

God bless the Lord, oh my soul. And on that day when my strength is wailing, the end was near and my time was come.

Still my soul will sing your praise unending. Ten thousand years and then forever more.

bless the Lord, oh my soul, oh my soul. Worship this holy name.

Sing like never before, oh my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

[14 : 07] I'll worship your holy name. I'll worship your holy name.

If you could turn now please in your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 1. Zechariah chapter 1 towards the end of the Old Testament.

It's not too long since we studied this book, although I can't remember exactly how many years it was. Zechariah chapter 1 we're going to read also from Revelation chapter 3 and the title of the verses verses 1 to 6 is what we're reading and the title in the ESV is A Call to Return to the Lord.

In the eighth month in the second year of Darius the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah the son of Berechiah son of Edo saying the Lord was very angry with your fathers therefore say to them thus declares the Lord of hosts return to me says the Lord of hosts and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts do not be like your fathers to whom the former prophets cried out thus says the Lord of hosts return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds but they did not hear or pay attention to me declares the Lord your fathers where are they and the prophets do they live forever but my words and my statutes which I commanded my servants the prophets did they not overtake your fathers so they repented and said as the Lord of hosts purpose to deal with us for our ways and deeds so he has dealt with us and turning now to

Revelation chapter 3 do we see God's people in the Old Testament having drifted somewhat from him and there's a call to turn back and Jesus in this section uses John the disciple to write to a church to speak into a church the church in Laodicea who were also at a distance from the Lord although they didn't realize it lukewarmness had taken over so Revelation chapter 3 and verse 14 these are the words of of Jesus and to the angel of the church in Laodicea write the words of the Amen the faithful and true witness the beginning of God's creation I know your works you are neither cold nor hot would that you were either cold or hot so because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot

[17 : 25] I will spit you out of my mouth for you say I am rich I have prospered and I need nothing not realizing that you are wretched pitiful poor blind and naked I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen and salve to anoint your eyes that you may see those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent behold I stand at the door and knock remember this is Jesus speaking to the church not to unbelievers to the church to those who believed in him behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me amen and may God bless these readings of his word we'll sing again now to his praise we'll sing this time from mission praise 288 mission praise 288 the words on the screen

I need thee every hour most gracious Lord no tender voice like thine can peace afford I need thee oh I need thee I need thee every hour oh gracious Lord no tender voice like thine can peace afford I need thee oh I need thee every hour I need thee oh bless me!

bless me my Savior to thee I need thee every hour stay out near by!

I to step up when thou art I need Oh, I need Thee, every hour I need Thee.

Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee. I need Thee every hour, enjoy your pain.

[20 : 31] Come quickly on the bike, for life is made. I need Thee, oh, I need Thee, every hour I need Thee.

Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee. I need Thee every hour, teach me Thy will.

And Thy wish promises in me fulfill. I need Thee, oh, I need Thee.

Every hour I need Thee. Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee every hour, O Holy One. Oh, make me Thy need Thee, the blessed Son.

[21 : 54] I need Thee, oh, I need Thee. Every hour I need Thee. Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

Amen. Joseph has commendable zeal in his worship.

We'll pray as we come back to God's Word. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word, and we pray for your help, the help of the Holy Spirit now, as we study these sections together.

We thank you that we have the promise that the Holy Spirit is our teacher, and we pray, Holy Spirit, that you would teach us, that you would open our hearts, that you would unblock our ears, that you would open our eyes, and that you would speak into each one of our lives.

We thank you that the Word of God is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, and we pray that your Word would penetrate our hearts, that you would break into our lives, and that we would know that we are being ministered to by your Word.

[23 : 21] We ask, Lord, for your help. We recognize, as we have sung, that we need Thee every hour. We cannot preach, we cannot listen, we cannot understand, we cannot believe, we cannot respond without your help.

And so we ask, Lord, for the help that we need, that you alone can give. And we pray for those who meet, as we do in other places, every place where your Word is open.

We ask, Lord, that you would be speaking through your servants. We pray for Richard, especially as he preaches in Calanish tonight. And we ask that you would speak through him.

And we pray for many congregations around the islands now where there are vacancies. And as congregations seek your will for the person that you would lead them to, we ask that you would guide, that you would lead.

We recognize, even in our own area here, the harvest is plentiful. The laborers are very few. And we ask that you would be sending more workers out into the harvest.

