

Looking Beyond Lockdown

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Date: 25 April 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of the prophet Zechariah.

Zechariah chapter 1. And if we read again from the beginning, Zechariah chapter 1 and verse 1. 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, The Lord was very angry with your father.

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.

La Sagrada Familia. It's the world's most famous unfinished building. And it stands to this day in the heart of the Spanish city of Barcelona.

The building work of this Roman Catholic church had begun nearly 140 years ago on the 19th of March, 1882. And it's still not finished.

[1 : 15] From the very outset of the construction, there were problems. The original architect, he resigned after the first year of the construction phase. Then they ran out of money and they had to rely on private donations.

Then in 1926, the succeeding architect, he died, which is always a problem. But then as things progressed, the progress was interrupted again during the 1930s due to the Spanish Civil War. And it was actually during the Civil War that the architect's drawings, they were also destroyed. Then fast forward to today and the current construction.

It has been funded by tourists paying entrance fees to visit this unfinished masterpiece. And it's expected that the church will be completed by 2032, which is 150 years after the ground was first broken.

And some actually say that they don't even think that it will be finished in 2032 because of the recent pandemic. But, you know, building projects, they often run into problems.

[2 : 27] They often run out of money or they run out of time or they just run out of steam.

Thankfully, our most recent building project didn't come across any of these problems.

We did have 14 joists with wood rot, but they've all been replaced. And now the painting has been done. The wiring is complete. The carpets in the church have been laid and the chairs are hopefully on their way.

So God willing, as I mentioned, we'll be back in the church on the 9th of May. And as a deacon's court, I just want to say that we're so thankful to the Lord for his goodness to us, but also to you as a congregation, not only for your patience, but also for your practical support.

We really do appreciate it. But, you know, when we come to the situation Zechariah was facing in his day, there was a building project as well. And this building project had run into problems.

But the problem wasn't finance or furnishings or even fixings. The problem was focus. Because God's people, they were more focused and fixated on themselves rather than being focused and fixated on God.

[3 : 44] And that left the temple lying in ruins. And so as we begin a study in the book of Zechariah this evening, I'd like us to consider it under three headings.

A context to review, a command to rebuild, and a call to repent. A context to review, a command to rebuild, and a call to repent.

So first of all, a context to review. A context to review. We'll read verse 1 again. It says, 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, The Lord was very angry with your fathers.

Now, the prophet Zechariah, he is helpfully introduced to us here by explaining who his people are. He's the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo.

And, you know, living in an island setting like ours, where most people sort of know one another, that's often the question you're asked when you meet someone. Who are your people?

[4 : 56] And in order to explain who you are, you have to give details of who your parents and also your grandparents are. And, you know, that's what it was like in Israel at the time, because there wasn't actually many of them who had returned.

And they all sort of knew one another. But, you know, for us reviewing the context to this book, it's actually easy for us to get very confused with all the Zechariahs that are mentioned in the Bible. Because there were prophets, priests and kings called Zechariah. Prophet, priest and king are, of course, the three offices that Jesus fulfills as our Redeemer.

But this Zechariah, this Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, he was given his name because of the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant promise.

The name Zechariah means the Lord has remembered. The Lord has remembered. And what the Lord had remembered was the covenant promise he made to Abraham.

[6 : 09] And that's why there's a context to review. Because God called Abraham. When God called Abraham way back in Genesis 12, you remember that God made a covenant with Abraham.

God promised Abraham, I will make you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you.

And I will curse him who curses you. And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. So God called and covenanted with Abraham this promise of a family nation.

And that family nation was Israel. And we refer to that period in history, that early period, we call it the patriarchal period. Because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they're considered as what you would say, the fathers of the covenant.

But if we were to follow then the timeline of Israel's history, we would see that the patriarchal period, it was from the 21st century BC to the 18th century BC.

[7 : 18] Until the children of Israel, they went into Egypt. And you know, that's the period we're considering and looking at in the morning services in the life of Joseph.

