

Zechariah 8

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[0:00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening. The intimation sheet you have here and I'm not going to take time to go through this, you have the details on the sheet here. Just to remind you that next Sunday though all being well, it will be a family service in the morning and that's at the usual time and it's a normal time service in the evening as well, although there's a baptism during the evening service. Latham's granddaughter Olivia will be baptised by her grandfather who's a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church.

So that's next Sunday evening at 6 and then at 8 o'clock, although it's not on the sheet here, there is the community carol service and there's details of that out in the vestibule for those who can take note of that.

Zechariah and chapter 8. I'm going to begin with perhaps some of the scariest words you could ever hear at the beginning of one of my sermons. I have 10 points tonight. I gave the points to Ross on the intimation for the presenters with the praise list and one of the presenters who will remain nameless and I'll try not to make eye contact with him just in front of me here, said to me, should I bring a cushion for tonight? Anyway, 10 points but I think we'll probably move at greater speed and we may even finish more quickly than we usually do.

Boys and girls, first of all, how many days till Christmas? How many sleeps till Christmas? Can you tell me? Pardon? 14? Emily's got her hand up. 10 sleeps till Christmas. Now tell me this, do you have an advent calendar in your house? Put your hand up if you've got an advent calendar in your house. What does an advent calendar actually do? Tell me. Tells you the date.

And it sort of helps you to count down all these days to Christmas. And in a way, Zechariah chapter 8, it's a bit like an advent calendar. There aren't 24 doors in it. There's actually 10 promises in Zechariah chapter 8. And with each promise that we look at, each step that we take through this chapter, we see more and more of Jesus. Just as the advent calendar takes us closer and closer to Christmas, you could say Zechariah chapter 8 takes us closer and closer to Jesus. It prepares us for the coming of Jesus. There's 10 promises. The first two we looked at last Sunday. So let me just give you the titles of them. The first promise that God makes those people is, is I love you. And that was verses 1 and 2. God was jealous for his people when they wandered from him. And the reason he was jealous for his people when they wandered from him was because, I shouldn't have said 10 points, should I? There'll be a procession all the way through. God was jealous for his people when they wandered from him because he loved his people. So he was saying to them from the outset of this chapter, from the outset of this book, I love you. And how do we know how much God loved his people?

[3:53] Well, we know how much God loved his people when we look at Jesus. So we see the love of God that he has promised to his people most clearly expressed in Christ. Promise number one.

Promise number two. God says to his people, I will never leave you. And that's verse three. God's promises is that he would come close to his people, that he would return to his people. Remember, they had drifted. And God uses Zechariah and Haggai to say, you're far from me, but I want you to come back to me. I don't want you to be far away from me. I want you to be close to me. I want you to be to be serving me. And as they heard God speak, and as they returned to him, God made good on his promise. And in fact, the Christmas story is evidence of the fact that God makes good on his promise. He didn't leave us in our sin. But God, the Son, came to us to be close to us.

He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all. Promise number two. Promise number three. God says to his people, I will bring peace. And that's verse four. This is what the Lord Almighty says. Once again, men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. And it's a wonderful picture that we're given in verse four there. We have the most vulnerable people in that place. And they're out there on the streets. They're out there in the open without any fear, without any concern. They have no anxiety over enemies that might come in.

There's no threat of conflict. There's no apparent danger. This is not a scene of war, but this is a scene of peace. You wouldn't have the little children and the old people who are frail out on the streets in a day of war. This is a day of peace. God has given them a picture of peace and tranquility and prosperity. And it's a picture that in part was being fulfilled in Zechariah's day. Remember, in days gone by, God's people had been in exile. They had struggled. They had been oppressed. They were under attack. Remember, in Joshua, as we traveled through that, wherever God's people went, there was bombs flying at them. Well, they weren't bombs, but you know what I mean. They were under attack. They were in conflict. There was war. There was oppression. They were constantly in a state of high alert. But now, in

Zechariah's day, they were enjoying a good measure of rest and peace, but that was just a small measure compared to what was coming. God was promising his people eternal peace. God was promising his people the peace of heaven. And there's just a foreshadowing of it here. Isaiah actually gives us another pointer towards this peace that God would ultimately bring. Look at Isaiah chapter 11, just for a moment.

[7:34] Isaiah chapter 11. We're given a glimpse again. It's almost a more, it's a bigger glimpse of the new heavens and the new earth and what God was going to do in bringing peace. You know, we sometimes watch these programs, these programs, these nature programs, and you've got lions and you've got wild animals, and it's kind of disturbing to watch because they're killing each other.