[24 : 29] We pray for Gordon as he responds to that sense of your call. And we ask that as he goes forward and meets Presbytery and Board of Ministry in due course, that you would guide and that you would lead him and Gillian and the family, that as they acknowledge you, that you would direct their path.

And we pray that you would give each one of us courage, whether we are in full-time ministry, whether we are speaking at a church meeting, or whether we are in conversation with those that we work with and those that we live with.

Help us, we pray, to be those who are willing to always share the reason for the hope that is within us, the hope that is given to us by Jesus.

And for any tonight who may be listening, who may be watching, who may be present even, who do not yet know Christ, who do not have that eternal hope, we pray that you would be working in their lives, that you would enable each one of us to see that we are sinners, that Christ is the Saviour, that he calls us, and as we come to him, there is forgiveness, there is salvation.

So hear our prayers and help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Maybe I'll start by asking a question or two that the boys and girls can answer if they want to.

[26 : 04] Boys and girls, have any of you, have any of you made up any resolutions? You know New Year's resolutions? Have you heard of New Year's resolutions? No? Some of you haven't even heard of New Year's resolutions.

Quite often what people do, at the beginning of the new year, they'll say, right, well, in this year, I'm going to do this, and I'm not going to do that. So maybe some people would say, my New Year's resolution is to run, and I want to run a marathon in October.

So that's my New Year's resolution. I'm going to train and I'm going to try and run. Or somebody may have a different kind of New Year's resolution. So that's what a New Year's resolution is. Is anybody brave enough to tell us what your New Year's resolution is, if you've made one?

No? Nothing? Michael? No? It's good to all be perfect, isn't it? Nobody's resolved to maybe, you know, keep your room tidy this year.

Do all the young people keep their bedrooms always tidy? Always? Maybe that's a resolution. Or maybe a resolution could be that you do your homework the second you get in from school, rather than doing it on the bus in the morning on the way into school.

[27 : 31] That could be a resolution. Maybe there might be someone in here who might find it helpful to have a resolution not to fight with their brother or their sister in 2025.

Maybe some of us might even want to make up a New Year resolution to try some vegetables and fruit in 2025.

Maybe not, actually. That's going a step too far. There's lots of resolutions that we could make at the beginning of a New Year, and many of them are good.

But the best resolution that we can make, whether we are young or whether we are old, is to put God first. That should be a resolution at the beginning of 2025.

That should be a resolution at the beginning of each day. That we will put God first. That we will prioritize our relationship with God.

[28 : 44] This morning, for the boys and girls in Sunday school, you won't know where we were this morning. But this morning, we were in John chapter 15. And in John chapter 15, Jesus is with his disciples.

And he says to his disciples, I want you to abide with me. I want you to abide in me. If you want to be saved, says Jesus. If you want to have joy.

If you want your prayers to be effective. If you want to be fruitful. Then Jesus says, Abide. Stay close. To me. So that was this morning.

We were in the New Testament. This evening, we're going from the New Testament, John 15. First of all, and mainly to the Old Testament. Where we hear God saying to his people in Zechariah chapter 1.

Not abide in me. Because at this point in time, God's people, they weren't close to him. Really. They drifted far away from him.

[29 : 48] And so God says, through Zechariah the prophet. Return to me. Come back to me. So tonight, we're continuing with this theme.

We're thinking about our relationship with God. And we're thinking particularly, how we can return to him. If we have been drifting.

And in a congregation of this size, and in a congregation of any size, a congregation of one, this is a word that speaks into our lives.

Because we are living in a world where it is very easy to drift from God. We often sing in the hymn, Come, I find with every blessing, prone to wander.

Lord, I feel it. So we may be wandering. We may have been drifting. We may have come into church tonight, and we feel like we're far away from God.

[30 : 57] Even though we're here. We may feel like we're far away from God. And we hear in this section, the call of God to return to him.

So three points in our time this evening. And boys and girls, my New Year resolution is to be finished by seven o'clock. So you've got half an hour between finishing and YF.

Three points for this evening. The first point we see is the anger of God towards the people that he speaks to.

The second thing we'll see is the apathy of the people. That's how God found them. The final thing we'll think about is the appeal of God as he calls his people to return to him.

So first of all, the anger of God. 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.

