Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Prerequisite for Blessing
Scripture: Zechariah 1:1-6
Code: 2153

The Prerequisite Blessing

Well, tonight we have the wonderful privilege of beginning a new book study. One that I have wanted for a long time to study and had my appetite recently wetted when I was talking to someone else who had the same desire and so we come tonight to the book of Zechariah. Take your Bible and turn to Zechariah. Happiness is sitting next to somebody who knows where Zechariah is. We hope you'll be able to find it alright. This is a great book. And I've not done much study in the Old Testament on Sunday morning and Sunday night, because I have a desire, personal desire, to finish the whole New Testament. But I wanted to take a little break from that and get into the Old Testament at this particular point because I feel this has such tremendous impact as a prophetic book and there is so much that is here. We need to understand. There's a great message from the Lord here. And even though this is a book written many centuries ago, maybe even as many as six centuries before Christ. As old as it, it is still written by an unchanging God.

And its word is as good as if it were penned this morning. And so it's a tremendous book. It is really incredible from many angles and I'm going to give you just a little bit of an overview before we look at the opening verses. Many people feel that it is the most difficult book in the Old Testament to interpret. And that maybe true and therein lies something of its challenge and I'd like to get all the hard stuff out of the way so that when I get old in the ministry I can just play golf and do the easy books, you know. So I'm wailing away on the hard ones right now while I'm young and aggressive and all that. And this is a hard book and so we approach it with a sense of prayerfulness and a sense of humility knowing that many who have gone before us have found it to be very difficult.

But primarily the thing that just really knocked me over as I was reading through it and through it again and again in the last month or so is the fact that it is a book about Christ, and that was really exciting to me. It is a primarily a book about Jesus Christ. In fact, on almost every page Jesus Christ appears in this book. And that really contemporizes it for me. He is the main character throughout. Now let me show you what I mean by that as we begin. Just a couple of highlights. Look at Chapter 1, verse 9. And here you have Zechariah talking to a particular personality. "And then I said oh my Lord what are these? And the angel who talked with me said unto me I'll show thee what these are."

Now here he is having a conversation with an angel. Look at verse 14. "So the angel that talked with me said unto me," now here's the same angel again and he's called the angel that talked with me.

Verse 19, "And I said unto the angel who talked with me," Chapter 2, verse 3, "And behold the angel who talked with me went forth." Chapter 4, verse 1, "And the angel who talked with me came again." Verse 5, "Then the angel who talked with me answered and said unto me." Chapter 5, verse 5, "Then the angel who talked with me went forth." Verse 10, "Then I said to the angel who talked with me." Chapter 6, verse 4, "Then I answered and said unto the angel who talked with me, what are these my Lord."

Now, it is somewhat clear here that there is an angel who is talking to Zechariah. The question is who is the angel? And the answer is he is really a mouthpiece for God, Himself, and another very special angel. Let's look at Scriptures and see this other special angel. Go back to Chapter 1, verse 11. And 1:11 says "And they answered the angel of the Lord." Now look at 1:12, "Then the angel of the Lord answered and said," Chapter 3, verse 1. "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord." Verse 6, "And the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua." Then who in fact is the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament? Jesus Christ.

In a sense then, along with God and through the angel that talked with him, Zechariah was having a conversation with none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And so when I say that Christ is the main character of the book, that becomes very evident. It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Now when you get into the last section of the book, you find again that Christ is everywhere. Look at, for example, Chapter 9, we'll skip a few chapters in there, but look at Chapter 9, verse 9. And now you're getting from Chapter 9-14 into the dominantly prophetic part of the book.

"Rejoice greatly oh daughter of Zion, shalt oh daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy king cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation lowly and riding on an ass on the colt the foal of an ass." Now who is that? That's Christ and that's Christ at what point in His life? Entering into the city of Jerusalem on what we commonly know as Palm Sunday, when He came in on the colt, the foal of an ass. There you have Him, the king, who is Christ. And in 9:9 the king arrives, Christ arrives.

Look at Chapter 11, verse 12. "And I said unto them if you think good, give me my price. And if not forbear so they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." What do you have there? A prophesy of the betrayal by Judas. So here the king arrives in 9:9 and the king is rejected in 11:12. Then in Chapter 12, verse 10 we see him again. "And I will pour upon the house of David and on the inhabitance of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication. And they shall look on me whom they have pierced." And who is that? That's the king crucified. So you have the king arriving, rejected and crucified, and also received and they mourned for Him as one mourns for his only son. In other words, there is this predicted revival, the salvation that comes to Israel.

Chapter 13, verse 8-9, you have Christ in judgment. "And it shall come to pass that in all the land says the Lord two parts shall be cut off and die. The third shall be left. I will bring the third part through the fire and refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They shall call on

my name. I will hear them. I will say it is my people and they shall say the Lord is my God." And here you have the salvation of Israel at the time of the tribulation. So the king is judging and his judging or refining brings out a people tested and proven.

