

Zechariah's vision

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening. Good evening. A warm welcome to the service this evening. Again, it's good to see a few visitors with us and you're especially welcome to the service.

The Youth Fellowship meets afterwards at half past seven and please, the secondary school aged folks and also those who've left secondary school and who are in university days, because you're all welcome to go to the Youth Fellowship.

The information you have on the sheets here, the white sheets, and they were on the screen in advance of the service beginning. But I'll leave you to read these at your own convenience.

If you could turn down your Bibles, please, to Zechariah chapter one, second last book in the Old Testament. Zechariah chapter one, and we said last Sunday evening that Zechariah and Haggai, the book previous, they kind of go together.

These are two men of God that God used to speak to his people. Haggai is thought to be an older man. Zechariah is thought to be a younger man. And yet the call comes through both of them.

[1 : 14] Haggai first, and then two months, I think it was, into Haggai's ministry, God takes hold of Zechariah and begins to speak through Zechariah. And yet the call in both books, in different ways, is a call to come to God.

It's a call to return to the Lord. So Zechariah chapter one and verse one. In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah, the son of Edo.

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, overtake your forefathers?

[2 : 24] Then they repented and said, the Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do. So we have the introduction there, and then we move from the introduction into a series of visions.

Nehemiah, Zechariah in an evening, and in a night, God takes hold of him in his dreams and shares visions with him. And this is the first of the pictures that Zechariah is given, passes on, the man among the myrtle trees.

Verse 7. On the 24th day of the 11th month, the month of Shabbat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah, the son of Edo.

During the night, I had a vision, and there before me was a man riding a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in the ravine. Behind them were red, brown, and white horses.

I asked, what are these, my Lord? The angel, who was talking with me, answered, I will show you what they are. Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, they are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.

[3 : 41] And they reported to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, we have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace. Then the angel of the Lord said, the Lord said, Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these 70 years?

So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. Then the angel who was speaking to me said, proclaim this word. This is what the Lord Almighty says.

I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity. Therefore, this is what the Lord says. I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt and the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem, declares the Lord Almighty.

Proclaim further. This is what the Lord Almighty says. My towns will again overflow with prosperity and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.

[4 : 53] Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. Let's unite their hearts in prayer for a moment again. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this evening. We thank you for your word, which we have read, and your word, which we have sung. And we thank you for the promise that we have just sung, that those who truly seek the Lord shall not lack any good.

And we pray that as we open your word and as we think about these verses, mysterious verses, we pray, Lord, that we would have the help of the Holy Spirit, who is the one who inspired these words, the one who moved Zechariah to see and then to record what he was given on that night.

We thank you for the Holy Spirit, is the one who applies the truth of your word to our lives today, so many thousands of years later, and he was our teacher.

And so we pray that as we think about these things and as we study, that we would not do that in a way that just engages our minds, but that we would be seeking the Lord in the midst of all this, that we would be enabled to see more clearly who you are, Lord, and what you are saying to us through these verses.

[6 : 22] So help each one of us, we pray. We thank you that you are the God who searches us and who knows us, and you are the God who meets us at the point of our need.

And so we ask that those, Lord, who are here, who don't yet know you, we pray that you would move in such a way that they would seek you and that they would find you, that they would cry out, Lord, as we are all called to cry out, as poor men and women and boys and girls, seeking the salvation that you alone can give.

So for any who have not yet received that salvation, for any who are still outside of Christ, we pray that this, even and even, that they would seek you and that they would find you.

And for those of us, Lord, who know you, who have been following for some time, we ask that you would meet us at the point that we are on on our spiritual walk at present.

Some of us may be walking close with you, Lord, and we pray for that blessing that comes from a close walk with God, and we pray for the protection that we need, as the enemy is always seeking to drag us away.

[7 : 32] And for those, Lord, who may once have walked close, but who may be some distance from you, perhaps some here, perhaps others who are at home. And Lord, you are the God who knows that we are those who drift from you.

And yet we thank you that your grace is such that when we are in the far-off place, you call us to the gospel. And as we turn in repentance and faith to you, you are the God who receives us and who restores us.

So, Lord, if there are any who are in that state this evening, we pray that we would know your presence and that we would know that restoration and that renewed joy of your salvation of us.

