

PostExilicProphets 21-08-26b

Let's resume our study now in Zechariah 8 and we are looking at these thus says the Lord sections in chapter 7 and in chapter 8 and as you come back to this and come to verse 7 of chapter 8, this is the fifth one that we counted in this chapter alone and knowing that there's one in the preceding chapter, but number 5 here in verse 7 of Zechariah 8 says, 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 righteousness.

Now, if you remember back in chapter 2, God said in verse 6, Up, up, this is after the measuring line vision, the young man with the measuring line, he's told don't measure. Up, up, flee from the land of the north says the Lord in chapter 2 verse 6. I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven says the Lord. Up Zion, escape you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, he sent me after glory to the nations which plundered you. He who touches you touches the apple of his eye, the surface of his eye. Surely I will shake my hand against them.

They shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me. Sing and rejoice.

Oh, daughter of Zion for behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst says the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day and they shall become my people and I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you says that a second time.

The Lord will take possession of Judah as his inheritance in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent all flesh before the Lord for he is aroused from his holy habitation. And look again at what we just read.

I will save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the west. I will bring them back. They shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

Do you remember that we saw in the early visions, the two years ago visions from Zacharias perspective that there was a lot said about the north and God. Uh, we looked at the passages that talk about God dwelling in the sides of the north, the horse drawn chariots with the white horses and the black horses are riding toward the north and that, uh, the dappled horses are turning toward the south and that this speaks of the ultimate and eternal final judgment. So when you think about these directions, the north and the south and the east and the west, how would these directions carry additional freight or additional meaning in the ancient day? What's the difference between the east and the west that we have mentioned here and the north and the south? Why doesn't this say behold, I will save my people from the north and from the south instead is from the east and from the west.

How have they even been in the west? What's west of Jerusalem? What's west of Israel? It's the Mediterranean sea. There's really no land to the west. There's water to the west.

So why does it say I'll bring them from the east and west and why does it not mention the north and the south? This is my, this is my suggestion. This is the theory which is mine north and south in the ancient world. When you look up at the night sky, there seem to be points that are fixed, especially the north.

The north star doesn't move. Everything rotates around the north star. They could see the zodiac constellations in the sky.

They could see Orion and such and they would look at it in the early evening. They would look at it in the late hours of the night, the early morning hours and they could see that it had rotated around a spot that didn't seem to change. The north seems to represent that which is fixed, that which is eternal and unchanging.

How about the east and the west? What sort of celestial truths can you take in a metaphorical sense about the east and the west? This is where the sun rises and sets, right? It defines the day, the day which passes, the things that happen under the sun. It begins in the east and it ends in the west. And so the temporal and the changeable seem to be represented by the east and the west where the north and by extension the south, which they couldn't see but they could surmise by looking at the arc from the northern hemisphere.

They could deduce that there was a similar spot in the south. And so you've got these unchanging poles and you've got the daily change in the east and the west. And so when God says he's going to save his people from the land of the east and from the land of the west, it's a reminder that prosperity or poverty, captivity or freedom are the vagaries of human history.

And people can be swept up in them by forces that are beyond their control. There are the ups and downs. There are the evils that are sufficient to any given day.

But they are timely. They are in time. They are defined by time.

They have a beginning and they have an ending. And the captivity of God's people, whether it is in the land of the east or in the land of the west, is always for some duration. In the case of the Babylonian captivity, it was 70 years.

In the case of the domination of the children of Abraham, God said they would serve for 400 years. Remember? But there are years that are defined by months, that are defined by weeks, that are defined by days, that are defined by the east and the west. So it is a reminder.

When we look around and see such turmoil, instability, upheaval, downward trends in almost any indicator you want to choose or to analyze, remember that this is time. And it has happened before. I want to read you some observations from a sermon by Dr. Quiswell that I coincidentally happened to be editing this morning.