In Chapter 14, verse 9 you have the king reigning in His kingdom. "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day there shall be one Lord and His name one." Only one religion existing in the whole world in the kingdom, the worship of the true Christ. And that worship is expressed in Chapter 14, verse 16 where it says from year to year through the kingdom, they go up to worship the king, the Lord of hosts. So you can see that from the beginning of the book where there is a historical dialogue with the angel of the Lord to the latter part of the book where there is prophetic information about the coming of Christ, Jesus Christ is the key to the book of Zechariah. Scofield has an interesting note that I think we ought to just remind ourselves of. He says this, "No Old Testament prophet has more prophesy concerning Christ, Israel, and the nations in so short a book. Zechariah predicts," and here it is, "the second coming, the reign of Christ, His priesthood, His kingship, His humanity, His deity, His building of the temple of the Lord, His coming in lowliness, His bringing of permanent peace, His rejection and betrayal, His return to Israel as the crucified one, and His being smitten by the sword of the Lord."

All of that is the book of Zechariah. In fact, the whole significance of the life of Christ and His reign in the future is here. So we say the book is mostly messianic dealing with Christ. Christ is seen in the book by many titles. He is called Jehovah's servant. He is called the branch. He is called the man. He is called the king, the priest, the true shepherd, and so forth. Now the book was written to be a comfort to Israel to let them know God was on their side. And they were to be blessed by God. It is a comforting book. In fact, the very name Zechariah means God remembers.

And God is remembering His people in this book. God is comforting His people. God is on their side. And of course, Jesus is the great comforter. We forget that. We think that the Holy Spirit is the comforter, but may I remind you that in John Chapter 14, verse 16 Jesus said, "When I go away I will send you another comforter." Which means He, Himself, was also the comforter. And so Christ here is the comforter of His people. It is a book of comfort through Christ. And if appears in the Old Testament as the angel of the Lord, He is comforting His people. If He appears in the future as the coming king, He comes to comfort His people.

In Chapter 1, verse 13, notice it, "And the Lord answered," and here's the key to the book really. "And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comforting words. This is a book about comfort. Chapters 1, verse 17 at the end says "the Lord shall yet comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem." So it is a book about comfort, present comfort for Israel and the need in which the book was written. Future comfort for them in the time the Messiah comes.

Now in addition to this, the comfort comes in this book through some very deep mysteries and that's why it's a hard book. There are some very strange symbols in this book. For example, Chapter 1, verse 8, you have the first of a bunch of mysteries, deeply mysterious elements. "I saw by night," and this will be our study next time Lord willing, "I saw by night and behold a man riding a red horse and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom and behind him there were red horses, sorrel, and white. And I said, oh my Lord, what are these?" That's a tough question. And then you go to verse 18. "I lifted up my eyes and I saw behold four horns and I said to the angel who talked with me, what are these." You go to Chapter 2, verse 1, "I lifted up mine eyes again and looked and a man with a measuring line in his hand and I said where are you going? And he said unto me to measure Jerusalem to see what is the breadth of it and the length. And behold the angel who talked with me went forth and another angel went out to meet him."

Now that's something that's difficult to understand initially. Chapter 4, "The angel who talked with me came again, waked me as a man is wakened out of sleep and said to me what seest thou? And I said I looked and behold a lamp stand of gold and a bowl on the top of it and seven lamps on it and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are on top of it and two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on the left side of it." And those will be on the quiz. "And so I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me and said what are these my Lord." Difficult mysteries.

Chapter 5, verse 1, "I turned and lifted mine eyes and behold a flying scroll. And he said to me what do you see? And I said I see a flying scroll. It's length is twenty cubits, it's breadth is ten cubits and he said this is the curse that goes forth over the face of the whole earth." You can go right on down in the chapter. It just goes on and on like this with very difficult things. Verse 5, you've got another one. He says, "What do you see? And he says there's an ephah going forth." And he goes on to discuss a talent of lead and a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah and on and on it goes. Now those are mysteries. Chapter 6 there's some chariots there. And so the way that Israel is comforted is by what this angel tells them and the angel is Christ, but the angel speaks to them in mysteries.

And we'll see the meaning of those as we go. There are some fantastic things in this book also relative to the restoration of Israel. If you're having any doubts about whether God is still working with the nation Israel, this book ought to settle those. In Chapter 8, verse 8, for example, "I will bring them and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and they shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and righteousness." In other words, there is coming a restoration for Israel. Chapter 10, verse 9, "I will sow them among the peoples and they shall remember in far countries and they shall live with their children and turn again and I will bring them again out of the land of Egypt, gather them out of a Assyria, bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon and place shall not be found for them."

There's coming a day when scattered Israel will be brought back and overcrowd their country. There are fantastic prophecies about the birth of children in the millennium. There are prophecies about the evangelism in the millennium. There is a complete description of the anti-Christ. There is a second-

coming judgment passage. There is a description of the battle of Armageddon. There is a description of the judgment of the nations, the martyrdom of the believers in the great tribulation, the salvation of Israel and the ultimate salvation of the nations. All of those things in this little book.

