

The Care of God

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[0 : 00] If you could turn with me now please to Zechariah chapter 10. Zechariah chapter 10 and we'll read the whole of the chapter.

This is God's word. Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime. It is the Lord who makes the storm clouds.

He gives showers of rain to men and plants of the field to everyone. The idols speak deceit.

Diviners see visions that lie. They tell dreams that are false. They give comfort in vain.

Therefore the people wander like sheep. Oppressed for lack of a shepherd. My anger burns against the shepherds. And I will punish the leaders for the Lord Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah.

And make them like a proud horse in battle. From Judah will come the cornerstone. From him the tent peg. From him the battle bow.

[1 : 33] From him every ruler. Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because the Lord is with them. They will fight and overthrow the horsemen.

I will strengthen the house of Judah. And save the house of Joseph. I will restore them. Because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them.

For I am the Lord their God. And I will answer them. The Ephraimites will become like mighty men. And their hearts will be glad as with wine.

Their children will see it and be joyful. Their hearts will rejoice in the Lord. I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them. They will be as numerous as before.

Though I scatter them among the peoples. Yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive. And they will return.

[2 : 34] I will bring them back from Egypt. And gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon. And there will be not room enough for them.

They will pass through the sea of trouble. The surging sea will be subdued. And all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down.

And Egypt's scepter will pass away. I will strengthen them in the Lord. And in his name they will walk. Declares the Lord.

Amen. May God bless that reading of his word to us. Okay, let's pray for a moment.

Before we turn back to God's word. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word which we have been singing.

[3 : 39] We thank you for your word which we turn to now. And we pray that as we read it and as we think upon it. That we would be given understanding.

We know that we cannot understand your word. Unless the Holy Spirit himself illuminates our minds and enables us to see and hear.

And so we pray, Lord, for the delight of the Spirit to shine into our hearts. So that we would grasp the truths of Scripture with our mind.

And that in our hearts we would take hold by faith. And we thank you for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We thank you that it's good news. And we live in a world that so much needs good news. We look around us and we see so much trouble.

[4 : 36] We see people who are in despair. We see people who are confused. We see people who are dissatisfied. And we know all these things, Lord, in our own hearts.

We thank you that we are not left with that eternal thirst. We're not left in the dark in a state of confusion.

We're not left in a place where there is only despair and there is no hope. We thank you that you're the God who reaches down to us in Christ.

And we thank you that he is everything that our souls need. He is the one who brings salvation to us as we look in faith to him.

He is the one who gives us a hope not just for this world. Not just a hope that gives us purpose in life and gets us up each morning. But we thank you that the hope that we take hold of in Christ is a hope that is sure and is certain and is eternal.

[5 : 44] A hope that brings us comfort. Even when we think of those who have passed before us from time into eternity. Those whom we miss. Those who we still hurt for.

And yet we thank you that when they die in Christ, they sleep in Jesus, as the scripture says. And we thank you that when we are trusting in Jesus, we have nothing to fear.

When the Lord is our shepherd, he is the one who leads us through the darkest path. The one who leads us through death. Into life that is everlasting. And we pray that each one of us here would be able to see this and to take hold of this.

You know our hearts. You know those who are dissatisfied. You know those, Lord, who are lost.

You know those who may be here even tonight under protest.

Not expecting to hear the word of God. Perhaps far from you. And yet just as the apostle Paul, in his former state, determined in his own will to go against you.

[6 : 55] You are the God who is able to confront us. Able to knock us off our feet, as it were. And to cause us to hear the voice of Jesus.

And to turn in faith to Jesus. So we pray, Lord, for each person who is here. We pray for many who are not here. We pray for those who to us seem the most unlikely candidates to respond to the gospel.

Those who are hostile at times. Those who show disinterest. Those who may take every opportunity to speak against Jesus. And yet we know, Lord, that in your power you are able to reach them.

Your grace is far reaching. And we believe that, Lord. And we pray, even now in the quietness of our own hearts, we see people in our mind's eye.

And we bring them to you in prayer. And we ask, Lord, that you would work in their lives. As we pray that you would work in our lives. We pray for your blessing upon us this evening as we seek your face.

[8 : 03] We pray for your help, Lord. Lord, as we bow before you in worship. And we ask, Lord, that you would speak into our lives. We pray that you would seek and save the lost.

We pray that you would sanctify those who are your people. We pray that you would encourage us.

You have said to us in scripture. Not to get out of the habit of meeting together.

But to encourage each other. And all the more as we see the day approaching. And help us to remember. Lord, one year passes into another year. But with each passing year and each passing day, we come closer to the day.

The day when Jesus will return to this world. No longer as the man of sorrows. Not in that gentle humility of the manger.

But in great power and might. And we ask, Lord, that each of us would be ready. So help us, Lord, we pray. And what we pray for ourselves here.