And you know, what we learn is that the children of Israel, they went into Egypt and they were in captivity in Egypt for 430 years. But during that time, God was faithful to his covenant promise.

He was faithful because he made this family, a nation family. He made the nation of Israel into a family nation. Because the population of the Israelites, they grew, as you know, from 12 sons, the 12 sons of Jacob or the sons of Israel.

They grew from these 12 sons to a population of over 2 million people. And then around 1440 BC, the Exodus took place under the leadership of Moses.

Where this family nation, they were brought up out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery and bondage. And they were brought through the Red Sea. And after 40 years in the wilderness, they were brought into the promised land.

[8 : 30] And so then from about 400 BC to about 1000 BC, we have the period of Joshua and the conquest of the promised land.

And then we have the period of the Judges, which is those years of rebellion and restoration under men such as Gideon and Samson. And then we have the period of the Kings, which begins around 1060 BC, where Saul was crowned the first king of Israel.

And at first, there's this united monarchy over Israel. There are three generations of a united monarchy under King Saul and King David and King Solomon.

And under the reign of King David, there was peace in the land with the surrounding nations. Under the reign of King Solomon, there was growth. And the temple, the first temple was built.

But then around 930 BC, this united kingdom of Israel, it divided. It divided. And it was divided by Solomon's sons, Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

[9 : 39] And it became the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam and the southern kingdom of Judah under Rehoboam. And then for the next 200 years, the northern kingdom was reigned and ruled by kings that caused this downward spiral of rebellion and rejection of the Lord.

And it ultimately led to the demise and destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BC, where the northern kingdom of Israel, they were invaded and taken captive by the Assyrian Empire.

And that's the last we hear of the northern kingdom in scripture. That's the last we hear about them. Because the focus then turns to the southern kingdom of Judah, which houses the line and lineage of the Messiah.

But the thing is, the southern kingdom of Judah, it wasn't any better than, they weren't any better than their northern neighbours. Because they too were rebelling and rejecting the Lord by their idolatry.

And in order to turn them back, the Lord sent prophet after prophet after prophet to call his covenant people to repentance. He was lovingly warning them that if they didn't repent, judgment is coming.

[11:00] God was speaking to his people through his prophets, but they weren't listening. They were ignoring the voice of God in their lives and the Lord was saying to them, it's going to end in disaster, destruction and death.

And it did. But you know, my friend, when we think over the past year in our lives and all that's happened, not only as a nation, but also throughout the world.

You know, the Lord has been speaking to us as nations and kingdoms and governments and empires. The Lord has been calling us, just like he called his people.

He's been calling us to repentance. But you know, you look at the government and they're not listening. You look at the nation, we're not listening. You look at the world, we're not listening.

And if we don't learn from history, it's going to end in the same way it ended for the Israelites. It's going to end in disaster, destruction and death.

[12:06] Because that's what happened to the Israelites. In 605 BC, the Babylonian army under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, they invaded this southern kingdom of Judah and they took them captive.

They took them captive into Babylon. And then in the summer of 586 BC, the Babylonian army, they destroyed the temple. They ransacked the palace and they burned Jerusalem to the ground.

It was a scene as God promised, a scene of destruction, devastation and death. And as Jeremiah had prophesied years earlier, the Israelites were to be in captivity in Babylon for 70 years.

They would be made to live in that place for 70 years and live there in a foreign land, under the rule of a foreign king. And they were going to be made to worship foreign gods.

Now, we often think that the story of the Old Testament ends with exile. But God's story of the Old Testament, it doesn't end with destruction, devastation and death. No, God's story of the Old Testament, it ends with redemption, restoration and renewal.

[13:19] And that's because that's how the story of God's covenant people will always end. The story of God's covenant people will always end with redemption, restoration and renewal.

And you know, my Christian friend, that's how God's story of your life will end. Because you know, whatever you're going through tonight, God's covenant promise to you is that the story of your life, it will end with redemption, restoration and renewal.