And yet, we're given this picture in Isaiah chapter 11 and verse 6. It says, The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf and the lion and the yearling together. And a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear. DJ would never be doing that just now. Their young will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra. And the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain. For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas. A picture of peace. Of all-encompassing peace. And the question is, how would this eternal peace be delivered? Because we're so far from it. And the answer is Jesus.

In fact, every promise that we're given here, the answer is Jesus. I will bring peace, says God. How? Through Christ. Zechariah couldn't yet see this, but we see this.

Luke chapter 2. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified, but the angel of the Lord said, do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to men on whom his favor rests. Jesus is the prince of peace. Jesus is the bringer of peace. He's the only one who is able to give us peace with God. He's the only one who is able to open the doors of heaven to those who trust him. So the promise of peace is a promise that is fulfilled ultimately and eternally in and through Jesus. And it's assured to all those who are trusting in Jesus. Can I ask you the question tonight? Do you have the assurance of this eternal peace? We thought this morning about the disturbing reality of dying without Christ.

[11:03] we thought about the disturbing reality of an eternity with no peace, but only punishment.

Jesus came so that we would not have to suffer that, but we would have peace. And that peace is something that is guaranteed to everybody who trusts in him. Are you trusting him?

Not just are you sitting in these chairs. These chairs will not take us to heaven. But are we trusting in Christ?

Promise number four. God says, I will make what seems impossible to you possible. That's my paraphrase of verse six. What we have in the NIV is this is what the Lord Almighty says. It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me declares the Lord Almighty. And the word marvelous there is a word that's translated as impossible in some of the versions of the Bible that you might have before you just now. And just as these promises are kind of stacked up one on top of the other, all these blessings as they start to put them together, blessings and promises of God's love for them and God's assurance that he'll never leave them and that he'll be with them and he'll bring them peace. All these promises as they'll take in together as God's people were hearing them.

They must have seemed almost too good to be true. Almost impossible. We know some people are great at making promises, but they're not able to deliver the promises they make.

[13:01] Politicians, over the last while we were sick to the back teeth of hearing promise after promise. They were gushing with promises in order to try and get hold of our vote.

But we tend to doubt the credibility of these promises. Because we know from past experience that very often once politicians are actually in power, they are not able or they are not willing to deliver the promises that they've made in their manifestos.

But when we hear God's promises, we need never doubt his ability to deliver them. We need never doubt his truthfulness in making them and then delivering them.

And even if they seem to us to be impossible, even what seems to us to be too marvelous to be true, it's perfectly possible with God.

And that's the message that was being driven home through Zechariah. And that's the message that is amplified and echoed by Jesus.

[14:21] I will make what seems impossible to you possible. Now when I give you that title, your mind isn't just in Zechariah. Your mind is running forward, isn't it?

To a conversation that Jesus had with a rich young man. And Jesus, when he speaks to this rich young man, he comes to Jesus with such promise.

He looks to be so close to the kingdom of God and yet he walks away sad. And Jesus, when he speaks to his disciples, as they're perplexed as this man walks away with a sad face, Jesus says, children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God.

It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Now is it possible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle?

It's absolutely impossible. So what was Jesus speaking of in these verses? He's speaking of our salvation.

- [15:33] The man that Jesus said was not getting to heaven at this point. This was a man who had tried hard to be good all his life.

This man in Mark 10, you can read about him later, he is a man who had worked towards keeping the commandments. He probably never missed church. He probably went to Sunday school.

He was probably sitting there at SU in school. An exemplary student. Everybody assumed if anyone's getting into heaven it's this man.

And yet Jesus says to his disciples, no he's not. He says to the man, you're not.

The man walks away sad. The disciples say to Jesus, in a state of amazement, who then can be saved?

- [16:42] If this man can't be saved, the moral student, morally upright, religious, who can be saved?

And Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible. But not with God. all things are possible with God.

And this is the thrust of the Holy Scripture. Not just Zechariah. We can't save ourselves. Whether we resemble the rich young man or any other character, we can't save ourselves.

Our sin is too heavy for us to climb up to heaven with our good works. And even if we could climb up to heaven with sin on our backs, we wouldn't get in the door of heaven because there is no place in heaven for those who are still carrying sin.

God's standard is too high. We can't reach it, not by good works, not by religious endeavors. It's impossible. So how can we be saved?

- [17:52] How can what seems to be and is in reality impossible become possible for us? the answer?

Through Jesus. Every promise is delivered through Jesus. What we cannot do for ourselves, he has done for us.

What was impossible for us has been made possible in Christ. even when you think about the means of how this came about. Matthew chapter 1, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son.

