



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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MAJORING IN THE MINORS: ZECHARIAH **BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD**

Scripture: Zechariah 3:1-4, 4:6, 9:9-10, 14:9

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INTRODUCTION

The FUTURE—that vast uncharted sea of the unknown—holding joy or terror, comfort or pain, love or loneliness.

Some people fear the days to come. What evils lurk in the shadows? They don't want to know. Others consult seers, fortune-tellers, and read horoscopes—anxiously trying to know what is to come.

But tomorrow's story is known only to God. . .AND to those special messengers (called *prophets*) to whom God has revealed a clue or two—that they didn't always understand themselves.

- Prophets are often thought of primarily as PREDICTORS of the future, offering precise details and explicit dates.
- Prophets are really more PROCLAIMERS of God's Word than PREDICTORS. Their task was to proclaim the word of the Lord, point out sin, explain its consequences, and call folks to repentance & obedience.

At times, however, they were given prophetic visions foretelling coming events. Actually, there are three kinds of predictive passages in the Old Testament—those that deal with:

1. The Near Future (e.g.: the coming of a king, the destruction of an enemy, the number of years Judah would be in captivity == events relatively near at hand).
2. Down the Line (e.g.: specifically with the coming of the Messiah).
3. The Distant Future (e.g.: the end of time, the conclusion to history).

ZECHARIAH, the Minor Prophet we are studying today, has all three in the 14 chapters of his prophecy. Let's place him in context:

- Last week, Matt took us through HAGGAI, a contemporary of ZECHARIAH.
- Both were preaching around the year 520 B.C. [We are on "the other end" of the Exile now.]
- Both of these prophets encouraged the remnant of Israel to get busy and finish what they had started—namely, the rebuilding of the Temple. [*You can tell what's #1 on God's agenda.*]
- But ZECHARIAH goes way beyond "current events". With spectacular apocalyptic imagery and graphic detail that rivals *The Book of Revelation*, ZECHARIAH tells of a Messiah whom God would send to rescue His people and reign over all the earth.
- He looks ahead 500 years to the FIRST COMING of Jesus. . .and on through to the SECOND COMING that will one day climax history.

Let's begin with events near at hand.

I. ZECHARIAH DEALS WITH EVENTS NEAR AT HAND

In the first 6 chapters of his book, ZECHARIAH records 8 nighttime visions. He tells how an angel awakens him and immediately draws him into active participation in some far-out dream. "What do you see?" the angel asks, and they carry on dialogue. ZECHARIAH sees things like:

- *A man measuring the city of Jerusalem* == God getting ready to bring His people back.
- *The high priest (Joshua) standing before God in filthy clothes* == sin [later].
- *A lampstand that is continually kept burning by an unlimited reservoir of oil* == God's Spirit given without measure.
- *A flying scroll* (like Martin Luther's inkwell) == God's anger at sin.
- *A woman packed in a basket and sent back to Babylon* == removing sin from the nation.

A. Let's go to one of the visions, the one found in Chapter 3:1-4:

*¹Then he showed me **JOSHUA the high priest** standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ²The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" ³Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."*

Note the characters in this scene:

- **JOSHUA**: Not the Joshua of Jericho fame. . .the one who succeeded Moses and marched his army around the walls of Jericho. No, this Joshua is a high priest among the remnant of Israel returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonia captivity.
- **SATAN**: The untiring accuser of God's people. That's what his name means (i.e.: *Accuser / Adversary*). Note in v.1:
 1. **SATAN's PURPOSE** == To accuse, to undermine, to discredit Joshua. If the "man of God" is so polluted, can you see why the people would be dissuaded from moving ahead with what God had given them to do (i.e.: rebuild the temple)?
 2. **SATAN's POSITION** == Standing at his right side. Church, let's not underestimate Satan. He is real! He is all around us. And he is powerful! If you don't have the Holy Spirit living within, you're no match for him.
 - Heed what **PETER** says: *"Be sober! Be vigilant! Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him! Stand firm in the faith!" [I Peter 5:8-9a]*
 - **MARTIN LUTHER** devoted a verse of *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* to this: *"For still our ancient foe, does seek to work us woe. His craft and power are great. He is armed with cruel hate. On earth is not his equal."*

- **THE ANGEL OF THE LORD:** Jesus Himself! Pre-incarnate (i.e.: before He was born in the flesh)! It is He who rebukes Satan. There Joshua stands, in no position to defend himself—just like us. He's standing there in filthy garments—just like us. And “the Angel of the Lord” replaces his filthy garments with rich, clean ones. . . *robes of righteousness*, Paul calls them in **Ephesians 4:24**. What an exchange! When Christ comes to live in your heart, He (not you) removes the old ones stained with guilt and condemnation and gives us a new set of clothes—“*a new self, created in His likeness to be righteous and holy.*”

Joshua could never serve the Lord in those dirty old clothes! He needed clean, fresh ones. As a priest, he represents us all. It needed to start from the top down.

