

## **“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: ZECHARIAH.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**July 22, 2012, 6:00PM**

**Sermon Texts: Zechariah 1:1-21; 3:1-5**

### **Introduction.**

We come this evening to the penultimate OT prophet. Only Malachi remains.

After 70 long years of captivity in Babylon under oppressive foreign rule, God's people start returning to Judah and Jerusalem. Haggai and Zechariah are the two prophets who journeyed back home with Ezra and Nehemiah and about 50,000 Jews to find their homeland and their great city and temple completely destroyed.

God sends a message of hope, and a call to start again, to rebuild. The first message was delivered by Haggai and a couple of months later a second message comes from the prophet Zechariah.

Haggai encouraged the people to rebuild the temple based on making God their first priority. Zechariah encouraged the people to rebuild the temple based on the future and the hope they have because of who God is and what God is going to do through His people.

The prophecy of Zechariah is the longest of all the Minor Prophets and perhaps the most challenging to understand. His prophecy divides neatly into two parts. The first eight chapters are eight dramatic nighttime visions.

The second part of Zechariah, from chapter 9 to the end, is very different from the first part, it seems to be written after the temple is completed about four years later and focuses on the future and to the time of a Messiah. Zechariah is called the most Messianic book in the OT.

### **Apocalyptic Literature.**

Zechariah is also sort of an OT version of the NT book Revelation. There are many close parallels and similar symbols and figures of speech. There are four horsemen on different colored horses, there lampstands, olive trees, measuring lines, scrolls and seals with curses and judgments.

Zechariah has parts that are called apocalyptic, like Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation. It has highly figurative language, and highly eschatological themes, meaning it looks to the future, and sometimes to the distant future.

Apocalyptic literature was common in Biblical times and therefore more easily understood in Biblical times. One principle of interpretation that I will pass on to you is the principle that it can never mean what it never meant. We can't assign meaning to Revelation today that the people of the first century would never have thought. So the locusts aren't helicopters and the hail stones aren't bombs and Henry Kissinger isn't the anti-Christ.

While we may not understand all the symbols and all the prophetic meaning, one thing comes through in apocalyptic literature, it very clear that there is a war on. These parts of the Bible confront our comfortable upper middle class, safe suburban, American lifestyle. In fact these parts of Scripture should make us squirm and question if our worldview is wrong, if in fact we are the ones out of touch with reality.

There's a war on going on, a war of cosmic proportions and eternal significance. There are armies, weapons of mass destruction, a powerful enemy, and lives hanging in the balance.

**Ephesians 6:12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The truth is we should be living more of a wartime lifestyle than a peacetime lifestyle. We should be on alert, we should be praying the way we would if our nation were under a full scale attack. We should be using our resources to fund the war effort. We should actively engage the enemy where we can and we should be teaching our children and grandchildren how to be warriors for Christ and the gospel.

This brings to my mind a discussion we have in our house about where to go to college. Christian college verses secular college. We are two and two so far so I guess Zach will break the tie. If I were to ask you which is potentially more spiritually dangerous, a Christian college or a secular college, which would you pick?

Phama and I both went to Christian colleges as did all of my siblings. Speaking from my experience at Wheaton College and for my son Kent's experience their thirty years later, and from Reed's experience at Azusa, Christian colleges are potentially more spiritually dangerous than secular colleges for a couple of reasons. And I warned my sons of this when they went.

First, we tend to let our guard down and coast. We think we are in such a spiritual environment where everyone is like us. You can't tell where or who the enemy is.

Second, the professors are much more subtle and students aren't discerning enough to recognize the error in their teaching. The Bible and religion professors are the most subtle. I had a professor who later led a major attack on the orthodox interpretation of Scripture. My brother, Fred, attended Sterling College, a Christian college in Kansas where Phama graduated and where my dad worked for a while. Fred had a professor that turned Fred into a skeptic and then a borderline agnostic.

Wheaton College, Calvin College and many other Christian colleges are both going through some major challenges from the homosexual movement. More and more students and professors are coming out in favor of homosexuality. That's just one battle in a major war.