[32 : 08] The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. Boys and girls, just to keep you on your toes. When you think about God, when we think together about God and who he is, we find out who God is through the Bible, don't we?

And so, if I was to ask you, tell me, boys and girls, tell me some things about God. Tell me what God is like. Describe to me who God is and what he's like.

What are some of the answers that you would give to me? What is God like? Give me a few answers. Emily.

He's kind. Good answer. Katie. Think about it. I'll come back to you. Michael. What is God like?

He's kind. Give me a few more. Lois. Pardon? He's big.

[33 : 27] Our God is so big. So strong and so mighty. Give me a few more. Open up to the more mature heads. Michael. He's loving.

Great answer. Daniel. Gracious. We sang that in the psalm, didn't we? He's gracious. He is loving. He's big. He's strong. He's kind. All these answers. Katie. Anything else?

Powerful. Great answer. These are all the kind of things that we think about when we think about God. God. He's told us through his word.

And he's shown us through his son Jesus what he's like. And he is gracious. He is good. He is strong. He is kind. He is gentle. He is loving.

[34 : 23] He is patient. He is. He is. He is. He is angry!!!!!!!

!!!!

but it says that he was very angry. So what does that mean? When we think about that for a moment let's think about what that means because we can sometimes take the way we are and

project it onto God.

So when we think about anger we have to think carefully about what it means that God was angry. When we get angry we think about bad temper, don't we? Sometimes we can be, I was cooking a pot of rice last night and so I put the rice on with the water and put on the heat and it starts to warm and then it starts to get hot and then it starts to bubble up and the next second it's boiling over and everything's hissing and the cooker's all dirty.

And that's often how we think of anger it sort of bubbles up from within us and then it boils over and we blow the stack and we're shouting at people or we're doing things that we wish we hadn't done.

[36 : 02] Maybe, insisting hypothetically for a moment for the young ones maybe as we think about anger maybe your sister has stolen your new top once again or she's used your straighteners once again even though she's been told not to and you start to get angry when you see your top on her post on Be Real and you've said it to her a thousand times that's my hoodie, it's not your hoodie and you're starting to get angry and so you challenge her and she doesn't just take it off and say I'm sorry about that she starts to argue with you and when that kind of things happen we start to feel mad and anger starts to boil up and then the next thing is a fight.

All that's hypothetical probably never happens in any houses. and that's a picture of our anger but that is not God's anger.

God's anger is not unpredictable and explosive. Remember I had a teacher in school and one minute he'd be talking to the class and everything was okay but then somebody would be capering in the back row and then without any warning at all he would just absolutely explode.

Just uncontrollable rage and the class would be living in fear of these explosions. That's our anger. God's anger is not unpredictable and explosive.

God's anger is very predictable. He has told us in his word what makes him angry. And God's anger is slow burning.

[37 : 58] He is slow to anger as we sang in the psalm. He is patient. The word that's used in the Bible for God's anger is the word wrath which means righteous, right anger.

Sometimes when we think about our anger we get angry about things that we shouldn't get angry about like if our football team loses or we want our own way and we don't get our own way even though we don't deserve it.

We get angry. We get angry about the wrong things very often. We get angry about selfish things but God's anger is not like that. God only gets angry when it's right to get angry.

So what angers God? Boys and girls you can answer that question actually. What angers God? Michael.

Sin. Sin. Sin. And so here in this chapter God uses Zechariah his messenger to tell the people that he is angry.

[39 : 14] In fact that he's very angry with their parents and their grandparents. The question that we have to think about is why God was angry.

what sin was God seeing in the people that made him angry? And that takes us to the next point. The anger of God point one.

The second point is an apathetic people. He sees an apathetic people. What is apathy? Well according to the dictionary apathy and I quote here is the absence or suppression of passion emotion or excitement.

Apathy is the absence or suppression of passion emotion or excitement. Apathy is a lack of interest in or lack of concern for things.

And the people of God at this point in time they were apathetic about the things of God when it came to worshipping God there was no passion there was no emotion there was no excitement there was no zeal they just didn't seem very interested.

[40 : 44] Haggai who wrote at the same time as Zechariah he tells us what the people were interested in and what the people were primarily interested in was themselves.

They were interested in making their houses as comfortable and luxurious as possible. they were interested in living very comfortable self-indulgent lives and God uses Haggai Zechariah's contemporary to call out his people on that.