So, meet with us, Lord, we pray. Enable us to worship you in spirit and in truth. Enable us to seek you truly in our hearts. And we pray that as we look to you, that we may respond as we see you with lives which glorify you and seek to put you first and know the joy of the Lord which is our strength.

So, be near to us, we ask. We pray for those whose desire would be to be present and who are struggling with their health and who are at home. We commit them to you, Lord, and we ask that you would touch them with your healing power that be your will and that whatever experience is ahead of them that they may know your grace which is sufficient for each situation.

[9 : 04] We commit them to you, Lord, and for those who are visiting with us tonight, we thank you for them and ask that you would bless them and that you would bless any congregations that they are connected with. And, Lord, we ask now that you would go before us, take away our sin and lead us as we look to you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Zechariah chapter 1, if we can have it open before us, please. I read a headline somewhere in an article in the course of this week past.

I can't quite remember where I read it when I went looking for it. I couldn't find it. But, in the headline of the article, what it said was that at least 85% of people in the UK hit the snooze button. at least once before they get out of their beds in the morning. Does everyone here set an alarm in the morning? Does anybody hit the snooze button? I have to confess, I hit the snooze button twice this morning.

So, I'm twice as bad, it seems, as 85% of the country. But, apparently, what they were saying in this article was that when we hit the snooze button, it's bad for our health.

[10:18] when the alarm sounds, so said the writer, we should, we should just get right up. And I don't know medically, physically, if that's the truth or not.

But, in the spiritual sense, as we turn back to the book of Zechariah tonight, it's certainly the message that's coming through both Haggai and Zechariah.

Last week, we thought about the fact that God's people had been, for some period, sleeping. Some were in Babylon, they had been taken captive, we remember the story of Daniel, and initially they were taken to Babylon against their will, it was not the place they wanted to be, it was not the place that God would have had them be, but they were dragged there, and there was an effort made to try and take the faith in the one true God that they had hold of and flush it out of them. We see that in the story of Daniel. So, God's people initially were in Babylon against their will, but then when the doors of Babylon open and they're able to come back to the place that God would have them be, they decide they don't want to go.

[11:35] They're too settled in the ways of the world, they've become comfortable in sin. And, essentially they've gone to sleep. So, there were those in Babylon and they were fast asleep, spiritually speaking, and yet we thought about also the fact that there were those who were in Jerusalem, there was 40,000 or so who heard the call of God to go from Babylon back to the place that he would have them be.

They made the journey, they endured the upheaval, they went to Jerusalem, and first on their priority list was to rebuild the temple of God so that God's word could be opened and they could join together in worship.

Their chief end, you could say, to use the language of the Shorter Catechism, was to glorify God. That was their resolve when they came back to Jerusalem.

That was their priority. They were full of zeal for the things of God, but over time when they faced opposition, we saw that their own comfort and their own security had taken priority.

They were sleeping and their desire to rebuild the temple of God which was in ruins so that the book of God, his word, could be opened. Well, in recent days you could say they had a greater interest in New Homes magazine than they had in God's word because they have luxurious panelling on their own homes and yet God's house is in ruins.

[13:11] So God uses Zechariah and he uses Haggai, two of his prophets in 520 BC to sound the alarm and to call his people to consider their ways.

Haggai says, it's just in advance of Zechariah being called to speak. Haggai says, or God says to Haggai, is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses while this house remains a ruin?

Now this is what the Lord Almighty says, give careful thought to your ways. And perhaps we should stop there just for a moment and heed that call to consider our ways because we're in a world where everything seems to rail against us considering our ways.

We get caught up in so many different things. The activities of our youth, the activities of middle age, I thought, as I went from being a teenager and a 20-something to a 30-40-something year old, that things would calm down.

And actually, they'd just get busier. And people who are in the midst of their careers, they're so overwhelmed with work and they look forward to retirement, and yet some of the retired people that I know are more busy than anybody that I know in the working world.

[14:35] And all these things, they militate against us, ever stop it, to consider our ways, to consider where we are spiritually and where we're going spiritually. And yet God, through Zechariah and Haggai, called them and he calls us to consider our ways tonight.