Tremendous book full of visions and prophecies and signs and celestial visitors and the voice of God and it traces redemptive history right on out to its climax. But you know, it's also a very practical book. It talks about repentance. It talks about God's divine care for the believer. It talks about salvation. It even talks about practical Christian living if you can imagine. Some very practical things. So I just tell y'all that to wet your appetite. There's a lot in this thing. This isn't some dreary ancient thing. This is hot stuff. And you know, as I thought about why does this book flourish with so many fantastic things?

Well, do you know what is so very interesting about it is that prophecy as such, the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament prophets is about to end when Zechariah writes. It's about to end. And Israel is going to know prophetic silence for 400 years. Silence which will be broken by a man named John the Baptist. But for 400 years there will be prophetic silence. No prophets, and it appears that as the prophetic period closes it pleased God to just have a mighty outburst of prophecy to indicate that prophecy was not dying a slow death. It wasn't stopping just because it ran out of gas. It was going out in a blaze of glory.

As strong as when it was born. Now that gives us an overall view of the book. Now I want to give you a view of the historical setting of the book. What's going on? Who's Zechariah? Where did he live? Why did he live? And what was happening in Israel? Now here we go. Are you ready? Keep alert now, get your brain in gear. We're going to just go flying by some history real quick. Don't try to write down everything. When we come to the book of Zechariah we encounter the people of Israel at a critical moment in their history. Eighteen years have passed since Cyrus the Great had conquered the Babylonian Empire.

Do you remember Daniel said there would be four great world empires? Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Babylon has come and gone. Nebuchadnezzar is gone. The Medo-Persian Empire rules, Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonian Empire. Now this was a great day for Israel. Israel had been taken into Babylonian captivity. The Babylonians when they conquered the world conquered Israel and hauled them off to captivity didn't they, in 586 B.C. But when Cyrus the Great came along and conquered the Babylonian Empire it was a dawn of a new day, because now there was a new empire, the Medo-Persians and they had on their hands all these Jewish captives. They had been there 70 years when Cyrus made a decree and Cyrus decreed they could all go back to their land. Now the whole record of the history behind Zechariah is recorded in the book of Ezra. So if you want to read about it, read the book of Ezra.

We won't take time to jump back and forth or we'll be here forever. And so Cyrus rose to power and in 538 B.C. he made an edict. Granting the Jews the right to return to their land. In common parlance, that would be known as the repatriation of Israel. Going back. So after 70 years of being out of their land, 70 years of captivity, 70 years of punishment for national sins and you remember Jeremiah, the prophet had told them it was going to come.

At last they are granted a royal permission to return and rebuild Judah and Jerusalem. It's recorded in Ezra Chapter 1, verses 1-4. Well, you know what happens in 70 years? People get their roots down even in a foreign land. And many of the Jews were pretty well settled. They'd gotten involved in enterprises. They'd married and so forth. And so when the decree, would you believe only a small remnant went back to Israel? Just a small remnant and they returned under a leader by the name of Zerubbabel. So off they go. A small remnant. They were an enthusiastic remnant, believe me. When they got back, according to the 3rd Chapter of Ezra, when they got back to Israel when they came back from the Babylonian captivity, in seven months they had rebuilt the sacred altar and they were again performing the sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament. They were back with their worship commanded by God. Forty-three thousand of them returned. That's all, but they were enthusiastic and in seven months that had reinstituted the sacrificial system.

And not long after the beginning of the second year in seven months the altar, by the beginning of the second year they had actually begun to rebuild the temple itself, which became known as Zerubbabel's temple. The foundations were laid, the base of the wall was laid. And then you know what happened? Bad things. The Samaritans came down and tried to stop them. Remember that? And the Samaritans hassled them about building the temple. So you know what happened? They stopped. So they just had the foundation and just up a little ways. It took Nehemiah later to come to get the rest of the thing going and build the walls around the city.

They were discouraged and the work stopped. But you know the ruler who had caused the stoppage, the Samaritan ruler was assassinated. And when he was assassinated you would have thought they would have taken advantage of the opportunity, but they didn't. And so it was still just left the way it was. But God wanted that temple built. God wanted that worship reinstituted so he brought along a man, a prophet. And the man's name was Haggai. He was a prophet at the same time as Zechariah. And his ministry was to exhort the people to build that temple. And he only gave four messages that are recorded in his little small book, the book of Haggai. Right in front of the book Zechariah. Four short messages challenging them to build that temple. And you know what those four messages did? This is great. You know what they did? They brought a revival in Israel. They literally brought a revival and things started cracking again.

And in the midst of the revival God raised up another prophet, Zechariah. Zechariah came two months after Haggai. We know that because if you compare Zechariah 1:1 with Haggai 1:1, it's very clear. "In the sixth month," Haggai 1:1, "in the eight month," Zechariah 1:1. Two months apart came

these two prophets. You say well, what was the difference? Well Haggai got them started and Zechariah kept them going. And he gave a lot more than four short messages. He kept it up for a long time. And his message to the people of Israel was keep doing it, God hasn't forgotten you. I know it's tough and the opposition is tough and you're trying to rebuild your country, but keep going. Let God be your comfort. Let God be your comfort. Let God be your comfort. Chapter 9 he turns a corner and says and the future is fantastic if you obey God in the present.