[9 : 06] We pray for the churches that surround us in this village. Across this island. And across the nation. And across all nations. Lord, whatever Christ crucified is preached.

We ask that you would add your blessing. We pray, Lord, that you would build your church. And we pray, especially for these churches that have been highlighted to us in this week. For Buclew and Greyfriars.

And we pray also for Loch Broome. We ask, Lord, that you would be with your people in these places. We pray for John Ross.

We pray for Neil Lachey. And we saw here recently. And we ask that you would encourage them in the work that you've called them to. We pray that you would speak through your servants.

We pray that they would see souls saved. And that they would see more and more people becoming more and more like Christ.

[10 : 04] That's our prayer for everywhere. And we ask, Lord, that you would hear our prayers.

That you would build your church as you have promised that you would.

We ask that you would go before us now. Into this service and into this week that's ahead of us. And into the year that we have embarked upon. We don't know what's ahead of us.

But we thank you that you are the God who is sovereign. You are the God who leads us. And we pray that you would lead us in the path of your choosing.

And that you would give us the strength. And that resolve to follow you. Hear our prayers. Take away our sin. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. If you could turn in your Bibles, please.

Now to Zechariah chapter 10. We began the service this evening.

[11:01] Singing from Psalm 8. And it's a psalm that reflects on the vastness of the universe. And yet it also reflects on the loving care of God for each individual in that universe.

You may come here tonight and have little regard and care little about who God is. And what he is saying to you.

But we bow in the presence tonight of a God who cares for us. Every person who is here.

Every person who is in this community. Every person who is in this world is created by God. There are no accidents. He's the God who made us.

He's the God who sees us. He's the God who made us the way we are. And he's the God who cares for us. He's mindful of us. We may not be mindful of him. But he's mindful of us.

[12:10] The psalmist is amazed as he reflects on that. He says, When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

What is man? He says that you are mindful of him. The son of man that you care for him.

We begin with that truth this evening. God cares for us. It's true. God cares for us.

But what does that actually mean? It's the kind of thing we come to terms. We hear said often. But what does it mean?

How does God care for us? Sometimes we tend to go into care homes. Ministers tend to go into care homes often.

[13:09] I've gone into, I don't know how many of them, on the mainland and over here. And I've been into some care homes over the years. On the mainland, I should say.

That didn't feel too caring. There didn't seem to be much attention shown to those who were there. There didn't seem to be much of a sense of compassion.

But then you go into other places like Harris House and there's an attentiveness. There's a much higher standard of genuine care.

And the question I want to think through tonight is, is how does God care for his people? God cares for us. But how does he care for us?

What is it that he does that enables us to see and experience his care for us? Well, Zechariah in this chapter, in chapter 10, gives us encouraging answers to that question.

[14:12] And the first thing we see here in God's care of us is he provides. He's the God who provides. Look at verse 1.

Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime. It is the Lord who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men and plants of the field to everyone.

And that was true for Israel. 500 or so years before Christ when this was written. They recognized that the showers that they so desperately needed in order for the plants of the field to grow, in order that they would have food on their tables.

God was the one who managed that. God was the one who did that. He's the one who provides for them. And what was true for them back in that day is still true for us in this day.

The rain in the springtime. The storm clouds from which the showers fall, which make the plants of the field grow. God is behind all of that.

[15:23] He's the God who provides. Now you know that. But you and I need to be reminded of that. The things that we tend to take for granted.

The water that is in this glass. The food that was on our tables. That is now in our stomachs. Where does it come from?

It comes from the Lord. He is the one who provides for us. And why does he provide for us in this way? He provides for us because he cares for us.

So with every glass of water that you drink, with every meal that you enjoy, every Marge bar or quality street that you put in your mouth, we're given another reminder of the fact that God cares for us.

So this is a literal picture that we're given in the first verse. But it's also a spiritual picture.

[16:33] One of the commentators, one of the commentators, we're speaking, says, the promise of rain, the promise of rain may have a spiritual meaning behind it, because the Holy Spirit is spoken

of in terms of rain.

Turn for a second to Isaiah 44, please. Isaiah 44 and verses 3 and 4.

God is speaking through Isaiah and he says, It's like the spiritual picture of what we have in the literal form in Zechariah.

Zechariah is saying, Ask the Lord for rain in springtime. It's the Lord who makes the storm clouds. He gives the showers of rain and plants of the field to everyone.

And God is saying in the spiritual sense through Isaiah, I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

[17:59] They will spring up. Like grass in a meadow. Like poplar trees by flowing streams. He's the God who provides.

Both in the literal sense and the spiritual sense. He's the God who's able to bring life to the dry ground that Isaiah speaks of.

And it strikes me that the ground in Scotland is pretty dry these days. Even here. The ground in Tarbert.