And as I was developing my final thoughts about this lesson, I thought that it dovetailed very nicely. This sermon, counter-intuitively, is titled, I Feel Inferior, What Shall I Do? He had a What Shall I Do series of messages that he delivered in the evenings back in 1982, and there were a number of them. But this one is really tied to the next one, which is, I Feel Insecure.

This one is, I Feel Inferior. The next one is, I Feel Insecure, What Shall I Do? But the theme across these two messages has to do with what should a Christian do? What should a Christian think in times of instability? I don't feel adequate and there is an element of discomfort and uncertainty in my environment. I don't feel secure and I don't feel up to the task or tasks or situations that face me.

What should I do? For his passage in this sermon, he chose the episode in Numbers 13, where they send out the spies. They send the 12 spies into the land and when they return, this is Numbers 13, starting at verse 26. You don't necessarily have to turn there, I'm going to read it.

13, 26 through 33 of Numbers. So they went and came to Moses and to Aaron to all the congregation of the children of Israel unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh, and brought back word unto them and unto all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. Remember, they brought the fruit of the land back, the grapes that they had to put on a two-man carrying pole.

And they said, we came to the land that you sent us to. It flows with milk and honey and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless, the people be strong that dwell in the land and the cities that are walled and very great.

Moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. Remember, the children of Anak, the Anakim were the giants. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites dwell in the mountains and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and by the coast of Jordan.

The land is great. The fruit is great. The potential is wonderful.

It flows with milk and honey. The people in the land are an insurmountable problem. Verse 6 of Zechariah 8, if it is too hard, if it is impossible in the eyes of the remnant, have you stopped to consider whether it's too hard in the eyes of God.

And you remember what followed, that the evil report of the land, you know, there be giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants. And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers. We were in our own sight as grasshoppers.

And so we were in their sight. We saw ourselves as grasshoppers. They saw us as grasshoppers.

Ring a bell in the current situation. It's a great land, but the people in it have got total control. They're giants and we're grasshoppers.

We were as grasshoppers in our own sight. And we are as grasshoppers in their sight. Dr. Chris will said, now doesn't that beat anything you ever read in your life? We were in our own sight as grasshoppers.

And so we were naturally in their sight. He goes on to say, why was it that they set up these spies? Where did that come about? We're told in Deuteronomy 8 verses 7 and 10, who originated the mission of the spies? God had already spied out the land. Deuteronomy 8, 7 through 10, the Lord, thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks and fountains that spring out of valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness.

Thou shalt not lack anything in it. When you have eaten and are full, you will bless the Lord, your God for the good land, which he has given you. The Lord had already looked at it.

Dr. Chris will says, already spied it out and brought the report. Not only that, but in Deuteronomy 1 21, the Lord commanded them to go up and take it, go up and possess it. Behold, the Lord, thy God has set the land before thee go up and possess it.

As the Lord God of thy fathers has said unto thee, fear not, neither be discouraged. God says, without any delay, without any human testimony, you don't need anybody's report but mine. Take my word for it.

Go up and possess the land. Well, how did the mission of the spies come about? They originated it. In Deuteronomy 1 22, Moses says, you came to me, every one of you and said, we want to send men before us that they may search out the land and bring us word again by what way we ought to go and into what cities we should come.

They came to Moses. Moses brought it to God. And God said in numbers chapter 13, verse one, listen to them.

If that's what they want to do, send those men that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel. So God says, take it by faith. They want to walk by sight.

God says, I've already given it to you. They want to see which parts they might be willing to go grab. So as Dr. C says, they impaneled a jury of 12 men to give a verdict on the land and on God's command to go and take it.

They chose 12 men, one from each tribe. And what a difference did those men make in their report? You've got one truth in the land, right? You've got one promise from one God, and you've got a situation in the land, but it gets reported two different ways. Sound familiar? There were two of them who said, man, let's go.

God is with us and we are well able to overcome it. We can do it with the help of God. That's in numbers 1330 and numbers 14, six through nine.

