out and I would not listen, says the Lord.

Picking a day once a year and having the national day of prayer doesn't cut it. This is like when Regent Mellick and his men come to the house of God and start asking questions and making petitions. It's wrong headed, it's wrong hearted, it is misdirected.

It doesn't even ask the right question. I scattered them, verse 14, with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. The land became desolate after them so that no one passed through or returned for they made the pleasant land desolate.

They did it. How? Read verse 11 and 12. So having delivered that, and that's the one thus says the Lord in chapter seven, that is the first one.

How many did we have in chapter eight? There were seven. How many did we have in chapter seven? One. What is seven plus one? Eight.

How many visions did Zechariah have two years earlier? Eight. Eight visions. Now, after having a couple of years to ruminate and chew and study and think about those, we have these eight oracles.

So let's look at this first one. This details the problem, which is why verse 14 happened. God scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, which they had not known.

If you flip back to chapter one and look at the first vision of the horses, verse 11, we have walked to and fro throughout the earth and behold, all the earth is resting quietly. The angel of the Lord said, O Lord of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah against which you were angry these 70 years? The Lord answered with good and comforting words. The angel who spoke with me said, I should proclaim, thus says the Lord of hosts.

Interestingly, in verse 14, I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal. I'm exceedingly angry with the nations at ease. I was a little angry and they helped with evil.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, I'm returning to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and a line will be stretched out over Jerusalem. God's line, God's measure.

Again, proclaim, thus says the Lord of hosts, my city shall be spread out through prosperity. The Lord will again comfort Zion and will again choose Jerusalem. So first vision, first oracle.

Now look at chapter eight. Again, the word of the Lord of hosts came saying, now see if this sounds at all familiar from what we just read. Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am zealous for Zion with great zeal.

Ring a bell. Chapter one, verse 14. Can write it in the margin.

First vision, I am zealous for Zion with great zeal. With great fervor, I am zealous for her. This word for zeal actually is zeal.

If you are zealous, you are jealous. So if you're a jealous, if you're zealous with great zeal, then I suppose you can be jealous with great zeal. Jealousness.

It also means to be provoked. Many times when the scripture says in the Old Testament, the Lord was provoked or he was zealous for his name. This is the word that is used.

It means to be provoked to action. Enough is enough. It is similar in a way to the word agape in Greek.

Remember of philos and agape and some of the other words for love in the New Testament. Agape we say is active love. It's agape that's in John 3, 16.

God so agape the world that he gave his son. It is a love that provokes to action, to make a difference. Zeal here and zealous is the same idea.

It is an active provocation, jealousy or zealousness that results in an action. You can't sit still with this kind of zeal. With great fervor, I am zealous for her.

Thus says the Lord, I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Remember verse 16 of chapter one, I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it says the Lord of hosts.

Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth. The mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. What was the charge in the last part of chapter seven? They refused to heed.

They stopped their ears. They made their hearts like Flint, refusing to hear the law. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, sanctify them by thy truth.

Thy word is truth. Jesus said, I am the truth in John 14, six. He is the incarnate word in John one.

He is the word made flesh, God's truth. If you put a little asterisk there in verse three, Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth. We're going to find that this is a recurring thread, a recurring theme in this pronouncement, in this prophecy.

The mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. Thus says the Lord of hosts, old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

So this is a place so secure and so peaceful that the weakest members of society, the extremely old and the extremely young sit in complete safety, enjoying the view, sitting in the street. They're not afraid in the street. They're not hiding inside behind a locked door.

These old people are sitting in the streets of Jerusalem, complete security. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. You've got the streets mentioned three times because the streets in a city define and characterize that city.

We've seen video over the last many months of what happened in some of America's city streets. This was a place of mob violence, of destruction, of injury, of death, of lawlessness. And it was manifest and filmed and graphically loosed into our living rooms from the streets of those cities, the streets.

I would commend your attention back to Zechariah chapter one verses 18 through 21, which was the second vision. I raised my eyes and looked and there were four horns. I said to the angel who talked with me, what are these? These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

The Lord showed me four craftsmen. These artisans are going to deal with the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could lift up his head. Remember that in verse 21, these horns were so dominating and so powerful that no one could lift up their head.

Now in Jerusalem, the oldest people and the youngest people can sit with a stick in their hand, play games in the streets because these horns of oppression, these horns of scattering and decimation have been cast out. The nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it. All of the family is back in the land.

All of these families are back in the city. Grandma and grandpa are sitting there watching the grandchildren and great-grandchildren play in the streets. What a contrast.

Back to Zechariah chapter eight, and you look at verse six. Thus, and by the way, just as a side note, because this is fulfilled in the millennium, God has not come and dwelt in Jerusalem with his personal presence till yet. When will these prophecies be fulfilled? It's in the millennial kingdom.

