

Last week Pastor Doug talked about Haggai’s message to “Take courage and work.” Haggai’s message encouraged the people to get to work rebuilding the temple, but two years later all they had done was pour the foundation. Once again they let their work on the temple slide and went back to their own interests. So, working along side Haggai (Ha gay i) , another prophet named Zechariah stepped up to inspire the people to return to the task at hand.

SCRIPTURE: *Zechariah 1:1-6 says; In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo. ” The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people, this is what the Lord Almighty says. Return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed; This is what the Lord Almighty says: Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices. But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, over take your forefathers? Then they repented and said, the Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.” (1-6)*

Commentaries point out that the name

- Zechariah means “God remembers”
- His father’s name Berekiah, means “God blesses,”
- And his grandfather’s name Iddo, means, “At the appointed time.”

Through one family we are reminded that God remembers and blesses at the appointed time.

The temple was a visible symbol of God’s blessing and presence among His people. And so Zechariah encouraged the people not to let their setbacks distract them from the goal, and he tried to motivate them by reminding them of God’s promise to return. He said, if you can’t get excited about rebuilding the temple because it’s the right thing to do, get excited because of who’s coming. Zechariah noticed that the people didn’t really care (this was evident in their lack of effort), their hearts just weren’t in it. So he told them the place to start was in their hearts by returning to God.

Humans have been moving away from God since Adam and Eve hid from Him in the Garden of Eden, and God has been calling us back ever since. I think the idea of Jesus return is less than motivating for some folks, in part because they don’t think it’s really going to happen and if it did it would be somewhere out there, like a zillion years away.

There are many movies about the end of the world and how it could end...volcano, virus, flood, meteor, etc., but there how many movies are there in the theaters about the Lord’s return to the earth to set up His kingdom?

It’s ironic that while Christians pray for the Lord’s return in the Lord’s prayer with the words, “your kingdom come,” The Good News Magazine reports that 6 out of 10 Christians in the U.S. don’t believe God will ever return to the earth (*Good News Magazine: September/October 1997*). Are we praying for things we don’t believe?

The Bible says that in the last days, folks who don’t believe or care about his return will laugh and smirk at the thought.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 3:2-5 says that,  
“In the last days there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire.

*This will be their argument: “Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? Why, as far back as anyone can remember, everything has remained exactly the same since the world was first created.” ...”But you must not forget, dear friends, that a day is like a thousand years to the Lord and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise to return as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and everything in them will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be exposed to judgment.” (v8-10) “Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living! You should look forward to that day and hurry it along – the day when God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world where everyone is right with God.” (v11-13)*

While some don’t believe in the Lord’s return, others wonder if it matters? Zechariah says there’s at least three reasons why it does matter.

- *First, because the Lord is coming back and he cares about what he will find.*

It sort of reminds me of when my mom would leave us kids at home alone while she ran errands. She would warn us on her way out the door saying, “while I’m gone I expect you to behave and get your work done.” And we knew we’d have to answer for whatever happened when she got home.

When Jesus left, he said he would return and according to (Mt. 12:36; Lk. 16:2; Ro. 14:12; & Heb. 4:13), we will give an answer.

- *Second, because of the hope his return offers.*

The cruelty, pain and suffering, abuse, inequality, disasters, war and such will end when God returns.

- *Third, because he has given us work to do before he returns.*

And each believer is given spiritual gifts and talents for this purpose. For God’s people in Zechariah’s day, the task was to rebuild the temple. For us, as Pastor Doug said last week, the temple is spiritual but our tasks are similar.

The Apostle Paul explained it this way in first & second Corinthians. (1Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2Cor 6:16). Listen to his words in 1Cor. 3: 10-17

*“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid which is Jesus Christ. If any one builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what they have built survives, they will receive a reward. If it is burned up, they will suffer loss, though they will be saved,*

*but only as one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy them, for God's temple is sacred and you are that temple."*

As the church pursues the Great Commission in making disciples, we build upon this temple. Like the Israelites there may be times we lose sight of our priorities and the task we've been called to. We can get distracted and begin to drift. Sometimes our moving away from God happens slowly, in subtle ways when we're overwhelmed, emotionally taxed or drop our guard. These could be during times of *Discouragement, Disappointment, Distraction, Disbelief, Disobedience, Deceit and Denial*. These can be precarious times for faith that cause us to disconnect from God.