But there were 10 men, the majority of the press, excuse me, the majority of the spies who said, man, they will eat us alive. Again, numbers 1331 through 33. Well, what's the difference in these two reports? What's the difference in the source of these two reports? The difference lies in the state of the heart, the condition of the soul.

Two of the men, Caleb and Joshua, were looking to God. God is with us and we cannot fail. 10 of the men were looking at themselves.

In our sight, we're grasshoppers. If you look at us, if you look at our resources, if you look at what man can do about the problem of man, the strength of evil, the power of what is in the world, you look at that and look at us and say, well, I'm a grasshopper. And these people know I'm a grasshopper.

They look at me and what do they see? A grasshopper. Faith and commitment, Dr. Criswell says, and this is a quote, always faith and commitment reasons from the promises of God. Faith and commitment reasons from the promises of God.

It sees the bright side. It sees the God in heaven who is never discouraged and never dismayed. Doubt, reactionism and pessimism reasons from the difficulties.

It magnifies the dangers. It exaggerates the problems. It sees the giants, the dark side.

It cowers before the Amorites in the mountains and the Canaanites down there by the sea. The wave of grasshopper pessimism covered the whole children of Israel. That's natural.

If you think you're an insect, don't be surprised when everybody around you treats you like an insect looks upon you as a worm or a beetle or a bug. And what do they do in their defense of not wanting to take the land, not wanting to claim the promises of God? This is Dr. C's point, and it's a good one. Numbers 14, verse three, it says they cry before Moses and before the people, and they say, our wives and our children shall be eaten up.

They will be a prey. Let us return into Egypt. Look at those giants.

They're going to take our babies. It's for the children. We're doing it for the children.

We've got to look out for the children. Dr. C says, I want you to read the scorn of God. In that same chapter, Numbers 14, 31 and 32, your little ones, God says, your little ones, which you said should be a prey.

Those are the ones I'm going to take into the land, and they shall know the land which you have despised. As for you, your carcasses will fall in the wilderness. You think you can protect your little ones? I'll take care of your little ones.

I'll take your little ones into the land. But because you did not operate in faith, because you looked at yourself and saw a grasshopper instead of looking at the Lord and seeing the arm of the Lord, which is mighty to save, has already demonstrated itself. These are the people who

saw the devastation in Egypt through nine plagues and then the death of the firstborn, who saw the parting of the Red Sea, who saw manna fall in the wilderness, who saw the Amalekites defeated.

Can't trust God based on a press report, based on a press report. The physical evidence that they had was grapes so big it took two guys to carry them, the land is great, but we're not adequate to the task. This is exactly what's going on here.

I want to read you one more thing further down in this sermon. This is such a great sermon by Dr. C. Again, it's called, I Feel Inferior, What Shall I Do? It's from 1982. He quotes Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

There's the hill called Difficulty that Pilgrim comes up to. He meets two men. One is named Timorous and the other one is named Mistrust.

And they're running at the maximum speed in a panic of fear. So Pilgrim, Christian, asks them, Why are you running? What are you afraid of? Timorous and Mistrust answer, We found down that road that you're traveling. We found two ferocious lions and they roared at us horribly.

Well the story says, Christian went right on down the road and he met the two lions and they roared at him horribly and they were fierce, but both of them were chained. Walks right by him. Now that's the way of life, Dr. C. says.

If you cower, the whole world will roar at you terribly and horribly. If you're unafraid, they're chained. They don't bite, they just bark.

There is a quote from Voltaire from a poem on the disaster of Lisbon. Voltaire said, Men are tormented atoms in a bed of mud. Devoured by death, a mockery of fate.

This world, this theater of pride and wrong swarms with sick fools who prate of silly nothings. I feel he was familiar with Shakespeare about life's poor player strutting and fretting his hour on the stage, sound and fury signifying nothing. We are so impressed by things that are not real.

God is real. His promises are real. His provision is real.

The future that we have with him through Christ is real. The forms of this world, the shadows of this world are passing away. What a tragedy to be Zechariah 8.6 people of God, even as the remnant thinking, well, it's too hard.

