

Zech 8

God's covenant promises

Tim Anderson 30/4/2023

We started this series in Zechariah back in February.

I feel like you guys have been patient with me,
so thank you.

It's just possible that you might remember when we started the series,
that I said that Zechariah is a book in two halves.

They are not exactly equal halves but close.

Ch 1-8 are prophecies

addressing the current situation of Zechariah's community.

This is what God is going to do for his people now.

"Let's get the temple built

and see how God blesses us according to his word."

Ch 9-14 are prophecies addressing the future.

These are God's plans going forwards,

but we won't see them in our lifetime.

I guess for us as Christians Ch 9-14 are quite interesting
in the sense that some of the prophecies say some things
that point quite directly to Jesus.

We'll get to those in future weeks.

But today we are in chapter 8.

It's closing off the first half of the book.

And like a good teacher,

Zechariah is giving us a bit of a summary of where we've been so far.

So there are no visions in chapter 8.

When there's a vision,

it tends to start with the words,

"Then I looked up."

1:18 "Then I looked up and there before me were four horns."

2:1 "Then I looked up

and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand.

5:1 "I looked again, and there before me was a flying scroll."

6:1 "I looked again, and there before me were four chariots."

There's none of that in chapter 8.
 Instead what we have are messages introduced by the phrase,
 "This is what Yahweh Almighty says:"
 It happens ten times in this chapter.
 "This is what Yahweh Almighty says:"
 And mostly, what Yahweh Almighty says
 is something that he has already said earlier in Zechariah.
 I'll take you through the first one,
 and you can trust me for the rest.
 8:2 "This is what the Lord Almighty says:
 "I am very jealous for Zion:
 I am burning with jealousy for her."
 That's telling us again what he told us in chapter 1.
 1:14 "Then the angel who was speaking to me said,
 'Proclaim this word:
 This is what Yahweh Almighty says:
 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.'"
 And so it is through most of chapter 8.
 It's a summary of where we've been so far.

It's a bit like business reports.
 The whole report is written
 but if you don't have time for the whole report,
 there's the executive summary on the front page.
 If you didn't want to try to read and decipher all the visions,
 with their difficult to make sense of imagery,
 you could skip straight to chapter 8
 and get it all laid out for you in prose.
 What a shame I didn't tell you that back in February, huh?
 Why did Zechariah even bother with the first seven chapters?
 Couldn't he have made life easier for everyone
 and just skipped to chapter 8?
 No that actually wouldn't have been better.
 The vivid imagery of the visions helps us to understand God's heart.
 We start to pick up how passionate he is.

You miss the passion if you just skip to the summary at the end.
It would be like saying you know a movie
because you've read through the plot summary on IMDB.
You read through the plot summary
to check there's nothing in the movie your kids shouldn't watch.
It's not a substitute for watching the movie.

Well we've read and preached the earlier chapters now,
do we even need to bother with the summary?

Yes we do.

This is actually more than the bullet points of an executive summary.
It's summarising the previous seven chapters
and reading it with the lens of the covenant being restored.
The previous chapters have said what God is going to do,
and what God wants his people to do.
But there hasn't been an explicit mention of the covenant.
In chapter 8, we see that the covenant is going to be restored.

Covenant is one of those big Christian words.

It's one we don't talk about often enough
because really it's one of the most important words
for understanding the storyline of the Bible.

There are a number of times in the Bible
that we could say that God established a covenant with his people.

A covenant is like a promise
and it's like a contract.

So God said to Abraham that he would make his name great
and increase the number of his descendents like the sand on the seashore
and give him the Promised Land to live in.

That was the promise.

But Abraham had to circumcise all the males in his family.

That marked them out as God's people.

And they were expected to live God's ways.

That was the contract.

Or God renewed that covenant to Moses.

Ex 6:7-8 "I will take you as my own people,
and I will be your God.

Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God,
who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.
And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand
to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.

I will give it to you as a possession."

That was the promise.

But Israel was given the 10 commandments on Mt Sinai
and they were expected to live by them.

That was the contract.

The big question is,

"What happens when the contract gets broken?"

Is God still going to stick to the promises he made?

Or has the broken contract voided the promises?

A marriage is a covenant.

There are promises.

"To have and to hold from this day forward,

for better, for worse,

for richer, for poorer.

There is also a contract.

Forsaking all others ...

What happens when the contract is broken?

Well if you don't forsake all others,

then often it doesn't last until death us do part.

Is that how it's going to be with God's covenant with his people?

That was the big question for Zechariah's generation.

Their ancestors had broken the contract.

They had worshiped other gods in the temple.

They had totally ignored the Law God gave Moses.

And so they were sent into exile.

Was the covenant over?

Or could it be repaired?

The message of this chapter is that God is restoring the covenant with his people.

8:4 "This is what Yahweh Almighty says:
'Once again men and women of ripe old age
will sit in the streets of Jerusalem,
each of them with cane in hand because of their age.
The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.'
I guess the modern equivalent of cane in hand is your walking stick,
or even better your four wheeled walker.
Now most people who use such devices
are not too rapt that they are necessary.
But having a cane in hand because of your age
is a great blessing from God.
Why? Because it means that you've lasted a long time.
As they say,
old age is not much fun, but it's better than the alternative.
We would never say that as Christians, would we?
The ancient world was brutal and without modern healthcare.
If you lasted long enough to have a cane in your hand,
you were a miracle.
God says, "That's how it's going to be."
Children playing in the streets may seem like a normal part of life.
Or it was when I was a kid before devices took over the world.
But again, life in the ancient world was a struggle to survive.
If the children were playing instead of joining in adults work
because all hands on deck were required to put bread on the table,
then you were living in great prosperity.