There's a war going on, but in Christian schools students don't see it or join the battle.

At Western Washington University Marc very quickly learned he was in a war zone, the battle lines were clear, the enemy was upfront and out spoken. Marc has grown spiritually at Western as he has had to take a clear stand for his faith.

The apocalyptic portions of the Bible remind us that there is a war going on and we are still in the middle of it. Apocalyptic writing is sort of like hearing back from a battlefield reporter about what's going on on the other side. It's a real war filled with all kinds of horror but the final reports are always that the good side is winning.

Zechariah's prophecy is meant to be an encouragement to the people of God in the midst of a warzone and it still is an encouragement to the people of God who are still in the battle and face what can sometimes seem like an uncertain future.

### **Zechariah 1:1-6. Introduction and reminder of where they were and why.**

Have you noticed when the prophets bring a word of encouragement it's never a word of false encouragement or a kind of sugar coated, glossing over kind of encouragement. They don't try to play down or smooth over sin in making their encouragement.

They never say, "There, there now, don't worry, it will all be alright, God's not mad at you, He loves you."

No, they call sin sin and they call us to repentance. The encouragement comes to those who take the message seriously and repent and turn from their evil ways and turn to God.

**Zechariah 1:3** 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.

Don't be hardhearted, don't be stiff-necked, don't be a stubborn and rebellious generation who forget the Words of God (Psalm 78:7-8).

The Bible is only encouragement where there is true and sincere repentance. The Gospel is hope and peace only for the poor in spirit, for those who hate their sin and mourn their sin, for those who humbly and contritely seek forgiveness and hunger for the righteousness of God.

Faith without repentance is not the Gospel. Faith without repentance is not encouragement. Faith without repentance is not Christianity. Faith without repentance is a hopeless lie.

Since Zechariah is such a long prophecy we will just get a taste of his prophecy and a glimpse of the vision he saw. We will just look at the first and the fourth vision. Remember Zechariah's message is a message of encouragement to motivate the people to rebuild the temple.

### **Zechariah 1:7-16. First Vision, Four Horsemen.**

The vision is at night, among a stand of Myrtle trees in a hollow (vs. 8). Myrtle trees are not particularly big or tall, nothing impressive. There are four horsemen and an angel who is interpreting or explaining to Zechariah what's going on.

There is also a man standing among the myrtle trees who is called the angle of the Lord. The angel of the Lord all through the OT is the OT appearance of Jesus Christ, physical manifestations or incarnations of Jesus. Jesus is the Captain of the hosts, of the armies of the Lord.

The angel tells Zechariah what it all means. Jesus is heard interceding with the Father over the state of affairs on the earth. The pagans are all happy and at rest, but God's people are in turmoil and distress, especially over the condition of Jerusalem. How long, O Lord?

The Lord answers and the angel tells Zechariah the response. God will have mercy on Jerusalem and will restore her and make her great and her prosperity will be great. God will comfort.

Does the church today look more like a stand of redwoods or a stand of myrtles? She looks like a clump of myrtles down in a hollow at night. But who is in her midst? Christ stands in her midst, and with Him are all the armies of heaven. Don't get your vision from TV or the internet or the newspaper. She is not what she will be. What you see will not always be.

We see how bad things are and assume that only it will keep getting worse. Nations rise and fall, wealth comes and goes, health and sickness, better and worse. There is only one unchanging constant in it all, God and building the church of Jesus Christ. The opposition doesn't matter, it will never prevail.

In fact the second vision is about the four horns which are the heathen nations that attacked Israel and Judah and how they are going to be scattered and destroyed by the Lord, which we know happens.

And the third vision is of God restoring Jerusalem to her glory and filling her again with His people until the point of overflowing. So be encouraged, rebuild the temple. Be encouraged, strengthen the church, invest in the kingdom of God on earth. It will prevail.

### **Zechariah 3:1-10. Fourth Vision, Joshua the High Priest.**

Joshua as the High Priest stands before God representing the people. He is representing a sinful people, and is dressed in filthy clothes. And Satan is there making accusations, condemning, ridiculing, mocking.

