

SERMON FOR AUGUST 23, 2020

TEXT: ZECHARIAH 1: 1-6

THEME: FIRST THINGS FIRST

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, **2** “The Lord was very angry with your fathers. **3** Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. **4** Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. **5** Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? **6** But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants, the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, ‘As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.’”

In the name of Jesus:

Today we begin a sermon series based on the Book of Zechariah, entitled “Your Kingdom Come.” To set the scene for what Zechariah writes, it might be helpful to review a bit of OT history. The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah were taken into Babylon to live in exile for 70 years. Their homeland and everything in it were destroyed by the Babylonians. God allowed this to happen because the people turned their back to God and worshipped idols. Ezekiel and Daniel were two of the prophets during the Exile who proclaimed God’s Word to His people. After the 70 years, the prophets Haggai and

Zechariah are called by God to preach God's Word to His people. The people begin to return home. These events are recorded in the books Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. As they begin to rebuild their lives, Haggai calls on the people to rebuild the Temple that Solomon originally built but was destroyed 70 years earlier by the Babylonians. Zechariah is also a prophet during this time of return. The people of Judah want to rebuild their lives, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. And quickly! But not so fast! Their efforts stall for seventeen years! There is infighting, due in part to economic reasons. The people of Samaria want the Temple built in their region, the Judahites want the Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. They fought over where the Temple was to be placed, because the Temple brought jobs and money to the area. The effort to rebuild the Temple stalls, for seventeen years. They finally begin again to rebuild but in their rebuilding, they forgot about God. They were going to rebuild the Temple because they mistakenly thought that if they did this, God would be pleased with their work. But their hearts were far away from God. They needed to learn to put first things first.

So let's fast forward a bit, to today. If you watch the Weather Channel at all you will probably see film clips of hurricanes hitting the coasts of the Southern parts of our country. Wind and wave batter homes built on beaches,

and you see these homes wash away into the ocean. They wash away because they do not have a solid foundation upon which they were built. Jesus warns you and me not to build our spiritual homes on sandy foundations. He says: “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. **26** And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7).

This is what Jesus is telling the people of Zechariah’s time through the prophet. A building is only as good as its foundation. Zechariah, and the people of God long to get back to normal, so to speak. They want God’s Kingdom to come. But it is now 520 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the Temple in 587 BC, and the people naturally thought “God’s Kingdom will come when we rebuild the Temple.” After all, that is what God said to the prophet Haggai, “Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house.” It was time to rebuild the Temple.

We all know the feeling of looking at broken timbers and busted bricks. What had been destroyed and torched in your life? Where has this Pandemic wrecked havoc with you? In a relationship? Loss of income? Your health, family, future, finances? Is your emotional well being frayed?

God has called all of us to build something in our lives. It may not be newsworthy and get the headlines on Fox News, CNN, or Time magazine. But it is important to raise children who are Christian, to be an honest and hard working person, to be ethical in your relationships, to study God's Word with regularity, to be a loving grandparent and to keep the Sabbath Day holy. It is time to build!

But not so fast! That is not how Zechariah begins his book. The Lord says: "Return to Me and I will return to you." (v3). A building is only as good as its foundation. Before we build, we need a solid foundation. First things first. Homework first then playtime. Plow the ground and plant the seed, then comes the harvest. Save your money then buy a car. Exercise, then go have a piece of cake. Lay the foundation, then build.

And if we don't? Then the whole thing comes tumbling down. If we build our lives trying to make a name for ourselves, if pride and pretense are my foundation, then whatever I build is washed away, like a beach house built

on the sand that washes away in the ocean. A building is only as good as its foundation. A solid foundation has two parts.

The first part is this: **Return to Me, says the Lord of armies. (v3)**. The rebuilding of the Temple will be in vain unless the people return to the Lord. To rebuild the Temple, thinking that God would be pleased with what you are doing, and yet your heart is not right with the Lord, that invites disaster! That is what got the people in trouble in the first place! The people's fundamental need wasn't a rebuilt Temple, it was a renewed heart.

What does it mean to return to the Lord? It means to repent. To turn around. You are going in the wrong direction. Turn around because if you don't disaster is just around the bend. To repent doesn't mean to be nice or to try harder. It means to take God and His word with utter seriousness. Repent, confess your sins, come clean, be honest.

It is easy to ignore the call to repent. All too often we don't pray for it, we don't listen for it, and a great many times we don't do it. But we can't build a life of mercy and faithfulness apart from heeding God's call to repent. If we don't change, we will end up building our lives on sinking sand.

We need to listen to Zechariah: "Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets cried out, Thus says the LORD of hosts, Repent from your

evil ways and from your evil deeds. But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.” (Zech 1:4) The danger is to be like the fathers and mothers who, in the days of Jeremiah, relied on the temple and refused to repent. Jer 7:4, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.” The temple needs to be rebuilt—no doubt! But the temple needs to have a solid foundation, and that means repentance and faith.

Zechariah says “they returned/repented.” (v 6.) They believed in the Lord. And how did that happen? It happened through confession. Confession isn’t telling God what he doesn’t know, He knows everything already. Confession isn’t complaining about your lot in life, it isn’t blaming and pointing fingers at others. That isn’t confession.

Here is what confession is all about. David says: “ “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” The prodigal son says, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” The tax collector says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Here’s my confession. It’s easy for me to fast-forward through confession. To say the words and syllables and then be done with it. When I

do that, I am simply going through the motions. Then I realize what I'm doing and I realize I'm a hypocrite. A two-faced pretender. I've preached sermons about people like me—people who only go through the motions, say the right words, but their hearts are galaxies from God.

So I need to slow down. We all do. Let's all slow down. Confess our sin. Return/Repent. Need some Scripture? Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." *A building is only as good as its foundation.* Zechariah's foundation has two parts. "Return to me, says the LORD of armies [that's the first part], **and I will return to you**" [that's the second part, the Gospel part] (Zech 1:3). How does God return to us? He returns to us in Jesus.

I have this wood cut in my office. Do you see it? It says Jesus. Jesus is easy to miss. Jesus is always easy to miss. Unless we focus on Jesus. That's why we need Zechariah. Zech 9:9, Jesus is our King who comes to us, righteous and humble. Zech 9:11, the blood of the covenant sets us free. Zech 11:8, people detest Jesus. Zech 11:12, people sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Zech 13:7, "Strike the sheep so the flock will be scattered." Zech 12:10, "They will look upon me whom they have pierced." God returns to us with steadfast love, cleansing mercy and full and complete pardon for all our sin. We must

see Jesus. And why is that? Because a building is only as good as its foundation. Edward Mote knows. In 1834 he composed a hymn. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. No merit of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." Here's a foundation to build upon. Jesus' blood and righteousness. All other ground is sinking sand.

Amen.