Harris. It's pretty dry these days. We're not seeing people in any great number come into faith.

We're not seeing people being converted. Are we? We're not seeing new life. But God can change that.

[19:05] And when he brings these reviving changes, it's usually in response to the prayers of his people. So what do we do?

This is a recurring application. Wherever we seem to go in Scripture, we're brought back to this time and time again. What do we do? What do we do? Ask the Lord for rain, says Zechariah.

Pray. Ask the Lord for this spiritual increase, because he is able to provide it. He loves to provide it. Why? Because he cares for his people. He cares for the people who are dying, who are lost, who are without hope, who are without Christ.

He cares for these people. He cares for the people. He cares for the people. He cares for the people. He cared enough to send his son into the world so that sinners could be saved, so that dry, thirsty hearts could be brought to life.

[20:27] And he's saying to us through Zechariah, ask me for this. Ask me for this. Ask for rain.

2 Chronicles 7. You know these verses. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain.

Something like we're experiencing at present. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Now, my eyes will be open, and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. It's both a challenge there, and a promise, a guarantee there.

God is the God who is able to provide new life, revival life, that will bring glory to his name, and salvation to soul, and encouragement to his people.

[22:05] So ask me for it, says God. God, it's good for us to go into a new year, remembering that God is the God who provides for his people.

He provides for us in the physical sense, so as Jesus taught in Matthew 6, we don't need to worry ourselves through the year about the things that our Father knows that we need, and has promised that he will give to those who ask him.

And it's good for us, it's vital for us to know that he provides in the spiritual sense.

He's able to heal our land. He's able to awaken the souls of many in this place, and bring new life.

He's able to revive the souls of us and send showers of blessing from heaven. He cares for us.

[23:19] He provides. The second thing is he leads. Verse 2. The idols speak deceit.

Diviners see visions that lie. They tell dreams that are false. They give comfort in vain. Therefore, the people wander like sheep, oppressed for lack of a shepherd.

God is the God who leads, and that's taught there first by way of contrast. We see idols come into focus here. And idols were a problem for Israel going all through the history.

History of Israel, God's people, even though they had left Babylon in good numbers here, as we've seen in Zechariah, they took some of Babylon with them in their rucksacks.

They had household gods called teraphim that they used to tell the future. They were like little statues. They would have them in their homes, and they would use these things to try and discern

the future.

[24 : 26] But these gods, these idols, they didn't know the future. They were dead. And any readings that the people took from these idols only sent them off in the wrong direction.

You know, like horoscopes. I don't know if these things are still in the newspapers. They used to be. Or tarot cards. We never used to see these things here, but I've seen them advertised in Harris in the last couple of years.

Fortune tellers, mediums who give us readings, all these people, if we listened to them, they'd send us off in the wrong direction. And God is teaching his people through Zechariah that idols, they mislead.

They deceive. They give false readings. They make empty promises of comfort that they never deliver on because they're dead. They're not able to do anything.

And when the people follow the lead of idols, they're lost. They're oppressed. They're disappointed. They are like sheep without a shepherd.

[25 : 41] And God, as he sees people in that state, he makes clear through Zechariah that he is angry. He sees his people in that state of confusion, chasing things that never deliver, wandering off down blind alleys.

He is angry. He promises to punish those who bring in idols that deceive his people. Why? Because he cares for his people.

He is the God who alone is able to lead his flock. Verse 3, my anger burns against the shepherds, these false shepherds, and I will punish the leaders for the Lord Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle.

And who do we see? Whose silhouette do we start to see form in these verses? Who is the one who is able to care for the flock of God's people?

Who is the good shepherd? Who is the one who is able to lead us by the still, still waters of contentment? Who is the one who is able to guide our way in righteousness?

[27 : 14] Well, Jesus is. So again in Zechariah, we see Jesus. We think of Jesus when we read these verses.

Remember in Mark chapter 6, verse 34, it says, when Jesus landed, he's in the boat, and when he landed, he saw a large crowd, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He has compassion on them. John 10, these familiar words, Jesus speaking of himself, connecting with these prophecies from Zechariah and elsewhere in the Old Testament, he says, I am the good shepherd.

I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. That's how much he cares for us. In order for us to be led from time into eternity in that place of safety in heaven, Jesus had to come and suffer for us as we thought about this morning so that we could be saved.

God it's good to go into a new year knowing that God leads us. Will you let him lead you into this new year?

[28 : 53] It's good to know that we don't have to be buying magazines and looking for sections where we can follow the stars. It's good to not have to be seeking direction from Mystic Meg or whoever it is.

It's good that we don't have to stress over the direction that politicians sometimes want to take us in when we have that sense that they don't really care for us.

It's good to know that the Lord is the one who always cares for us. He's the one who leads us.