So he comforts them in the process. He wants to bring the revival to a full complete end. Now that's the message of the book. It is God comforting His people through the prophet in a time of hardship while they were rebuilding their country and their temple and all through the book Zechariah keeps saying God wants to bless you. God wants to bless you. You're going to receive this and you're going to receive that and oh God's going to comfort you and in the future you're going to have this and you're going to have this and you're going to have this and all of these marvelous blessings are promised them.

But there's a great big giant pre-requisite for any of it and that's the first six verses. And if you don't get those, none of the blessings will belong to you. And so we have called it, the message, pre-requisite to spiritual blessing. Zechariah just kept going along and saying boy now that you're building the temple oh let me encourage you to keep on being obedient. To keep on serving the Lord, to keep on doing what is right. God has so much for you. God has so many fantastic blessings, but there is one gigantic condition. And that condition is the essence of the first six verses.

Let's look at them. There is one key thing here. Verse 3, "Therefore say unto thus saith the Lord of hosts, turn unto me says the Lord of hosts and I will turn unto you says the Lord of hosts." Now what you have there is the key to the whole book and it is the concept of repentance. Verse 4, "Don't be like your fathers. Turn from your evil ways and from your evildoings." In other words, the place of blessing is always the same. It is when a person turns away from sin. That's the message of the first six verses. Repent and turn away from sin and stand in the place of blessing.

Why does this book begin with that? It begins with that because Zechariah wants to eliminate any false security on the part of ungodly people that God is going to give all these blessings and all these blessings and all these blessings and it's just going to be totally indiscriminate. You can just stand there and get it all. And just so nobody gets smug and secure, he says but there is a pre-requisite to all of it and any of it and that is turning away from sin. God does not bless regardless of people's spiritual condition.

Took Shore, the restaurant owner in New York who recently died a couple of days ago was on the new made the statement one time "I wouldn't be where I am in the nightclub business if it wasn't for the big man upstairs." But the blessing of God was never on his life, because he never stood in the place of blessing because he never turned from his evil ways. God only blesses where there is a

turning from sin to obedience in Him. So the prophet as a message of comfort and a message of blessing both now and in the future, but it will only belong to those who meet the condition. Now repentance turning from sin is a constant cry of Old Testament prophets. I mean, it goes on and on through the Old Testament. Listen to some of it. In Isaiah 55:6-7, Isaiah says this, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let them return unto the Lord and He will have mercy on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon." There is mercy and there is pardon for the one who turns to God away from sin.

In Jeremiah Chapter 3, verses 12 and 13, Jeremiah said, "Return thou backsliding Israel saith the Lord and I will not cause mine anger to fall on you for I am merciful. I will not keep my anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity and that you have transgressed against the Lord your God." Jeremiah said the same thing. There is blessing, but it is for the people who turn from sin. Ezekiel said the same thing. Another prophet in Chapter 18, verses 30-31. He said, "Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby you have transgressed and make you a new heart and a new spirit." And I love this line because it's so potent. "Oh why will you die, oh house of Israel."

And Hosea, another prophet, "Oh Israel return unto the Lord your God for you've fallen by your iniquity." And Joel, "Turn you to me with all your heart and fasting and weeping and mourning and rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and repenteth Him of the evil." In Amos, another prophet, "Seek ye me and ye shall live. Seek the Lord and ye shall live." And Zephaniah, "Before the fierce anger of the Lord come on you, before the day of the Lord's anger come on you, seek you the Lord, ye meek of heart."

And on and on it goes. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi said the same thing. "Return to me and I'll return to you," said Malachi in Chapter 3, verse 7. Four hundred years of silence followed Malachi and a new prophet comes by the name of John the Baptist and the first thing that comes out of his mouth is this. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The message never changed. The place of blessing, the place of the kingdom, the place of mercy and grace was always the place of repentance, always.

Christ before He ascended into heaven, stood on that mountain and told the disciples what they were to preach. And you know what He said to them? "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem." Preach repentance He said. And the apostles went out and Peter in Acts Chapter 2 opens his mouth and says "Repent ye and be converted." In Acts 17:30 Paul says, "And God commands all men everywhere to," what, "repent." Now the message hasn't changed. God has a place of blessing. God is a place of comfort. God has a place of grace and mercy and hope and peace. But it's only for people who turn from sin, that's all.

That's the point of it. The idea means 180 degrees from sin to God; always the place of blessing.

That's why Luke says that the angels of heaven rejoice over one sinner that does what? Repents. Now let's look at verse 1 and hear the message of repentance. "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet saying." Now let's look at the verse for a minute. In the eighth month, the month of markusvan. In Hebrew calendar that is October, November time. The rainy season.