It's impossible. Marvelous doesn't mean marvelous. It means it's too hard.

It's impossible. God says, have you asked me if it's impossible? Did the people go to God and ask if it was impossible when the report of the spies came back? No, they wailed and cried and said, well, for the babies, we've got to flee. It's ridiculous.

Let me give you one final quote. This is Blaise Pascal. Remember Blaise Pascal from science

class? Man is a feeble reed trembling in the midst of creation, but he is endowed with thought.

For his destruction, he does not need the universe to arm. The wind, the water can suffice to kill him. But though the universe were to fall on man and crush him, man would still be the greater in his death than the universe in its victory because he would be conscious of his defeat while the universe would not be conscious of its victory.

We have the power of thought and because of that, we have the power of faith and because of that, we have the power of God. We have the promise of God. All of Zechariah, this prophecy, this book invades against foolish thinking that God fails to heed the exhortations of God, the promises of God.

That is why the fathers of this audience went captive into Babylon. That's why these people are in danger of failing to have God in their midst, failing to have that true temple of his presence, his power, and we can fail in the same way. We fail to build that temple.

We fail to take those promises to the bank and somewhere in our heart we have decided the giants are too big and the promise of God is impossible of fulfillment. It's just not possible. That's why that verse six oracle is all by itself.

Quickly now in verse seven of Zechariah chapter eight, thus says the Lord of hosts, I will save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the west. These temporal issues and by the way, we look around and we say the deterioration in the hockey stick graphs and the universality of the power of evil throughout the world, we must be in the last days. I just want to remind you of when Voltaire lived and when he looked around at the evil in his day, that's when he said what he said about man just being an atom in the mud and that it goes back to Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

What profit does a man have of all his labor that he does under the sun in the land of the east and the land of the west? A generation passes away, another generation comes, but the earth goes on forever. So just because things look terrible doesn't mean that it hasn't happened before or that it won't happen again or that we are absolutely in the last days and we should instead of living our lives in the light of God's promises, just grasp to the hope that the rapture will happen sometime soon. That hope by itself doesn't secure us righteousness by faith.

It doesn't bear fruit in keeping with righteousness. That's desperation to say well, even so come Lord Jesus and please come before I have to actually endure or progress or lay hold in faith. Now if the Israelites, back to the example that Dr. Criswell gave, if the Israelites when they came to the border of the land shortly after leaving Egypt, 40 years earlier than the days of Joshua, if they had trusted in God's promise and instead of sending in the spies had just said well, Lord is this the time? We're ready.

How do we get there? They had God's promise clear back in Exodus chapter 15 verses 16 and 17. Exodus 15, 16 and 17, fear and dread shall fall upon the inhabitants of Canaan by the

greatness of your arm. They will be still as a stone until all of your people are passed over and God will bring you in and plant you in the mountain of your inheritance.

God promised them that the people would be paralyzed with fear and dread of them. This is the exact opposite. The people of Israel are paralyzed with fear and dread of the people in the land.

That's backwards, backwards and we don't want to let it happen to us in this day and in this time. Now 40 years later when the babies that they were so worried about grew up and that generation was ready to enter the land with Joshua, guess what happened? When they were talking to Rahab, famous resident of the wall with the scarlet thread in her window, what did Rahab say in Joshua chapter 2? She said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land and that your terror is fallen upon us and all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. The promise of Exodus 15 could not be fulfilled in that first generation that came to the edge of the land.

Why? Read Hebrews, read the first few chapters of Hebrews. They failed to enter into that rest because the promises of God were not mixed with faith. Heaven help us if that happens to us.

This is the message that Zechariah and Haggai before him are delivering. Thus says the Lord in verse 9, I'll get back to the correspondence between the visions and these oracles next time, but look at verse 9 of Zechariah chapter 8. Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets. It's all about God's truth.

It's about God's promise. If you're hearing these words, let your hands be strong. Don't be a grasshopper.