He's the one who laid down his life for us. He is no dead idol. He is the risen living Lord. He knows the way ahead.

He is the way. So follow him. That's the message. Follow him. And if there are idols in your heart, there likely aren't teraphim on your mantelpiece.

[30 : 03] But if there are idols in your heart, as there can be in mine, now is a great time to smash them and follow only Jesus.

There's contentment in life when we follow him. There's safety in death when we follow him. There's life everlasting when we follow him.

He's the God who cares for us. He provides. He leads. Thirdly, here he saves.

And in verse 4, the one that we see very clearly is Jesus, the Savior. We've seen already in the previous verses, these signs that point us toward Jesus, but here we have a number of descriptions

that point us repeatedly to Jesus, the Savior.

Verse 4, from Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler. Now, where did Jesus come from? He came from Judah.

[31 : 23] These are the words that we read in every Christmas service, Micah 5, 2, that you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you, one will come, out of you will come for me, one who will be ruler over Israel.

Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. We see here Jesus, the one who would come to save. Jesus is the cornerstone.

Jesus is the tent peg. Jesus is the battle bow, the cornerstone. If you doubt that Jesus is the cornerstone, all you have to do is listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 2.

Paul in Ephesians 2 verse 19, when he's addressing God's people, he says, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building, the whole church, is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord, and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

[32 : 54] Christ is the cornerstone. He's the foundation for his people. He is the one who holds the whole building of his church together.

He is the one who determines the strength and the shape and the form of his church. We don't make the rules up. We don't determine what the church should be. Christ does.

And he has made very clear to us who he would have us be in the word. We see the Savior here from Judah, the cornerstone.

Jesus is the tent peg. I remember Adam telling me about the worst night's sleep he ever had. I didn't warn him about this story. But he was camping on the Clesham one night with a group of children from the school.

[33 : 57] And the winds got up and the tents that the kids were in got absolutely blasted. The wind was deafening. Everything was shaking.

There was no sleep. But the tents didn't move because they had been secured with strong tent pegs. And that's the picture here of Jesus.

One of the commentators, Bentley, says the word tent pegs speaks of something which is utterly dependable and trustworthy and which holds everything together.

The coming Messiah will be strong, reliable, and a unifying force that God's people will be strengthened in their work and witness for him and his glory. We see the Savior here.

We see Jesus here. We see him as the tent peg, as the cornerstone, as the battle bow. When we think of Jesus, we often think about gentleness.

[34 : 58] And yes, he is kind. And yes, he is gentle. And yes, he is slow to anger. And yes, he is abounding in love. Yes, he is the lamb of God who was slain to take away the sin of the world.

But as we read in Revelation 5, he is also the lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus is the warrior king. Jesus is the battle bow. He is the one who went to war with sin and Satan and death and hell and triumphed once and for all.

he is the battle bow. And those who are his people, those who take his name, Christians, Christ's ones, were to be like him.

Not fearful and timid men, and these kind of nice, slightly wet, cowering people, that were to be ready for battle.

[36 : 11] Were to be fighting fit. Verse 5, together, together, they will be mighty like mighty men, trampling the muddy streets in battle, because the Lord is with them.

They will fight and overthrow the horsemen. There's a picture of the Christian, not some wet, effeminate character who runs a thousand miles from any kind of conflict, and who's petrified by every accusation that comes in his direction from the world, but Christians are to be like Christ, who is not fearful, and timid, and cowering, and wet.

Jesus is the battle bow, and when we have the assurance that this Savior is with us, this cornerstone, this battle bow, this tent peg that brings the security that we need, when we have the assurance that he is with us, what do we have to fear?

As we head into another new year, we can say with Paul in Romans 8, if God is for us, who can be against us?

We're more than conquerors through him who loved us. And so we see here the God who cares for us, he is the one who provides for us, he is the one who leads us, he is the one who saves us.

[38 : 15] Two more points, no more time, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, and we pray that as we meditate upon your word, that you would embode in us, that you would strengthen us, that you would enable us to believe the promises that you give to us, so that we would not progress from this place anxious and fearful and worrying and timid and cowering, but enable us to remember that you are the God who cares for us, you're the one who provides for us, you're the one who leads us in the direction that you would have us go, and you're the one who gives us that security, that salvation, which no one else can take away from us, so enable us, we pray, to know the encouragement of your word and the courage of the Holy

Spirit as we go from here into this world, and we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen. The fourth point of the sermon is he's the God who gathers us in, verse 6 and following, you can see that there is a constant recurring invitation to come to God, to gather his people in, and we sing in connection with that to finish, I hear thy welcome voice that calls me Lord to thee for cleansing in thy precious blood that flowed on Calvary, and we respond by saying, I am coming Lord, coming now to thee.

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 now and forevermore. Amen