Haggai started two months earlier. So in that month in the second year of Darius, oh that is so interesting. You say it is? Oh it is. Let me show you why. The Persian emperor that had released the Jews was Cyrus. When Cyrus died he was succeeded by Cambyses and Cambyses is well known for having conquered Egypt, but Cambyses didn't have a child and he committed suicide. And when Cambyses committed suicide there was a vacancy and Darius was a powerful man and in that vacancy Darius drove to the top and became the ruler. He began to reign in 522 B.C. Which means if this is the second year of Darius, then it was written in 520 B.C. And Darius I just can't help but tell you, Darius here is the king under whom Zechariah writes. You see even though they were back repatriating their country they had no king and the king or the ruler of the whole world at that time was Darius, so he is really the king over Zechariah. Now the point that is so fascinating here is that Old Testament prophets very often date their prophecy by kings.

And frequently as you study the prophets you will notice this that they will say in the year of such and such a king, the word of the Lord came unto so and so. And that's how they date their prophecy and give us historical background. But in every case it is always a king of Israel or a king of Judah except for two times. And those two times are Haggai and Zechariah and both times they name a pagan Gentile king, because there is no king in Israel, because it is already the times of the Gentiles. Israel is already in Gentile hands and do you know when the times of the Gentiles ends?

It ends at the return of Jesus Christ. Since 586 B.C. Jerusalem has been under the hands and the power and the control of the Gentiles. And so when Zechariah goes to date his book, he has to date it according to the king. And since Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian Israel had lost her dynasty and never got it again. And so we find that this is a man under Gentile domination writing his letter. Now notice it says, "came the word of the Lord and I would just remind you that this book is not some whimsical thoughts by this fellow Zechariah, but it is in fact the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord. Do you know that 3,808 times the Bible claims to be the word of the Lord? This is no different. This is God's word through the prophets mouth and the prophets pen.

Thus saith the Lord you'll find again and again and again and again through this book. Now the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet. Now the term the prophet, modifies Zechariah not Iddo. The word of the Lord came unto Zechariah the prophet. Now what was the prophet? The Hebrew word is navee. And it simply means a spokesman or a

speaker. This is God's mouth. This is God's voice. This is God's speaker. And He is simply available to God to utter through His mouth the word that God wants.

His name is Zechariah. His father is Berechaih. His grandfather is Iddo. Now there's not really a lot of significance about those folks. Let me just give you a little thought about the names. Zechariah is a very common name. It's kind of like Bill or Mary or Sam or Joe or Bob or something like. There are 27 other people in the Bible named Zechariah. So if you're trying to figure out which one he is, you'll have to a little research. But there are 27 other Zechariahs. Very common name. It means God remembers. Now you'll notice the term Iddo. Iddo was a priest, not a prophet. The prophet there modifies Zechariah. We know he was a priest, because Ezra and Nehemiah both tell us that. So Zechariah came from a priestly background. His father is Berechiah. He is mentioned only here. He's not mentioned by Ezra, Nehemiah. Perhaps he died very young. And maybe Zechariah actually succeeded Iddo as priest because his father died soon.

Iddo could have been priest and actually Berechiah could have died during the lifetime of his father Iddo so that Zechariah followed his grandfather as priest. Now Zechariah is believed by Jewish tradition to be a very important man. Some have said that he was a member of the great synagogue and the great synagogue was a group of 120 members founded by Nehemiah. This is tradition, not Scripture, but they said this was the forerunner to the Sanhedrin and Zechariah was a member of it. And it is indicated also that this Zechariah was martyred. If you read Matthew, won't take the time right now, read Matthew 23:35 you will note there that it is said that Zechariah, the son of Berechiah was martyred.

So Zechariah was a prophet who gave up his life and martyrdom. Now let's having gotten all of that out of the way hit the message in verse 2. Zechariah means Jehovah remembers. Here's a little note for you. Berechiah means Jehovah blesses and Iddo means in his time. And the message of the book is Jehovah remembers and blesses in his time. And it's coming to those who repent. Now in the call to repentance we see four features and these are going to go flying by so hang on.

Number one, the problem of wrath in verse 2, and here the prophet sets up the reality of the need for repentance by discussing the wrath of God, verse 2. "The Lord had been sorely displeased with your fathers." Stop there. The literal word is this. This is the way the Hebrew reads. Angry was Jehovah at your fathers with great anger. He was angry, angry. The word means vehement displeasure. Almost to the extent of abhorrence or hatred or despising. That's how angry God was.

And you know something? Zechariah didn't need to give them a lot of illustrations. All they had to do was look around them and there were plenty of them. The rubble that once was their country was illustration enough of how angry God was. God was so angry with their fathers that He took them right out of the land. That thousands of them were slaughtered. They were dragged into captivity. Their land was just desolated. And when Zechariah says the Lord was really made with your fathers,

yeah, we can see that. Confirmation was all over the place.