And it will end all because of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. And that's what we see as we review the context to the book of Zechariah.

Because in 538 BC, and in fulfilment to Isaiah's prophecy, which had been prophesied 150 years earlier, in 538 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia, he released the Israelites from captivity in Babylon.

And he commanded them to return to the promised land and rebuild the temple. And you know, what's remarkable is that the Lord not only used King Cyrus to free the Israelites, he also used King Cyrus to finance the Israelites.

[14:42] Because King Cyrus, he provided funding to rebuild and to restore the temple. And so after living in lockdown in Babylon for 70 years, the Israelites, they finally returned to the promised land in 537 BC.

And they returned with the hope of a new beginning. They returned with excitement and enthusiasm and eagerness to get the work done, to clear the rubble and restart the restoration project.

But as we see in this book, it wasn't long until they ran into problems. It wasn't long until they ran into problems. Which is why we see, secondly, a command to rebuild.

A context to review. And then secondly, a command to rebuild. A command to rebuild. Look at verse 2. The Lord was very angry with your fathers.

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.

[15:53] You know, in comparison to the strong number of 2 million Israelites who returned to the promised land after the exodus, you know, there had actually been a significant decline in the number of Israelites who returned after the exile in Babylon.

Because there was only this remnant of about 50,000 people who returned to rebuild and restore the temple. But this remnant, they were looking beyond lockdown.

And as they were looking beyond lockdown, they came across obstacles and opposition. Because the Samaritans, the Samaritans came and they started distracting them, diverting their attention from their primary purpose, which was gathering together and glorifying their covenant God.

But what happened was that 15 years went by. 15 years went by and the remnant who had returned to rebuild and restore and rededicate the Lord's house, they hadn't finished.

They hadn't finished and the temple was still in ruins. They had abandoned the temple. They left the temple derelict and desolate and even deserted. And instead they had spent their time focused and fixated on themselves rather than being focused and fixated on the Lord.

[17 : 24] But you know what this restoration remnant needed more than anything. What they needed to rebuild and restore and renew and rededicate themselves to the worship of God at the temple, what they needed wasn't comfort from the world or even to conform to the world.

No, what they needed more than anything else was the trumpet call of God's word. They needed prophets to powerfully and passionately preach and proclaim the word of God into their lives.

They needed to be confronted and challenged by the preaching of God's word. They needed to be shifted and even stirred up by the truth of God's word. They needed to be revived and revitalized by the glory of God's word.

And you know, my friend, is that not what we need too? Because as we begin looking beyond lockdown and as we seek to return to the Lord's house and rebuild and restore and renew and rededicate ourselves to the worship of God, what we need more than anything is not comfort and confirmation from the world.

No, we need the trumpet call of God's word speaking into our lives. We need men of God to powerfully and passionately preach and proclaim the word of God in our lives.

[18 : 51] We need to be captivated by the glory of God and challenged by the gospel of God. We need to be shifted and stirred up. We need to be revived and revitalized by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We need this word to shape us and stir us up for the furtherance of God's kingdom. And you know, I think of the restrictions that were put upon the Israelites when they were living in lockdown in Babylon.

That's why we sang in Psalm 137. We sang there that the Israelites, they sat and wept as they remembered what it was like before lockdown when they gathered in God's house.

They said, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? And you know, in many ways, that's how we might feel at the moment with all the obstacles of restrictions and not being able to sing the Lord's songs in church.

But as we begin looking beyond lockdown, you know, we're not to become focused and fixated with all the obstacles. No, we're to become focused and fixated with the opportunities.

[20 : 10] The opportunities for rebuilding, for restoring, for renewing, for rededicating ourselves to the Lord. We're not to look at the obstacles, my friend. We're to look at the opportunities that we have.

And you know, that's what Haggai and also Zechariah sought to do. They sought to challenge and confront God's people to be focused and fixated with the Lord.