Haggai chapter 1 and verses 2 and 3 I think it is the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet this is what God said to the people through Haggai is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled luxury houses while this house God's house lies in ruins and that was the

reality at the time of Zechariah writing this God's house and God's cause was in ruins and it had been for 15 years about 15 years previous to this God's people had been given permission to leave Babylon before that God's people they had been slaves they had been captured they were against their will in Babylon they were in a forced captivity but

God used Amani put in position to open the borders so God's people they were allowed to leave Babylon head back to their home to rebuild God's house so there was a green light the borders opened and 40,000 or so of God's people headed back home to Israel their design their mission their desire was to rebuild God's house and so they got straight to work to build this temple to rebuild this temple and at first that work went really well and they were full of zeal because they wanted a place to worship they wanted a place where they could glorify God and at first things were going well they made good progress as they sought to build for God's glory but then things got difficult and they faced opposition from the surrounding nations and it became very un-PC you could say to be involved with this project and it was heavy work it was hard work and so the people just got discouraged and when it got tough they just gave up there's a building in

Oban it was in Oban a year or two back there's a building in Oban called McCaig's Tower or some people call it McCaig's Folly and it's an impressive looking building that towers above Oban and it's a building that was started it looks almost like a Coliseum and it was started by this man McCaig but it was never finished so it's just a facade just a tower with nothing inside it and so it's called McCaig's McCaig's Folly and we can imagine the house of God at this point in time in that kind of estate it's half built no one's on site nothing's happening and God's people even though they can see the ruin of this temple that they were commissioned to build God's people they just don't seem bothered because they were more interested in making their own houses luxurious than building [45 : 07] God's house and what was the cause well their zeal for God's glory had faded and a heart apathy had taken over they'd gone lukewarm they'd lost their zeal apathy had crept in and as God looks in God says to this people through Zechariah that he is angry he's very angry now when we think about apathy we probably don't think about apathy as one of the most serious sins would we now if someone in our congregation was arrested midweek because they robbed a bank in

London or they committed some serious assault we'd recognise that instantly as sin and if they were a Christian if they were a member of the church the elders would want to speak to them about the bank robbing and the serious assault but apathy we don't talk so much about apathy do we when someone goes off the boil spiritually and starts to drift away from the means of grace when you rarely see them and even in service when the prayer meeting is no longer part of their life when there seems to be no spiritual sparkle in the eye it probably would take quite a long time before anyone came to challenge them to challenge us but it seems to me that

God is much more serious about apathy than we are again listen to the words of Jesus in Revelation chapter 3 we read them you don't need to go there I'll read them again Jesus speaks to a church in Laodicea this church thought they were doing fine they said we're doing great you don't need to worry about us but Jesus looks into this church and he recognizes that they had become apathetic they had become lukewarm and he says to them Revelation 3 15 I know your works you are neither cold nor hot would that you were either cold or hot so because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold

I will spit you out of my mouth strong words from Jesus but Jesus goes on to say in the same section those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me now reflecting on these passages just as we take a moment to apply this we all have to ask the question

I have to ask the question as I allow the light of God's word to shine into my heart I have to ask the question is God angry with me as you have to ask that same question of yourself is there apathy in us do we still have excitement do we still have passion do we still have zeal do we still have that burning love for the Lord that maybe we had at first when we were converted are we still amazed by the gospel are we still amazed by the fact that God so loved us that he sent his son into the world to save us is that an amazing thing for us to consider are we amazed by grace are we filled with zeal is it a passion is it an excitement that swells up within us as we think about the Lord

[50 : 50] Jesus I met a newly converted couple when I was on holiday in Renes a guy I used to work with many years ago who was nowhere near church who was a notorious character for fighting anybody that moved on a Friday night and amazingly God took hold of him and his wife and

they began to wake up spiritually their eyes were open to see their son their eyes were open to see that Jesus was the saviour and they were brand new shiny believers and as I sat with them and had a coffee with them and listened to them they were so full of life and so full of zeal they could not get enough of the Bible all they wanted to talk about was the Bible all they wanted to talk about was the Lord all they wanted to talk about was how amazing this message of the gospel was they were blown away by the gospel and I have to say it was hugely encouraging to spend an hour with them but it was also challenging if I'm honest even convicting see sometimes as God's people we can lose that zeal we can lose that sense of how amazing grace is and apathy can creep in and we stop seeking first the kingdom of God and glorifying God and enjoying him forever stops being our chief end and life becomes more about my comfort and my security and my personal ambitions than it is about God and his glory and the privilege of knowing