As the Israelites experienced these things, they lost sight of the promise. It can be a devastating thing when your hopes and dreams for the future are shattered. When it seems that the things that you'd longed for aren't going to happen.

In Zechariah's time, there didn't really seem to be a lot of hope for the future. They had a vision, but the reality was worse than they imagined and their dream seemed impossible.

- They wanted to see their culture re-established.
- They wanted to see Jerusalem repopulated with their children and grandchildren and
- They wanted to return to worship in a rebuilt temple as grand as the one they remembered.

But just having a vision doesn't make it happen. They had problems and difficulties that stood in the way of their progress. So, in Chapter 8:3-5, God gave Zechariah a vision of what could and would be again. *But*, he said, the security they were looking for, for themselves, their children and grandchildren was built on the basis of a right relationship to God. That had to be their first priority. But they did not listen. They continued to practice idolatry by putting their own priorities ahead of God's.

We can get caught up in idolatry when we seek after something other than God to satisfy our needs and desires. It can be career, leisure, preoccupation with self or money, anything that holds a higher priority in our heart than God.

If God called you today and said, "I'm coming back this week and wanted to know what would be a good time for you. Would you say, a) right now, Lord, come right now. Or b) please don't come until I've had this (fill in the blank) experience. Or c) can I get back to you.

A good way to assess our hearts condition is to ask ourselves two questions.

- What preoccupies most of my time and
- What preoccupies most of my thoughts.

What is the last thing you think about in bed at night? What is the first thing on your mind in the morning? Is it God that preoccupies our thoughts? John Calvin said: "our hearts are idol factories." And the apostle John warned us to, guard our hearts from idols.

For the people in Zechariah's day, the consequences in their lives became their teacher. Limitation, defeat, disillusionment and discouragement defined their experience. The same thing may happen to us if we choose to do what we want rather than what we know God wants.

It's good for us to check our hearts condition. I don't know where you are today. Maybe you're feeling really closely connected to God right now. Or maybe you're aware there's some distance there, life's gotten busy and your spiritual life has taken somewhat of a back seat to other priorities.

Like the folks then, our hearts and minds are prone to wander. But we can learn to recognize when we're wandering and we can learn to return.

So how do we return to God? It isn't something we do just once, we do it daily.

- We return to God when we make what God wants our priority. He has revealed His will for us in the Scriptures.
- We return to God when we acknowledge our sins and ask forgiveness.
- When we guard ourselves from idols and distractions that can lead us in the wrong direction and away from God.
- We return to God when we consciously think about God, talk to him, and focus on him in worship, prayer and Bible study.
- We return to God when our faith results in action.
- We return to God when we develop and use our gifts and talents in a way that helps the church and its mission.
- We return to God when we are faithful even when it's inconvenient or costly.
- We return to God when we do the things he loves and don't do the things he hates.
- We return to God when we are focused, connecting, obeying, believing, encouraging, and accepting our responsibility for the task at hand.

Zechariah reminds us that as we return to the Lord, he will return to us. Our personal lives and individual efforts matter a great deal to God. Like the temple, some of our lives are in a rebuilding phase. We see the places of ruin in our past, dreams & visions for the future that now seem impossible. And yet we worship a God who remembers, who is faithful to his promises, who will bless us and will be with us through all the times of our lives.

#### PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for your words of comfort and hope. Help us to guard our hearts and minds from anything that can distract us. Help us to discern and put away from us any idols we may cling too. If there are ways that we have drifted from you, help us to see that and make a conscious effort to return to you. When the reality is worse than we imagined, when our dreams for the future seem impossible and our goals hard to reach help us to remember your promises. And may we encourage others with the good news that a day is coming when you will return, when your kingdom will come and your will, will be done here on earth as it is in heaven, on this day you will make everything right. But while we wait help us to do our best each day so that when you return you will find us faithful. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

#### BENEDICTION:

"And so dear friends, while you are waiting for the Lord to return, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life and to be at peace with God, growing in the special favor and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all glory and honor, both now and forever. Amen" (v14;18)