What did considering their ways involve? Well, it involved turning from sin. It involved turning from a life that put self first.

Remember, we thought about that last Sunday evening, the definition of sin. It's putting I at the centre. S-I-N. That's what sin is. Me first. My interests, my career, my security, my comfort, me first. That's how they were living. And God was calling them to repent, to turn away from that way of living. But considering their ways not only involved stepping away from sin, it involved stepping towards God.

It involved a turning, not just away from the things that God was calling them to hold loosely or to let go of, but it involved coming in faith or returning in faith to God.

[15:48] And that really is the message that comes through this first vision. And I want to just ask, I think it's five questions as we go through this vision. And the first question is, when did Zechariah see this?

Remember, this is a night vision, this is a dream. So when did Zechariah see this? Verse 7. On the 24th day of the 11th month, the month of Shabbat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah, the son of Edo.

So we're given a very precise date in verse 7 as to when Zechariah saw this. We know the day exactly that Zechariah saw this. And when we're given details like that, they're always of importance.

So why is this detail important? Well, it's important, the scholars tell us, because that date, the 24th day of the 11th month, the month of Shabbat, in the second year of Darius, that date was five months.

That date was five months after the rebuilding of the temple began. So the temple was in ruins, and God speaks through Haggai, and he calls them to get back on site, and they did get back on site.

[17:02] And that's the encouragement here. They didn't just cover their ears, they didn't just hear God's word, but decide they were going to carry on regardless. They responded. God's people who were sleeping, they did wake up.

God's people who had walked off site, and who had been off site for some time now, as they heard God speak, they walked back onto site, and they began to rebuild. They began to do what God called them to do.

They responded in repentance. They responded in faith to what God had said to them. They returned to the Lord as God was calling them to through Zechariah and Haggai.

And now, through Zechariah, the Lord was returning to them with words and pictures, visions that would bring encouragement and strengthen their faith and strengthen their resolve.

And that's a biblical principle and application here. If you and I take a step in faith, God will respond. Sometimes we get stuck and we think we're never going to move and we never seem to move.

[18:04] But when we take a step forward in faith, God responds. It's true of salvation. We hear the gospel message to repent and believe, but it's as we actually step away from sin and repentance.

And it's as we come to Jesus in prayer and we ask him to take our sin away and we ask him to come into our lives that God meets us and gives us salvation.

It's true of restoration as well. It's possible that there could be some here tonight who are far from God. And yet when we hear the call to return, as we take a step away from the sin that so easily entangles us and back towards the God whose call we are hearing, that he meets us as the prodigal son found he was met as he returned from that far off land and revives us and restores us.

So when does Zechariah see this? Well, he saw this at that particular point in time. What does Zechariah see? That's the second point, that's the second question. I don't know about you, but when I dream, there's virtually nothing I can remember of the dream.

I know I've dreamt and I've got some kind of garbled words and fuzzy pictures in my mind, but when I actually try and focus on them, I just can't remember them.

[19:19] But for Zechariah, because God was speaking to him in his dream, everything is in high definition, detail. He can recall everything perfectly.

Look at verse 8 to verse 11, where we see the substance of the dream. During the night, says Zechariah, I had a vision and there before me was a man riding on a red horse.

He was standing among the myrtle trees in the ravine. Behind them were red, brown and white horses. I asked, what are these, my Lord? The angel who was talking with me answered, I will show you what they are.

The man standing among the myrtle trees explained, they are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth. And they reported to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees.

We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace. It's quite a dream, isn't it? I doubt any of us have had a dream that comes close to anything like this.

[20 : 23] Maybe Grace has, multicolored horses. How many of us have dreamed of multicolored horses in our dreams? And trees and shrubs and plants and angels.

It's a strange dream. But what does it all mean? And that's really what we want to get to.

Sometimes the girls, they do these puzzles and you might have a few words on a page, but you've got to crack the code.

So there's pictures that you're given as part of the puzzle. And the pictures relate to a particular word. So you have to go looking for what the picture relates to.

And then you put the pictures and the words together to try and actually understand what it means.

And it's maybe a bit like that, this vision. We're seeing things here, but we want to know what do these myrtle trees, what do these angels, what do these characters actually represent?