These are the blessings of the covenant.
Because the covenant is going to be restored,
its blessings will once again flow to the people.

For Zechariah's hearers,
listening to this was a bit like

giving descriptions of a high society party
to people in a concentration camp.

8:6 ""It may seem marvellous to the remnant of this people at that time,
but will it seem marvellous to me?"

declares Yahweh Almighty."

Marvellous doesn't mean really cool here.

It's more like an incredible dream that is totally unbelievable.

Blessings that because of your experiences,

it's impossible for you to wrap your head around.

But not so for God.

God knows that it can happen and he's planning for it.

This is the full restoration of the covenant.

The language mirrors the language used
when the covenant was stated earlier.

I quoted God's words to Moses,

Ex 6:7 "I will take you as my own people,
and I will be your God."

That's classic covenant language.

But here it is in Zech 8,

8:8 "I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem:

they will be my people,

and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

It's not just good things happening.

It's relationship.

I am yours and you are mine.

That's the covenant.

There's the promise and there is also the contract.

The contract is very similar to what we heard last week.

8:16-17 "These are the things you are to do:

speak the truth to each other,

and render true and sound judgement in your courts;

do not plot evil against each other,

and do not love to swear falsely.

I hate all this declares Yahweh."

Last week, Zechariah was not prepared to tell the men from Bethel who came knocking on his door

that they didn't need to celebrate the fasts

that commemorated the destruction of Jerusalem anymore.

That was because they were caught up in religiosity.

But now because the covenant will be restored,

he can tell the people

that because of their relationship with Yahweh,

those fasts will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals.

It's not that they don't need to observe them anymore.

It's that the observances will be transformed -

from mournful to joyful, from solemn to festive.

There will be no question about whether you have to observe them because you will want to.

Who wants to miss a joyful party with friends and family?

There's one more aspect of the covenant that stands out in this chapter.

The blessings of the covenant for God's people

were never meant to be just for them.

God's people are blessed to be a blessing to others.

In the great statement of the covenant in Genesis 12,

God tells Abraham, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

In Zech 8, we see how the nations are blessed through God's people.

8:20-22 "This is what Yahweh Almighty says,

"Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come,

and the inhabitants of one city will go to another city and say,

'Let us go at once to entreat Yahweh Almighty.

I myself am going.'

And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem

to seek Yahweh Almighty and to entreat him.'"

People from nations round about are going to recognise

that there is no point serving any God other than the one true God.

So they will make the trip to Jerusalem

to seek Yahweh's blessing and favour.

This picture is even intensified in the last oracle in the chapter.

8:23 "This is what Yahweh Almighty says:

'In those days ten people from all languages and nations
will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say,
'Let us go with you,
because we have heard that God is with you.'"

In the previous verses, the Gentiles were discussing amongst themselves about heading up to Jerusalem to seek the favour of the Lord.

Now God's people are themselves acting as the ones guiding people to the Lord.

When God is speaking to Moses about the covenant, he says that Israel will be a kingdom of priests.

A priest is a middle man between God and other human beings.

A priest helps people to connect up with God.

And so this image of 10 gentiles clutching the robe of the Jew is a picture of God's people living up to promise of the covenant.

Finally, they will become a kingdom of priests.

Finally, they will lead others to know the Lord and share the blessings of the covenant.

So far, we have thought about what it means for the covenant to be restored between God and Zechariah's generation. But what does this passage mean for us as Christians?

For Christians, the blessings of the new covenant are different.

It's not about being able to live long enough to need a walker.

It's not about the vine yielding its fruit.

But it is still about God being with us.

How is God with us?

Immanuel means God with us.

Immanuel is one of the names of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is God with us.

So if Zechariah is promising

that God would come and live among the people,
then we have the fulfilment of that promise,
Jesus come to live among us.

But Zechariah was not only promising
God would live amongst his people,
he was promising that the blessings of the covenant would flow to them.
And so it is for us.

Eph 1:3 was the verse we started the service with.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in the heavenly realms
with every spiritual blessings in Christ."

Our blessings are spiritual blessings.

That doesn't mean they are make believe blessings.

But it means they are blessings that can be seen by the eye of faith.

You don't walk around with a sign that says,

"I am a child of God".

The people who you bump into at Coles
can't tell that you are a child of God.

But it doesn't make it any less true.

And what a blessing,

to be a child of the creator of the universe.

When you go to get a stent put in by the cardiologist,
they can't look at your heart and say,

"Hmm, I can see the Holy Spirit living in there."

They can't see it.

But that doesn't make it any less true.

We don't need to build a temple,

because the dwelling place of God is in our hearts.

But what a privilege to have the creator of the universe
growing his fruit in the garden of your heart!

What a spiritual blessing!

And like in Zechariah 8,

the covenant blessings that God gives to Christians

are not to be hoarded.

Zechariah pictured 10 gentiles holding onto the hem of a Jew's garment, so he could lead them to Jerusalem.

The blessings of the covenant are to be a blessing to others.

It's the same for us.

If you've been made a child of God,
that is a blessing that you want to share with others.

If ten people from Hastings also become children of God,
that doesn't mean

that there will be less spiritual blessings to go around for you.

On the contrary,

Paul tells the Thessalonians,

1 Thess 2:19-20 "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?

Is it not you?

Indeed you are our glory and our joy."

Those who we lead to the Lord

become a source of even more spiritual blessings for us.

We are blessed in order to be a blessing.

And when we are a blessing to others,

that itself is a source of spiritual blessing for us.

That much is the same under the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Let's spend some time praying

that we might indeed live up to our calling.

That we might cherish the spiritual blessings of the new covenant.

That we might share the spiritual blessings of the new covenant.