Impossible, we say. And with man, this is impossible. But with God, these are the methods that he employs for our salvation.

the God that we worship is the God who makes the impossible possible. And that takes us into the fifth promise. God says to his people, I will save you.

- [19:07] Verses 7 and 8, this is what the Lord Almighty says, I will save my people from the countries of the East and the West. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.

See, the savior of the people of God in Zechariah's day was not going to be Zechariah the prophet. It wasn't going to be Zerubbabel, the governor. It wasn't going to be Joshua, the high priest.

But it's God himself. God says time and time again, I will save you. And how did he save us?

He himself, God the Son, came down into this world to do for us what was impossible.

I will save you, says the Lord Almighty. You know, we've been thinking much about dreams in the book of Zechariah and what God was saying in and through these dreams.

[20:19] But in a little over 500 years time from now, God would speak to a carpenter that no one knew called Joseph. He would come to him in a dream through one of his messengers and angel of the Lord would appear to Joseph in a dream and say, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

God's promise of I will save you is made good in and through Christ.

He is the one who came to this world. He is the one who lived for us. He is the one who died for us. He is the one who rose for us so that those who believe in him will not perish but will be saved.

And the promises they just keep on coming and I have no time to kind of expound any of them but let me just give you the titles of them and you can go and think about them yourselves this evening.

[21:42] Promise number six. God says, I will reverse your fortunes. That's verses nine through to verse 13. the promise of peace with God.

Remember as they drifted into trouble they suffered but as they returned to God there is the promise of a reversal of fortunes.

Peace with God. The harvest of salvation. The movement from being under the curse of God to knowing the blessing of God.

That's what was promised and that's what was delivered to us in and through Jesus. Promise number seven. God says, I will do you good.

That's verse 50. That's verse 14 to 17 but you see the words in verse 15. Who is the one who can take us from eternal disaster to eternal security?

[22:44] Who's able to fulfill that promise? Christ. God says, And that's what he promises to those who will trust him and obey him.

Promise number eight. God says, I will turn your fasting into feasting. I will turn your mourning into joy. And this actually is the direct answer to the question that came at the beginning of verse seven.

Remember the beginning of verse seven. God's people come and they say, should we still be fasting? As we look back to all the misery of past years, all these fasts that we're keeping, all this religion that's such a part of our lives, should we be doing this?

And God says to them, why are we doing it in the first place? I didn't ask you to do it. I didn't ask you to do it. And then after a long dialogue here, God says in response to that question, I will turn your fasting into feasting.

I will turn these dark days of mourning into joy. How? In the ultimate sense? through Jesus.

[24:09] Promise number nine. God says, I will bring crowds back into Jerusalem. That's verses 20 to 22. And in a sense, that happened in the geographical sense, but in the greater spiritual sense, we see that this promise is still coming true.

because Jerusalem, as we know it in terms of New Testament, the New Jerusalem is the church. We are part of the New Jerusalem.

It's the church of Christ. And day by day, week by week, year by year, still people, as they see their sin and as they come to Christ, they're being brought into this New Jerusalem.

Maybe even someone tonight will be part of this promise of God to add to the crowds that are making up this New Jerusalem.

Those who trust in Christ. And the final promise is the promise of God to be with them.

[25 : 30] Verse 23 just finishes with the words, we have heard, we have heard that God is with you.

And these words of promise in Zechariah, they reverberate through the centuries until eventually, after a long period of silence, that silence is broken.

in Matthew chapter 1 where we read, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

God's promise. God's promises each one fulfilled in and through Christ.

So Zechariah chapter 8 is unlikely as it might seem to us. It points us over and over again to Jesus.

[26 : 48] Every promise of God finds its fulfillment in Christ. So let me simply finish by saying receive him.

We can sit with a list of promises that do us absolutely no good unless we act on them. We get messages on email every day of the week with an offer of this and an offer of that.

They do us absolutely no good until the day that we act on them. and every promise of God that is given to us here, the promise of his love, the promise of his security, the promise of his peace, the promise of his salvation, the promise of his keeping us and reversing our fortunes and doing us good and giving us joy and bringing us into his church and being with us forever.

These promises are of absolutely no use to us unless we take God at his word and take hold of them by faith.

What a horror to go from time into eternity and to see every promise of God that was offered to us lost with no opportunity to take hold of it ever again.

[28 : 32] Tonight, if you have ears to hear, if you have eyes to see, if you have a heart that is in any way stirred, by what is before us here, God is speaking to you.

He may never speak to you again, but God is speaking to you and he is saying, take me at my word, take hold of my promises and know my blessing in and through Christ.

May we do that this evening. Amen.