The holy places were defiled. The holy places were desecrated. The people were enslaved. The priesthood stopped functioning. And so I just point up what Zechariah's saying. Get it straight. God is a God of wrath. God is not a sort of a senile Santa Claus figure. God is not some kind of passive grandfather character who sits up there stroking His beard and just hoping everybody will be real nice, because He likes it if they are. God is angry about sin. Very angry, angry with a great anger. Whether God is dealing with Israel or God is dealing with society today or society in general, whether God is dealing with a believer in the church, whoever and whenever God deals with sin, He is angry.

Listen, you say but did you forget that 1 John 4:16 says "God is love?" No, I didn't forget that. Did you forget that Hebrews 12:29 says, "God is a consuming fire?" He's both. You need to study Scripture just very briefly and you will find out that God is a God of wrath. God is a God of anger. God's holy righteous character is indignant about sin. It offends God and brings about a holy reaction. If you were to read Ezra 8:22, you would find that God is angry with people who forsake Him. If you were to read Hebrews 10:26 and 27 you would read that God is angry with apostates.

If you read Deuteronomy 29, you would hear that God is angry with idolatry. If you read Psalm 89, you would see that God is angry with sinning saints. If you read 1 Thessalonians 2:16, you would hear that God is angry with false teachers. The anger of God can be seen in the drowning of the old world. It can be seen in the scattering of people at Babel. It can be seen in the drowning the Egyptian army, the chastening of the Israelites, the death of Nadab, of Korah, Dathan, and Abihu. The anger of God can be seen in the punishment of Saul and the punishment of David and the punishment of Solomon. The anger of God can be seen in the death of Ananias and Sapphira and the anger of God can be seen in the reality of hell.

God is a God of wrath. The person who believes that sin goes unpunished is a fool. Every act of sin demands a holy reaction and God was very angry and God reacted in anger to that, but it was righteous anger. His holiness had been affronted. So you see Zechariah introduces the fact that even though this is God remembers and God blesses and God comforts, there's always a circle in which that happens outside of which is wrath. In Romans 1:18 it says "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness." All of it.

Secondly, after discussing the problem of wrath, Zechariah hastens to the presentation of grace. And I don't know about you, but I'm in a hurry to get there. In verse 3, beautiful. "Therefore say thou unto them, since God is a God of wrath, say to them, thus saith the Lord of armies," that's what that means. The Lord of armies. "Turn unto me saith the Lord of armies and I will turn unto you saith the Lord of armies." You say why does He call himself the Lord of armies three times in one verse? It's a little redundant. You know what that name means? The Lord of armies re-enforces His authority and His power. And God is saying turn to me and the implication is or my army will take care of you. So

there is grace here, but there is grace offered. The other alternative is still wrath. Turn unto me. God had already taken the initiative, He always does.

God had already begun to turn to them. After all He'd raised up Cyrus and He called Cyrus "my servant," even though he was a pagan king and Cyrus sent the people back. And He raised up Haggai to start the revival. And He raised up Zechariah to preach and God's heart had already turned back to His people. The 70 years was over. They were back in their land. His discipline was over and He was saying, I've turned to you, will you turn to me.

It was time for a change. God had turned and begun already. In Haggai 1:13, Haggai says, "The Lord wants to tell you that He's with you again." Haggai 1:13. He's back. And now you're free to turn to Him. God loves us and His love for us is to insight our love for Him. You see John says we love Him because what? He first loved us. And God said discipline is over everybody. Here I am. I'm just telling you return to me because I've got all this comfort for you, got all this blessing.

You know, I think sometimes when I hear something like that, you say well what does that have to do with a Christian. I've already returned. Yeah, but you know I think there's a sense in which that applies to us. You know, we may have returned to the Lord, but I don't know that we're always as close as we ought to be do you? I think some of us drift away, don't you, as Christians. What did James say? Is it James 4:8? "Draw nigh unto Him and He'll," what, "draw nigh unto you." Is He talking to unbelievers? No. Talking to believers. And a lot of times in our lives, I don't know about you, but I know about me, just drifting don't you and you hear the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit say MacArthur. Oh yeah. See.

I just love the concept. Return to me and I'll return to you. Israel was back. Positionally back in the land, but they needed a deeper commitment, a personal return to God and His person and His character. And you may be positionally all right, I mean, you're in the land, you're saved and all of that, but we drift don't we? God's wrath is always averted by repentance and confession and coming back to Him. And believe me when you come back to Him, you can't drag your garbage in with Him. You've got to dump it before you go in, right?

That's repentance. That's confession. What a message. What a message. You see the problem of wrath is solved by the presentation of grace. Here God is a God of judgment and a God of wrath against sin, but He stands with love and He says return to me and I'm waiting for you. And you know that's the cry that's been going out to the world ever since this time. This is what Jesus said. This is what the apostles preached. This is what the prophets preached. This is what the early church fathers preached. This is what all the Christian preachers through the ages preached. It's what I'm preaching and everybody will keep preaching until someday heaven closes its doors and Jesus comes and it'll all be over with but for now and for this time, He says return to me. And to us who are Christians, He says when we drift, return to me.