God and the privilege of making him known and that's where God's people were and that's where they had been for some time God is angry because he looks into the lives of his people and they were an apathetic people and yet he does not write them off he does not send them away he does not spit them out he makes an appeal to them to return to him verse 3 the appeal of God the final point briefly so God he challenges the people through Zechariah he tells them the truth about what was going on in their hearts and their lives and then

God through Zechariah says in verse 3 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 and this is the gospel this is the gospel God the awesome powerful big mighty gracious kind good God he says to us come to me repent turn away from sin and turn to me and you will be saved and we'd be wrong if we thought that repenting is something that we do once and then it's done repentance is something that we are called to do continually

Martin Luther began his 95 thesis by saying when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said repent Matthew 4 17 he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance so you and I are to repent every day every hour we turn away from sin we turn away from the selfishness that suffocates us we turn to God and worship every day that's how we're to live the people that Zechariah wrote to the people that God commissioned Zechariah to challenge they were God's people but they stopped repenting they stopped turning away from sin and from self they stopped turning in worship to God and now over the course of time they drifted far away from

[56 : 22] God and yet God does not want them to stay far away so he sends Zechariah to say return to me and I will return to you and what a promise that is the promise that was for back then and that day is a promise that is for us this day God says through his word to us tonight return to me if you've been drifting and I will return to you no ifs no buts no small print no exclusions no qualifications you return to me says the Lord and I will return to you and all of us need to hear this all of the time but perhaps some of us may need to hear this especially today at the beginning of a new year maybe we've been drifting maybe secret sins have crept in and we have allowed them to find a space we've harbored them in our hearts maybe life has become more about self than about the saviour maybe

God seems far away if that's if that's you listen to the appeal of God return to me declares the Lord almighty and I will return to you says the Lord almighty our God is not remote he's not far away he is not unknowable he is near and he appeals to us in the gospel to come into relationship with him to be reconciled to him and if we've been drifting to return to him an angry

God is the first thing that they see an apathetic people but the appeal of God which is saturated in his grace is returned to me and as we return we do not find an angry God we find a God who receives us who embraces us like the father did the prodigal who blesses us and who calls us to walk close with him let's pray heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you that you are the God who knows our hearts we do not know each other's hearts we sometimes struggle to discern our own hearts but you are the

God who knows us and we pray for your forgiveness because we recognise even as we look into the mirror of your word that often we are found where God's people were found in Zechariah's day often we are drifting often our priorities are more about self than they are about the saviour often we find that our zeal for the things of God is fading as the world takes a grip forgive us we pray cleanse us in the blood of Jesus as we confess our wanderings and take away from us we pray any lukewarmness any apathy that may deaden our souls and receive us as we respond to the call of God to the words of

Jesus the one who stands at the door of our hearts and knocks we thank you that as we open the door of our hearts you are the God who comes in and who sups with us who brings to us that intimacy that relationship that close walk with God that our hearts long for we pray that as we go into this new year that we would be less prone to wander and that we would be those who are found always repenting always returning when we drift and seeking to abide in Christ we pray these things in Jesus name Amen we sing to conclude mission not mission praise the hymn book number 683 I hear thy welcome voice that calls me

[62 : 17] Lord to thee for cleansing in thy precious blood that flowed on Calvary then the response I am coming Lord I hear thy welcome voice that calls me Lord to thee for cleansing in thy precious blood that flowed on Calvary I am coming Lord coming back to me wash me cleanse me in the blood that flowed on

Calvary Jesus calls me on to perfect faith and love to perfect hope and peace and trust on earth and heaven above I am coming Lord coming back to thee wash she cleansed me in the blood that flows on Calvary it's Jesus who confers the blessed work within by adding grace to welcome grace wherein the blood of sin I am coming

Lord coming back to me wash me cleanse me in the blood that flowed on Calvary me oh hail atoning blood oh hail redeeming place oh hail the gift of Christ our Lord thy strength and righteousness I am coming Lord coming back to me wash me cleanse me in the blood that fold of Calvary and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of

God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more Amen