Let your hands be strong. That's how the temple of the Lord of hosts is going to get built, with strong hands by people who hear the word of the Lord. And he's not really talking about the physical temple.

That temple gets built, but not the way God wants it. He never enters it. He never dwells in it.

There were no wages for man. There was no hire for beast. There was no peace from the enemy for whoever went in or came out, went out or came in.

Why? Look at the end of verse 10. Is this not shocking? The reason the enterprise to build on that foundation and get the temple completed did not succeed. Why? There was not enough money and not enough security.

There was a tax from without and a tax from within. Why? I, the Lord God, set all men, everyone against his neighbor. God said, you are not qualified.

You are not worthy. You are not prepared. You are not able.

So I am preventing your success. You're not defeated by the things you fear. You're defeated by your lack of faith and God unable to honor that faith because you don't have it.

I set everyone against his neighbor, but the remnant, God says, verse 11, I will do something different with the remnant. The seed will prosper. The vine will give its fruit.

The ground will give her increase. I set all men, everyone against his neighbor in the past. Keep your finger here and turn back to Haggai chapter two, verse 14.

Remember Haggai, the first of our post-exilic prophets? Look back at 214. Remember there was a question at that time as well. These guys asked, do we still have to keep these fasts that we made up? The priests asked them, what happens if something holy touches something unclean? Does the unclean thing become holy? The priest answered, no.

Haggai said, if one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean? The priest said, yes, it will. Defiled people can defile what is holy. That's the upshot, right? Haggai answered and said, so is this people in 214.

So is this nation before me says the Lord. And so is every work of their hands because the people are defiled because the people are faithless because the people do not heed and do not hear. They are defiled and every work of their hands is defiled.

And what they offer there is unclean. They, their work and their offerings are unclean. That's why God said every man against his neighbor.

He's not going to let these people into that ground and build a defiled and unclean edifice. He is going to do it for the remnant. The seed shall be prosperous.

The vine will give its fruit. In verse 12, the ground will give her increase. The heaven should give their due.

I will cause the remnant circle at the remnant of this people to possess all of these to possess it. Turn back to Haggai chapter one, verse six, you have so much and brought in little you eat, but do not have enough. You drink, but you're not filled with drink.

You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. He earns wages, puts them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord, consider your ways.

When your ways are right, these things don't have to be a judgment. Don't have to be true. And the remnant who heeds, who listens, who trusts in the promise of God, who refuses the grasshopper mentality are the ones who are going to enter into the fullness.

Prosperous seed, fruity vines, the ground giving its increase due from heaven. The remnant of the people will possess all these and it will 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.

The enemy of faith is fear. A lot of stuff going on around us, nationally, internationally,

culturally, spiritually governed mentally, politically. Don't fear.

Do not fear. Let your hands be strong. We can build the temple of God with a pure heart, with clean hands, and we can offer ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

That is our reasonable service. Doesn't matter what's going on in the world. Doesn't matter how much evil seems to be striding the earth like the Anakim or the Philistines or the rest of the Amorites who dominated the land.

The victory that overcomes the world is our faith. Without faith, it's impossible to please Him. Well, we'll pick up here and look at the rest of this wonderful chapter 8 in Zechariah next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the wonderful encouragement we have that it is not by our might and it is not by our power. It is by your spirit. You have made us that promise, and we understand that because we have the fullness of your spirit in this dispensation, the promises that are examples for us in the Old Testament are even more true, even more personal, even more immediate and fulfillable in our daily lives.

We pray that as we reflect on these things that God the Holy Spirit will encourage us, strengthen us, give us clear eyes and motivated hearts to exploit the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ that He accomplished on the cross, delivering us from our sins, breaking the power of Satan, the power of sin and death, and enabling us to be those brethren among whom He is the firstborn, among whom He is ready to distribute gifts, inheritance, opportunities for future service and reflecting His glory in yours now and in the ages to come. We thank you and praise you for these things, and we ask and submit our request to you in Jesus' name. Amen.