Some of you never came in the first place. You've never come to Christ at all. You'll never know God's blessing. You'll never know one bit of it in terms of personal covenant blessing between Himself and yourself. So having stated the problem of wrath and the presentation of grace, He turns to the plea for repentance. And because of wrath and because of grace, He pleads for their repentance, verse 4. "Be not as your fathers." Have you ever noticed...have you ever noticed that evil is hereditary and I don't just mean in the nature of man, but I mean that people tend to pass on the same evil patterns to their children.

The conduct of fathers, fathers do you know this, is perpetuated in their children. It is. And so He says "don't be like your fathers unto whom the former prophets cried saying thus saith the Lord of hosts turn now from your evil ways and from your evildoings, but they did not hear nor hearken unto me saith the Lord." He says there were prophets then and they cried out, but they didn't listen and they didn't hear and they're gone now.

Yeah, and they can say yeah, look around the city they're gone. They knew the results of their fathers' sins. Nobody needed to tell them that. They knew what happened. They knew their fathers had been slaughtered by Nebuchadnezzar's hoards and the ones that didn't die were hauled off into the captivity. They knew that. It wasn't any long lecture needed. He says just remember your fathers and don't be like they were, be different. In Ezra 9:7, it says "since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day." The people in Ezra's time we've been sinning in the same pattern as our fathers until now they say.

So Zechariah says God's got 14 Chapters of blessing coming up. You're going to be in a place to receive them? Not if you don't act differently than your fathers did. And their fathers had acted evil. They had not repented. In 2 Chronicles Chapter 29, I'll just draw your attention to verse 3, 2 Chronicles 29:3. "He in the first year of his reign and the first month opened the doors of the house of the Lord." This is a revival under Hezekiah. "And repaired them he brought in priests and Levites and gathered them and he said here me ye Levites sanctify yourselves." Hezekiah's going to straighten that nation out back in their history. This is long before Zechariah. "Four our fathers have trespassed and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God and have forsaken Him and turned their faces from the habitation of the Lord and turned their backs and shut up the doors of the porch and put out the lamps." They put the temple out of business. "And have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel, wherefore, the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah and Jerusalem and our fathers have fallen by the sword."

Remember your fathers, he says, and what they did and how they paid. The graves of the world are filled with people who fall into the classification, who have walked out of the presence of God, who have not been willing to turn from their sin and have forfeited blessing for time and eternity. The grave danger is that these would do the same. The prophets cried and cried and cried. You want to

know for the most part what happened? They didn't listen, because when Jesus came and preached the same message, they took Him and killed Him, didn't they?

And Jesus told a parable about a man who owned a vineyard and he said had workers in the vineyard and everybody he sent you killed. And finally he said, I'll send my son and you killed him too. And Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and said "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto them. How oft I would have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her brude, but you would not. Oh Jerusalem." You see it never didn't change much and it hasn't changed much today. People still reject just like their fathers and their fathers before them.

Turn, He says. Shabuain the Hebrew. Turn it means repent. Turn around. Turn from your evil ways. What does that mean? That's the bent of your nature. Turn from your evil doings. That's the deeds that a bent nature does. But these people really for the most part didn't. They just perpetuated the same thing. This is God's message. Simple message. It's a message to you as it was to the people in Zechariah's time. I got a whole lot of blessing for you. Oh I just want to bless you. But you've got to be in the place of repentance. And even to the Christian, God is saying I've got a place of blessing. Remember Jude where he says, "keep yourselves in the love of God."

And what he means is remember how he said there is a little circle and in that the sunshine of God's love always shines and blessing just keeps coming, but Christians are prone to wander outside the circle, aren't they, and it gets very lonely out there and very cold, very dismal. And Jude is saying just run back in the circle where God's love just keeps reigning sunshine. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Keep yourselves in the place of blessing. Listen, unbelievers they'd never been there. Christians we've been there and sometimes we want to wander out into the darkness of the world don't we? So he says the problem of wrath can be solved by grace. And he makes a plea for repentance and then just to re-enforce that he closes with what I call the pattern of history.

Verses 5 and 6, this is powerful stuff. He says, look at the pattern of history. Somebody's going to say oh yes, come on that was then. That was long ago. That doesn't apply to me. I mean this is something way back in history. God wouldn't do that to me. God isn't like that. Well, you better check history because history will clarify that question. Look at verse 5. "Your fathers where are they? And the prophets? Did they live forever? But my words and my statutes which I commanded my servants, the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? When I said it didn't it happen? And they returned and said as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath He dealt with us." He said He would do it and guess what? He did it.

Just take Jeremiah. Jeremiah kept saying you're going to be sorry, you're going to be sorry. There's a price to pay. They just rejected Him, but there was a day and they paid. Four issues fill out those thoughts. Notice the pattern of history. First of all is the problem of sin, the issue of sin in verse 4.