Because during lockdown, during living in lockdown, they become focused and fixated on themselves. And with the temple lying derelict and desolate for 15 years, Haggai and Zechariah, they both begin preaching and proclaiming God's word in the year 520 BC.

Haggai and Zechariah are what the scholars refer to as the restoration prophets. They were the restoration prophets. And they were the restoration prophets because they were crucial during this restoration period.

Malachi is also a restoration prophet, but he doesn't appear on the scene for about 100 years. But what we need to understand is that Haggai and Zechariah, they were restoration prophets.

[21 : 32] But they were not only contemporaries, they were also colleagues in the ministry. They had the same call, they had the same commission to confront and challenge God's people with God's word.

We read here in verse 1 that Zechariah's ministry began in the 8th month of the Jewish calendar, which was November 520 BC.

But Haggai's ministry, it began two months earlier. We're told, if you went a few pages back in your Bible, you'd see Haggai chapter 1. And it says that Haggai's ministry began in the 6th month, which would be around September 520 BC.

And when Haggai began his ministry, he issued a call to rebuild. Haggai preached and proclaimed to the people, he said, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.

Go up to the hills and bring wood and build a house. Build the house that I may take pleasure in it, that my name may be glorified, says the Lord. And this redeemed remnant, they responded by resuming the restoration project to rebuild the temple.

[22 : 48] Then the following month, if you read in Haggai chapter 2, the restoration project, it was slowly restarting. And in Haggai, he prophesied and he proclaimed for a second time.

And in his commentary, the late Professor John L. Mackay, he suggests that, he gives actually a detailed date of Haggai's prophecy in Haggai chapter 2.

He says that it took place on the 17th of October, 520 BC. I don't know how he worked it out, but that's the date he gives. And what Haggai asked the remnant that day was a very relevant question as they began looking beyond lockdown.

Haggai asked a relevant question to the remnant. He asked, who saw the temple in its former glory and how do you see it now?

Who saw the temple in its former glory and how do you see it now? You know, it's a great question for the remnant who had returned because many of them had seen the temple in its former glory.

[23 : 58] Many of them had been alive and had attended Solomon's temple before they came to live in lockdown in Babylon. Many who belonged to the older generation, they remembered the former glory of Solomon's temple.

They remembered what it was like gathering at the temple for all these annual feasts and festivals. They remembered the throng of people who would come from all over the nation and gather in Jerusalem.

They remembered the thousands of people there and the buzz that there was at the festivals. They remembered the Lord's songs as they all walked up to the temple in Jerusalem singing, I joyed when to the house of God.

Go up, they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates, our feet shall standing be. They remembered those glorious days. And Haggai was asking them, who saw the temple in its former glory?

And how do you see it now? And you know, Haggai, he asked that small remnant, this relevant question, because as they stood around the ruins of the temple, the older generation wept while the younger generation wanted to work.

[25 : 14] The older generation wept while the younger generation wanted to work. The older generation saw the temple in its former glory, but now all they could see was rubble and ruin.

But the younger generation, the younger generation who were born in lockdown, they were born in exile in Babylon, they never saw the temple in its former glory.

They would have certainly heard about it. They would have been told about their history from the older generation. But what stalled and what stopped the rebuilding and the restoring of the temple was that the older generation wept while the younger generation wanted to work.

The older generation wept while the younger generation wanted to work. And you know my friend, this should confront and challenge us as a congregation that we don't fall into the same trap.

Because I know that our experience and our enjoyment of church, it's not going to be the same as it was before we were living in lockdown. Maybe not for a long time.

[26 : 28] But as we said, as we begin looking beyond lockdown, we're not to become focused and fixated with all the obstacles. Rather we're to be focused and fixated with the opportunities.

The opportunities for rebuilding and restoring and renewing and rededicating ourselves to the Lord. And you know we can only do that if both the older and the younger generations work together and do as the Lord has called and commanded us through the prophet Haggai.