Note that there are grandpas and grandmas, and there are little children playing in the streets in the millennial kingdom. They do not yet have eternal model resurrection bodies such as we will be issued at the rapture. There's not much said about our resurrection bodies, our eternal bodies, what that model is.

I would assume that they will be in their prime and that there won't be children, eternally children, and there won't be old people eternally old. I think we'll all be in our prime, whatever that is. I would think somewhere in our, hopefully, early 20s or something.

I'd like to be as smart as I was in my 40s and as young as I was in my 20s. That would just be ideal. I'd like to be a lot smarter than I've ever been, and hopefully I will.

But anyway, as a side note, old men, old women, boys and girls playing in the streets. This is millennial, and it gives you an idea that these are resuscitated bodies. They last a long time.

If you die at the age of 100, you're just a kid. So now, thus says the Lord of hosts number four in verse six, if it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in my eyes, says the Lord of hosts. That's the entire oracle is just that one saying, if it is marvelous.

Well, the key to it is the word marvelous. It doesn't really mean marvelous. Let me just tell you quickly, when God came to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 18 and said about this time next year, Sarah, who's 90 years of age is going to have a son.

And she laughed in the tent. And God says, what's your problem? Is anything too hard for the Lord? It's this word, too hard. If it is too hard, if it is impossible in Exodus chapter three, verse 20, and in Exodus chapter 34, verse 10, the marvels that God said he was going to do in Egypt and having delivered the people in Exodus 34, he says, when I take you into the land, I'm going to do even more marvels.

I did marvels delivering you out of Egypt. And I'm going to do marvels delivering you into the promised land, Exodus 3, 20, and Exodus 34, 10. In both cases, when you see the marvels, the mighty works there, it's this word.

I'm going to do the two hard things, the things considered impossible. Who would think that the enslaved people in Egypt could not only be delivered and freed from slavery, but march out with all the wealth of Egypt carried on their shoulders, not attacked or pursued successfully by the Egyptian armies. And that when they went into the land of Canaan with a 40 year delay, they're invincible.

They're unstoppable. That's this word. Jeremiah 32, 17.

Keep your finger here. This is our last passage before the break. Jeremiah 32, 17.

Ah, Lord God, behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and

outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for you. That's this word.

If it is too hard in the eyes of the remnant of the people, remember the remnant, these are the ones that are saved yet so as by fire. These are supposed to be the ones that are a little more on the ball that have picked up on some clues and have started looking for the narrow path through the straight gate, right? But even among the remnant, God says, look, you're the delivered. You're the returnees.

You're the ones that represent that which has been plucked from the fire as it were and put back into the land to build my temple. You're supposed to be the ones who get it, quote unquote. So when I start delivering these promises to you via prophetic Oracle, and even you begin to doubt and say, well, look around, look at the nightmare mess that is the remains and the smoking rubble of Jerusalem, even 70, 80, 90 years later, it's a disaster area.

And we're fighting among ourselves. We can't get any momentum going. We barely laid the foundation.

We're offering sacrifices on a bare altar. There's infighting and outfighting. We're attacked from without and suborned from within.

This is just a mess. If it is too hard, if it is impossible in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, current days, will it also be too hard and impossible in my eyes? Says the Lord, you're so preoccupied with what you think and what your concerns are with should you fast or not? Have you forgotten about God? Did you stop and think about his opinion, his plan, his purpose, whether he thinks it can be done or not. Sometimes we make a promise and we can't deliver on it for whatever reason.

That doesn't happen to God. Will it be impossible in my eyes? Says the Lord of hosts, that's the entire thought. Break out of your subjectivity and be objective.

Look at it from God's perspective. Now, if you go back to the first chapter and look at those first two visions of the horses in the glade and then the vision of the horns, and then you come to chapter two, I raised my eyes and looked and behold, a man with a measuring line. And an angel came out and said, speak to the young man.

Jerusalem shall be inhabited as a town without walls because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I says the Lord will be a wall of fire all around her and I will be the glory in her midst. Compare that promise.

How are the remnant receiving that promise? Do they believe it? Are they banking on it? Are they living in its light? That's the question those people should have been asking themselves, to actually hear the word of the Lord, have it be heated, have it enter into their hearts, have them hungry for more. Instead, largely just the opposite is happening. Well, as you can tell, there is a wonderful correspondence between these eight, thus says the Lord's, not an exact correspondence.

It's approximate because these people didn't have a written copy of the scriptures, but they're gonna remember that there were eight visions and they're gonna remember these eight, thus says the Lord's and they're going to connect those eight dots. And that's what we're gonna do. And it's amazing.

You wanna talk about hope and comfort in this time of tribulation in our nation and in our culture this really has a lot of reality check for us. And we're gonna look at more of it when we come back from our break.