But God answers and silences Satan. Jerusalem is the elect of God, Joshua is the elect of God. Yes, he may be filth, but he is chosen by God and God will clean him up.

God does what only God can do. God takes off the filthy clothes and gives him a whole complete set of new clothes, pure clothes.

This prophecy is not difficult to figure out. God takes our sinful nature and puts it on Christ. In more technical language, God imputes the sinful nature of man to Christ and then imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. This is called double imputation. Our nature is put on Christ, Christ's nature is put on us.

He who knew no sin is made sin for us and we who are sinful are made to be without sin.

We don't do something for God, God does something for us and to us. He bestows on us the righteousness and obedience of His Son. When we stand before God we do not stand in our own goodness, we stand before Him in the righteousness of Christ.

The righteousness of man is but filthy rags. The only righteousness that will be able to stand before God on judgment day is God's righteousness, so we must come in His righteousness.

Once we are cleaned up and dressed in pure garments, God tells us to live and act according how we are dressed.

When we are dressed in grubby old work clothes we live and act like it. And when we are dressed in a tuxedo or evening gown we act like it. I went to a high school where the guys had to wear a coat and tie every day and the girls had to wear dresses every day. It effected how we acted and the kind of respect we showed to each other and our teachers.

When we are cleaned up by God, He says now don't go out and get all dirty again. Don't hallow in the mud of sin, disobedience, sexual immorality, lust, greed, pride, selfishness, anger, strife, and so on. Walk in my ways, live according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

**Zechariah 3:6-7** And the angel of the Lord solemnly assured Joshua, 7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.

### **Application and conclusions.**

We live in a time increasingly characterized by despair, meaning living without hope, nothing to look forward to that really matters.

If you listen to the politicians they try to capitalize on the despair and tell you how they can bring hope. And then they try to tell you how the other guy's ideas will just lead to more despair. Mr. Obama capitalized on that in his last campaign, hope and change. And now there are those who say his way is no hope and we need another change.

As the recession and unemployment drag on and on and every quick fix doesn't change anything.

But every generation has had their gloom and doom. The cold war, over-population, global warming, terrorism and global warfare, nuclear winter, resources running out, take over by the Muslims or the Chinese, disease, cancer, aids, sexual immorality and a slide into cultural decay.

Things that were once widely and strongly held and were central to our faith are now being abandoned. The culture is seeping into the church more and more.

Where is our hope? Who will help us? We look again and again to man, to some person, to the next president or governor or pastor or leader, someone in whom we can put our trust and find hope. As Zechariah says, there's no hope in turning to our fathers, to man, only to God.

We must look to the creator and sustainer of all the earth, to the architect and master designer, to the sovereign God who has a plan and is fulfilling that plan.

More than every modern man needs to hear the Word of the Lord, to hear the sovereign God speak. God is there and He is not silent, God has spoken and His Word is true and unchangeable.

The people of Israel had been lead away captive and when they finally returned their homeland was completely destroyed. They were defeated and demoralized, they would have to start all over. It's like a person whose home has been destroyed by fire, earthquake, flood or tornado. Some sink into despair, some turn to the future with hope.

Judah's future and our future depend on a king, a new King who lives and reigns on high and who is coming again.

One of the great themes of the Bible is that we are always forgetting and that God is always reminding us. We sin by forgetting, we repent by remembering. What God has promised He has done and what He has promised He will do. Truly the best is yet to come.

Zechariah deals with the past and future, looking back and looking forward. God has dealt with the past and God is in complete control of the future with a plan and a purpose.

This is good news for those haunted by the past and for those anxious of the future. We must understand our past and our future in relationship with Jesus.

Christ has dealt with all our sins and all our guilt and has paid the price and removed the penalty of all our sins.

You can also rest secure about your future because you know who holds your future and that He who holds it is faithful and true.

We will close singing Jerusalem the Golden. The New Jerusalem is the church of Jesus Christ victorious. It is being built and it will prevail and it will be glorious.