

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

TEXT: ZECHARIAH 8: 1-8

THEME: SECURE YOUR OXYGEN MASK

And the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, **2** “Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. **3** Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. **4** Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. **5** And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. **6** Thus says the Lord of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the Lord of hosts? **7** Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, **8** and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

In the name of Jesus:

First secure your own oxygen mask. This directive is familiar to anyone who travels on commercial airplanes. In the event of an emergency (a loss of cabin pressure) we are told that an oxygen mask for each person will drop from an overhead control panel. In such an anxious moment, parents might instinctively try to get air to their children. Adult children, for their part, might focus on preserving the life of their elderly parents seated next to them.

Such kindness might be instinctive but it isn't wise. If we pass out from the lack of oxygen, the people sitting next to us won't survive. That is why we need to first secure our own oxygen mask!

And so we find ourselves today in an emergency situation that seemingly has no end. Our plane has hit turbulence. The oxygen masks have dropped. We are in need of air! We are all gasping for air. It's called a Pandemic. Covid-19. We have been emotionally tossed and turned. We are gasping for help, searching for stability and strength. What should we do? Just as the warning suggests: "First secure your own oxygen mask."

That is what Zechariah says. Our sermon series is called Your Kingdom Come wants His kingdom to come, to us and through us. That is the message of Zechariah 8. God desires to bring the Gospel, the oxygen we need, the world needs, to sinners. But first, we need to secure our own oxygen mask.

God says in verse 3: "I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. God's Not only up there, He is down here, God is with us, in a very real way, and His name is Jesus.

Now note what is said in verses 4 and 5: "Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its

streets.” (Zech 8:4–5) This isn’t turbulence, it is a picture of peace and harmony, of happiness and sharing. It is what the Bible calls shalom. During this time there will be no more social distancing, no disease or death. God will do it!

And then verses 7-8: “I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.” (Zech 8:7–8) God brings exiles home and makes them his through his faithfulness and righteousness. Not our faithfulness and righteousness. His.

At that time this then happens: “The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew.” (Zech 8:12) The day is coming when God will make all things new. Vines and produce and dew from heaven!

There will be no more fasts. No more sadness. “The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.” (Zech 8:19) God changes mourning into music; sackcloth into singing; deep sighs into hearts full of endless Hallelujahs.

This is what we need, the oxygen of God's Good News. We need His presence, His protection, His salvation, His renewal and His celebration. And all this is ours, free, without cost, all because of Jesus. This is the oxygen that drops from heaven. And it is yours through faith in Jesus. First secure your own oxygen mask. And if you don't?

Then all this is ho-hum, hum-drum. It is all just a bunch of words, and we end up being religious without being a Christian. If we ourselves don't breathe in the breath of the Gospel, if we don't believe with all of our heart in Jesus we forget its freshness and we fail to receive its life giving power. What's meant to be vibrant comes across as blasé—no big deal. We all need to be jolted again to life, so God's kingdom comes to us. Then through us.

First secure your own oxygen mask. Once we're spiritually revived, then we're generous towards others. Then we reach out to people living in extreme isolation. Then we pray for families who aren't used to spending so much time together. Then we go out of our way to love people in the name of Jesus.

Breathe in the spiritual oxygen of the Gospel! Come alive in Jesus Christ! God's kingdom to us. Then through us the Holy Spirit works to show Christ's compassion to people caught in this Coronavirus tailspin, heading for an economic and emotional crash of momentous proportions.

Zechariah shows us how the Gospel comes through us. For the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, is not just for us, it is for everyone. Just listen to verses 20-22: “People shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying: “ Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going. Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.” People come in waves. First in line are the Gentile leaders, then the city dwellers, And finally many people and strong nations. The prophet Zechariah envisions God’s redeeming mercy for people of every tribe, nation, and color.

That One who gives us life and gives it abundantly is Jesus! The Gospel is for you and for all. Listen to how Zechariah describes it: “In those days ten people from the nations of every tongue will **seize the** robe of a Judahite.” (Zech 8:23) Ten people seizing the garment of one Judean. The Gospel is *personal*. The verb “seize,” signifies a fervent and impassioned action. We want those who don’t know Jesus to believe in Jesus, we want unbelievers to seize us and ask us what we have that they don’t.

A recent survey of 8,000 people who became believers indicates that 5% walked into a church and stayed; 7% came because of the pastor; 3% came

because the church had a program they liked; 1% came through door-to-door visitation; 4% came through Sunday School; 80% came through invitations from friends or relative. Who can you reach out to? Who can you help? The Gospel is universal. The Gospel is personal. It's one on one. It is meant to be shared.

And so Zechariah concludes this chapter with the words: "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." (Zech 8:23) The Gospel, this oxygen that we have freely received is meant to be shared. People come to faith when they hear the Good News of Jesus. Faith comes by hearing. When you speak kindly to your children on the playground, you demonstrate the Holy Spirit's power for other moms. When you refuse to participate in gossip, you bring honor to Jesus. Even in your response to your own sin—admitting wrong and asking for forgiveness—you testify to the truth of the Gospel you confess.

To those who are tired of the Pandemic we can say: "Jesus conquered *this*." To the coworker burdened by frightening financial fears we say: "Jesus died to redeem *this*." To those afraid of dying from Coronavirus we say: "Jesus stepped fully into death and demonstrated ultimate victory even over *this*." But the opposite is also true. If we're unkind to those around us, if we speak harshly to our family

members, if we stockpile and hoard and freak out, we tell the world that Jesus is just a cliché. Jesus is just an afterthought. Jesus is no big deal.

The Gospel isn't black letters on white paper. The Gospel is vibrant and neon and in living color! The Gospel provokes wonder and amazement. The Gospel can be applied from a thousand angles, and invites people to have confidence and hope. The Gospel breathes life into dead hearts! Do you see the need? Do you hear the cries? Our plane—our world—is in turbulent airspace! Trust in Christ. Be renewed in the Spirit. Then share the life giving Gospel with others. Amen.