Build the house that I may take pleasure in it. that my name may be glorified. But you know as an older generation I know that it can be so tempting to look back at the past.

It can be so tempting to remember the former glory. It can be so tempting to remember a bygone era and think how good it was back then when there was someone from every home who went to church and the church was full to the gunwales on the Lord's day.

And where it was a day where there was reverence and there was respect and the gospel was preached with power and passion and precision and coming to church was a spiritual experience. [27 : 53] It was a Christ-centered experience. It was a God-glorifying experience. And yes, my friend, there were many things in the former days that were right.

But there are also many, many things in the former days that were wrong. And we need to learn from the past not live in the past.

We need to learn from the past live in the present and look to the future. We need to learn from the past live in our present and look to the future.

And now as the small remnant looking beyond lockdown we need to make sure that we don't make the same mistakes as the remnant in Israel. We need to make sure that as Zechariah says in chapter 4 that we don't despise the day of small things.

We need to make sure that we're not weeping but working because there's already a lost generation in our community that doesn't want to come to church. My friend, we need to make sure that as we begin looking beyond lockdown that we return to the Lord's house to rebuild and restore and renew and rededicate ourselves to the worship of God.

[29 : 15] And you know that's why in the following month in the month of November that's when Zechariah's ministry began with a call to repent which is what I'd like us to consider lastly.

A call to repent. A context to review a command to rebuild and a call to repent.

A call to repent. Look at verse 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.

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 but pay attention to me declares the Lord.

You know like many of the prophets before him Zechariah was both a foreteller and a forth teller. He was a foreteller and a forth teller.

[30 : 20] And as we study this minor prophet together we'll see that a lot of what Zechariah prophesied and proclaimed it was foretelling more than forth telling.

Because Zechariah he received many visions and many promises about this coming Messiah. But in this opening section Zechariah he isn't foretelling he is forth telling.

He's forth telling. He's preaching and proclaiming a message of repentance. Thus says the Lord return to me and I will return to you.

Thus says the Lord return to me and I will return to you. Now of course the remnant had returned to the land but the question is had the remnant returned to the Lord.

They had returned to the land but had they returned to the Lord. They had returned to the promised land of Israel to rebuild and renew and restore and rededicate themselves to the Lord but the Lord wanted more than that.

[31 : 24] The Lord wanted he wanted not only a structural renewal he wanted a spiritual renewal. He wanted the remnant to repent.

He wanted the remnant to repent. Yes they had returned to the land but had they returned to the Lord. Thus says the Lord return to me and I will return to you.

And this word return it's often used in the Old Testament in relation to repentance because repentance it's turning away from sin and turning to the Lord.

repentance is a change of direction. Repentance is a change of direction. It's conversion.

Repentance repent and be converted.

It's turning around. But more than that repentance is not only a change of direction it's a change of heart. It's a change of mind. It's a change of will. Repentance is reformation of your whole life.

[32 : 29] Repentance is recognizing Jesus as Lord and that he is reigning over every area of your life. You know it was the Puritan Matthew Henry who said those who profess repentance must practice it.

Those who profess repentance must practice it. And this remnant they clearly professed repentance by returning to the land and rebuilding the temple.

But they also needed to practice repentance. They needed to practice repentance by returning to the Lord. Return to me and I will return to you.

But you know when you read through the book of Zechariah Zechariah his message was a call to repent because the Christ is coming. Repent because the Christ is coming.

You know in the years leading up to the lockdown in Babylon the prophets had repeatedly preached and proclaimed the message judgment is coming you need to repent because judgment is coming. [33 : 42] But the message which Zechariah preached and proclaimed is actually the same message that must be preached and proclaimed today. Jesus is coming you need to repent because Jesus is coming.

And you know I say that because the book of Zechariah is full of references to Jesus Christ. We're familiar with some of them. Zechariah 9 verse 9 relates to the triumphal entry of Jesus as he came into Jerusalem.

Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion shout O daughter of Jerusalem behold your king is coming to you he is just and having salvation lowly and riding on a donkey a colt the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 12 verse 10 it refers to the cross of Jesus and I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication then they will look on me whom they pierced and Zechariah 13 verse 7 it relates to the disciples awake O sword against my shepherd against the man who is my companion says the Lord of hosts strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered then I will turn my hand against the little ones you know my friend the message of Zechariah the message which Zechariah preached and proclaimed it's the same message which must be preached and proclaimed today that Jesus is coming you need to repent because Jesus is coming and as Zechariah prophesied that message it must be preached and proclaimed not by might nor by power but by my spirit saith the

Lord and you know it was that command to rebuild and called to repent that the remnant responded the remnant responded because within four years the temple was rebuilt it was restored it was renewed and rededicated to the Lord and in 516 BC after years of living in lockdown the people once again celebrated the Passover and you know that's something we should also look forward to we should look forward to celebrating the fulfillment of the Passover which is the Lord's Supper we should look forward to another communion season as we begin looking beyond lockdown now if you read through the first six chapters of the book of Ezra and with this I'll close if you read through the first six chapters of the book of Ezra you'll read about the history of what we've been considering this evening you'll read about this context to review and the command to rebuild and also the call to repent and you'll read about it in the book of

[36 : 47] Ezra because in many ways Ezra was an Old Testament historian it suggested that he actually wrote first and second chronicles which records what happened prior to lockdown in Babylon and then the book of Ezra it accounts for what has happened to the Israelites as they began looking beyond lockdown and so I'd encourage you to read through the book of Ezra because in Ezra chapter 6 we read so the people prospered they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Eddo and they built and finished the temple according to the commandment of God the people prospered through the prophesying of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah Zechariah and you know that should be our prayer too as we begin a study in the book of the prophet Zechariah we should pray that we will prosper that we will prosper through the prophesying of the prophet

Zechariah so a context to review a command to rebuild and a call to repent and God willing next Lord's Day will continue our study in the book of Zechariah may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray together our heavenly father we give thanks to thee that thou art the God of history and that history is God's story God's story of redemption that through the seed of the woman there will come one to crush the head of the serpent and we give thanks that he came in the person of Jesus Christ that he crushed his head that he defeated death he conquered the grave and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel and Lord even as we begin this study in the book of Zechariah that it would be a book that encourages us and challenges us and even equips us as we begin as a people and even as a nation as we begin looking beyond lockdown oh Lord so much has changed in our lives and we wonder if it will ever go back to the way it was but we give thanks that despite every change thou art the

God who has not changed thou art one who reveals thyself to us and says to us in scripture I am the Lord I change not Lord bless us then we pray guide us we ask lead us into a week that lies before us a week unknown to any of us but we give thanks that thou art the one who goes before us cleanse us and we pray go before us for Jesus sake Amen well we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening by singing to God's praise in Psalm 124 Psalm 124 in the Sing Psalms version and we're going to sing the whole psalm Psalm 124 If God the Lord had not been on our

side let Israel say had not the Lord been near when foes attacked us filling us with fear and when their wrath against us reached its height alive we had been swallowed in their spite and we'll sing on to the end of the psalm of Psalm 124 to God's praise song if God the Lord had not been on our side let

Israel sing and not the Lord be near then hold the dark house filling out to fear and when their wrath against us reached its height alive we have been told in their spite we would have been dereg■s of ¿ ■ you have Keith met the■ mat stood front had borronnd us alonetaa■ made another For we are set us free And have not led us to their cruelty We are each day just as an afterburn Come on the Father, let us be set free The Spirit's power, we are at liberty Our health is in the name of the Lord Who made the earth and heaven by His word [43 : 05] The Spirit's power, we are at liberty The Spirit's power, we are at liberty The Spirit's power, we are at liberty