Or maybe a better example is text messages for the older people. We sometimes get text messages or WhatsApp messages from young people. They've got emojis, pictures of all kinds.

[21 : 29] They've got shortened phrases which they all understand perfectly, but for people like me, I often have to go to the girls and ask, what does that actually mean?

Lol. The phrase that you get, lol. When that first started coming up in my text messages two or three years ago, I've thought about it long and hard. What on earth could that mean? And I concluded it must mean lots of love.

I'm not even joking. And it came from my sister, so I thought, well, it's a bit warmer than I would expect her to say. But when it came from, you know, Duncan or somebody like that, I immediately went to the girls and said, you know, what does this lol mean?

Does it really mean lots of love? And is it appropriate to have this in a session in a minute? But it means laugh out loud. You know, that's the thing. But we sometimes struggle to know what do these words, what do these pictures mean?

So what does this all mean? That's what we want to get to. What does Zechariah see? Well, he sees myrtle trees, verse 8. And myrtle trees are given to us as a picture of the people of God.

[22 : 38] God's people, they're not described in this dream. They're not portrayed in this dream as strong, tiring, unshakable oak trees. No, they're small, humble, vulnerable myrtle bushes.

They're not described as majestic cedar trees that people look at and will be amazed by and overwhelmed by. No, they're just ordinary myrtle trees.

Myrtle plant, incidentally, is a plant that has no fragrance about it. It's not attractive. It has no fragrant aroma about it until its leaves are crossed.

And then there's this amazing fragrance that comes from the myrtle. And this picture that's given to us is a picture of the people of God. That's who we are if we're Christians.

Myrtle bushes, according to this vision. The world doesn't look at us and think how amazingly beautiful, how lovely. Quite the contrary.

[23 : 37] Remember what Jesus said of his people in John 15. He says, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own.

As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That's why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you. No servant is later than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. And yet, when the world persecutes the people of God, like the myrtle tree, there is a beautiful fragrance released, or there should be, the fragrance of grace, the fragrance of Christ.

So the myrtle tree speaks to us about God's people. Very ordinary looking, very unattractive to the world, and yet when put under pressure, the fragrance of Christ should be about us.

Think about that in work tomorrow and at school. Think about that when we're in the shop and somebody decides they're going to have a go. Think about that when the message comes in that really riles you.

[24 : 44] When we're pressurised in the world because of our faith, then the world should see something of the grace of Christ. They should get a fragrance of Christ about us and not just see the vengeance of the world.

The other thing about the myrtle tree is that it's symbolic of future hope. See, when God takes hold of Zechariah, God's people were in a hopeless state and yet this myrtle bush is symbolic of future hope.

Isaiah, as he looks forward to a day of blessing in Isaiah 55, he says, instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.

So the myrtle, it was a signal, it was a sign that blessing was coming. Things were tough, things were dry, it was a desert land they were in, but blessing was coming.

So Zechariah, he sees, he shares with them this image of the myrtle. But next in verse 8, Zechariah sees a man on a red horse, verse 8, and this man is identified there as the angel of the Lord.

[25 : 56] Now, who is the angel of the Lord? Well, angel means sent one, and the angel of the Lord is God himself sent by God.

So who is this? This is Christ. This is Jesus. This is Jesus, God the Son, before he was born into this world. This is the pre-incarnate Christ that Zechariah is seeing.

Sometimes we think in our minds that Jesus, when he came into the world, he was born. But remember, Jesus is the eternal Son of God. And although he was born into this world, he's existed eternally.

And Zechariah sees him here in this vision. One of the commentators, Bentley, says, who is this one who appears as a human being and yet is divine? There is only one who fits the description. The angel of the Lord must be the God-man whom the New Testament reveals. The angel of the Lord is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ. He is Jesus, revealed in the Old Testament, before he was born as a baby of Bethlehem.

[27 : 01] So we see Christ here. We see the myrtle who shoots and reporting to Christ, the pre-incarnate Christ, the angel of the Lord, are horses. In verse 9, we read about another angel, the interpreting angel, who kind of comes along Zechariah in all these visions to try to help him understand what's going on.