People are characterized by evil ways and evildoings. That's where it all begins. Evil ways and evildoings lead to a second issue, rejection. The end of verse 4, "but they did not hear nor hearken unto me saith the Lord." So what do you have? Evil ways, sinful ways, and the result rejection. They refused to hear the prophets. The refused to hear Christ. They refused to hear the Scripture and that leads to the third issue.

The issue of sin leads to the issue of rejection leads to the issue of death. Verse 5, "Your fathers where are they?" What was the answer? They're dead. They're dead. They're dead. They died in judgment and even the ones who went into captivity died in an unclean land, in a pagan land. And the Bible says "The wages of sin is," what, "is death." And they died. Where are they? They're dead. And so the issue of sin lead to the issue of rejection lead to the issue of death and that lead to a fourth issue, the issue of opportunity.

"And the prophets? Did they live forever?" What are you saying, Zechariah? I'm saying this, prophets die too and when prophets die, you listen but there's nobody talking anymore. That's right. And they just were about to experience 400 years without a prophet to speak for God. Where are the prophets? No more opportunity. You see sin persisted and leads to rejection, persisted in leads to death, and that leads to the loss of all opportunity.

It's gone, no more prophets, nobody to preach, no message to hear. There's a pattern. It's very clear and it's just the same today. You say, oh, that isn't going to happen to me. Oh yeah. Just like them, verse 6, the issue of inevitability. "But my words and my statutes which I commanded my servants, the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers." You judge. Did that happen what I said would happen? Did it happen? Oh it did happen. The exile was proof positive that it happened. "The death of the nation stands as evidence that it happened and even your fathers returned and said as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us according to our ways and according to doings so that He dealt with us." It's obvious to anybody who was left alive that God did exactly what He said He was going to do.

And I would just tell you beloved God will do what He says He will do. If He says in grace, I will bless. In wrath, I will condemn, He will do it. And I would close with verse 3. Listen, and this is the call of the God to your heart tonight. "Turn unto me and I will turn unto you." Oh that's beautiful. Now listen to this. He doesn't say turn to my law. It's a good law. That isn't what He says. He doesn't say return to my way of life. Return to my principles. Return to my religious system. He says return to what? To me, don't you like that? Turn to me. Hey this is something personal isn't it? This isn't something institutional. Christians are a bunch of people who carry out a certain prescription. Christians are people who are connected to God.

Return to me. Oh there's something personal there. There's something very intimate there. And you know, there's only one way to return to Him. Only one way, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and

the light. No man comes to the Father," what, "but by me." That's the only way. To return to Him. Are you like the prodigal son who returned to his father and his father slew the fatted calf and made him a feast and put a ring on his finger and robe and said rejoice my son has returned. God has so many things that He wants to give. Maybe you've never even come to Christ. And so God is saying turn to me from Your sin and I'll meet you there and we'll start a relationship forever and I'll pour out blessing. Maybe you're a Christian and He's saying could you get just a little closer. I've got some really great stuff that's real intimate and if you just get up a little closer I want to let you have this.

All the marvelous realities of Zechariah's prophecy and every other promise in the word of God can belong to the person who turns to God, away from sin. And that's the message that begins the book. Let's pray. With your eyes closed for a moment, your heads bowed and just a moment of silence between you and the Lord, the message tonight is obviously directed at us to really convict our hearts. It's not my message, it's the message of the Spirit of God through the prophet Zechariah unto whom the word of the Lord came. This isn't John MacArthur, this is God speaking through the voice of the prophet Zechariah. I'm just trying to tell you what Zechariah said from God. And what he said is "Oh God is a God of comfort. God is a God of blessing." If you're in the right place and the right place is the place of repentance. Look at your life. Are there evil ways and evildoings there? Be honest.

Some of you are saying yeah. I'm saying that. Yeah, there sure are. Well, if you've never come to Jesus Christ, why don't you just come right now in your heart and say God I want to come to You and I want to turn from sin and I want to come through Jesus Christ who is the only way to the Father. The one who died and rose for me. And if you'll quietly, silently pray that prayer you will have turned to God and He will have turned to you and embraced you.

And then for those of us who are Christians who kind of drifted away and the Lord's gently saying could you get a little closer, there's some sins in your life even though you're saved and even though you're back in the land, there's some things that aren't what they ought to be and maybe you could set them aside and draw nigh unto me and I'll draw nigh unto you. Some things we need to set aside in our life. If that's the case in your life, why don't you just confess that silently to the Lord. Wouldn't it be great if we all walked out tonight in the most intimate fellowship possible with God, the God of the universe?

God keeps His word, whether to judge as He says or to bless. The choice is yours. Father, I pray for all of us in our hearts as we search and look and examine. That we would be honest and open enough to really see what's there and if it's sin, to confess and repent and turn to You. We thank You so much that You have called unto us in grace, You've pled with us, You warned us that there's a place of blessing if we want it. And Jesus said, "Him that cometh to me, I will under no circumstances turn away."

And so Father for all of us who come, we know there will be opened arms to embrace us. Father, to the end that all of us might settle every issue with You, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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