And the interpreting angel tells Zechariah that these horses that he sees, these are angels. angels, and they're constantly reporting back and forth to Christ, whether it's good reports, white horses, or bad reports, red horses, or a mixture of good and bad that's been reported, speckled horses as the AV puts it, or brown horses in the NIV.

These are angels, these are God's heavenly reconnaissance agents, who are constantly moving throughout the earth, although the eye can't see them, usually.

And yet that's what Zechariah sees, and he's given this vision so that God's people will be given courage. Yes, things were tough for them, and had been for many years.

Yes, they were fragile, vulnerable, despised people who had many enemies, and who felt the threats, and the oppression, and the violence that was so often against them.

[28 : 19] Yes, as they thought about their own history, and their own hearts, they were people who knew, that they had been unfaithful to God. But what Zechariah was showing them through this vision was that God had not been unfaithful to them.

God was with them. That's what they say. God was with them. Matthew Henry says though the church was in a low position, yet Christ was present in the midst of it.

God was with them. And the good news for us tonight is God is with us. We may feel under attack in our workplace, in our families, wherever. We may be going through hard times, we may be in a dry place spiritually, we may look in the mirror of God's word and see so much sin in our hearts, but God is with us.

Zechariah saw the pre-incarnate Christ and he took courage. We see the incarnate Christ. We see the one who has done everything well, the one who lived for us, the one who died for us, the one who rose for us.

We see the fullness of his love for us, we see the sufficiency of all that he has done for us, so how can we not have courage? God through Zechariah tonight says to us, courage, don't be scared, don't be afraid, don't be silenced, don't be wayward, don't remain in your sin, but repent, return, and know the blessing of God with us.

[29 : 51] Two short questions to finish. What does Zechariah hear? Verses 12 and 13, the angel of the Lord said, Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these 70 years?

So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So what's going on here? We know what Zechariah saw, we know when he saw it, but now he hears something, and what Zechariah hears is the angel of the Lord, God the Son, speaking with the Lord Almighty, God the Father.

And what's he saying? Well, he's pleading for the cause of his people. He's asking that they be shown mercy. For 70 years, they've been in a spiritual desert of their own making because of their own sin.

For 70 years, they have been oppressed by the nations, but the pre-incarnate Christ here comes on their behalf and he makes intercession for them.

So this prayer is heard, this conversation between God the Son and God the Father, and it brings comfort to Zechariah. And what comfort we can take today as we think about the fact that Christ is still praying.

[31 : 07] He's still making intercession for us as people today if we're trusting him. If you want to hear something of Jesus' prayer for you and I, go to John 17, we have no time to go there just now.

But as one commentator said, it's a great blessing to know that our Saviour is now in heaven at God's right hand, speaking to the Father on our behalf. It's quite a picture, isn't it?

As we sin, as our guilt is seen in the heavenly realms, God the Son says to God the Father, yes, they are guilty, but show them mercy because their sin is paid for.

God the Son says, I have a strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me things depart. that's what Zechariah hears.

[32 : 12] We see what Zechariah has seen. So what is Zechariah told to say? There's two things, I'll just give you the headings. He's told to say in verse 14 and 15, judgment is coming.

Judgment is coming. See, God loved his people even though they were unfaithful to him. He loved them with that righteously jealous love and the nations that had oppressed and were oppressing them, they angered God.

And as they swaggered about, settled in their sin and in their arrogance, God sees and he says to Zechariah, so he will speak it on, judgment is coming.

And that brought comfort to God's oppressed people and it brought a reminder that we must not overlook. There's a judgment day coming and all who do not believe, all who do not bow the knee to God will have to face him and will be punished eternally for their sin.

And that should drive us to repent. If we do not yet have peace with God, it should drive us to go out with the gospel. If we do, judgment has come. And finally, God says through Zechariah in verses 16 and 17, salvation is coming.

[33 : 26] And this is a word which it would come true and it did come true in Christ. Mercy, comfort, spiritual, prosperity, that was God's promise for his returning people and it's a promise that was delivered at such great cost through Christ to the life and the death and the resurrection of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

And as we come to him in faith or as we return to him, if we have drifted, we share in these blessings that God through Zechariah foretold and we gain an interest and we gain assurance through the Saviour's blood.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all, both now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.