Matt & I as pastors / spiritual leaders must seek the cleansing of the Holy Spirit constantly in our lives. But while we take the lead, we don't live on a higher plane than everyone else! All of us need to come before the Lord in humility and repentance, seeking His forgiveness and His holiness. Once that's accomplished, be aware that the enemy, Satan, will try to undo it. He will try to accuse you and put doubt in your mind about your salvation, about your standing with God. He will also sow seeds of doubt about whether you have the ability, the time, or the resources to serve Him. Don't try to fight him in the strength of your own flesh. Call upon the Holy Spirit to help you resist the Adversary's influence.

Once that's accomplished, then God can use you—not because you're perfect, but because you now have “clean hands and a pure heart” [**Psalm 24:4**]. Let the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit equip you spiritually for service in the Kingdom of God.

B. Next we come to ZERUBBABEL, talked about in Chapter 4. Here's the situation. . .

The Jews had been back from captivity for almost 20 years. Yet they had not rebuilt the Temple. They had started it. . . even had the Persian king's blessing. . . but abandoned it when local opposition heated up. There are always going to be some nay-sayers.

But now there's a new king on the throne—ZERUBBABEL. He is gung-ho for getting the job done.

But the people are bankrupt—spiritually, financially, politically. Their place of worship (from which they draw strength) is in ruins. They are overwhelmed at the seemingly impossible task of putting it back together.

It's at this point that the Lord steps in and addresses ZERUBBABEL [**ch. 4:6**]: *“Hey Zerubbabel, it's not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.”*

Yet sometimes we let ourselves be overcome with PESSIMISM. We get to thinking that everything around (and within) us is broken beyond repair.

- You may be pessimistic about your job / your business. The economy is struggling. Don't know whether you'll make it.
- You may be pessimistic in your family. There's a lot of fighting & arguing. . . maybe some unfaithfulness. . . the kids are out of control. Things have never been this bad.
- You may be pessimistic about our nation. You love this country, but think it's broken beyond repair.
- You may be pessimistic about the war on terrorism. It's been long and arduous. Not much progress. People are starting to question. Things don't seem to be getting any better.

An article I just read pointed out that “*after 9/11, 70% of the American people admitted to feeling fearful, apprehensive or discouraged about life.*” People who are discouraged generally lack the confidence, enthusiasm, conviction to do what is best.

Pessimism stymies us. We get stuck and can't get going. The Israelites had been like that for years. The Temple in its unfinished state had become part of the landscape. They embraced the failure it represented as something natural and normal.

ZECHARIAH was encouraging them to trade their pessimism NOT for optimism BUT for faith. Don't confuse FAITH with OPTIMISM. They are not the same.

- OPTIMISM is “confidence in one's self”. It is being confident that WE will prevail.
- FAITH is putting our confidence in Him! Being confident that HE will come through.

You know, we can look at our church finances and rejoice! We might even be optimistic about the future. We've been conducting Focus Groups, and you can just feel the excitement building. But optimism alone will not get us there! It's not what we can do in our own strength; it's giving God room to work. It's “*not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit*” says the Lord Almighty.

That's the lesson of ZECHARIAH.

Don't get stuck in *pessimism*. Negative thinking will kill your spirit; it will kill a family, a business, a church.

Don't place too much stock in *optimism* either.

Instead, look to *faith*. Walk by faith. Move forward into the future—not by your own power, but by the might & power of the Spirit of God.

ZECHARIAH didn't only deal with events near at hand; he also had the long view. The rebuilding of the temple was just the first act of a much larger drama—the ushering in of the Kingdom of God—which is the goal of all human history. SO:

II. ZECHARIAH LOOKED DOWN THE LINE

He saw Jesus as the coming Messiah—One who would come as a servant to die for us. . .and, after being raised from the dead, reign victorious over all the earth forever.

He gives details of Messianic events 500 years before they happened. Listen to this from ch. 9:9 and see if you can tell who ZECHARIAH is talking about:

⁹Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

ZECHARIAH was looking ahead. . .we can look back and see this was clearly fulfilled in the life & ministry of Jesus Christ.

But there's more. Remember that part about “reigning victorious over all the earth forever”? That hasn't completely come about yet, has it? But there is coming a day when everything will be under His loving and powerful control. . .all enemies will be vanquished. . .peace will be over all the earth.

ZECHARIAH sees that too! He is able to see all the way to the end of human history when:

¹⁰ . . . Jesus will proclaim peace to the nations,
And His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth
(i.e.: from one end of the earth to the other).

III. ZECHARIAH HAD THE LONG-RANGE APOCALYPTIC VIEW

Have you ever wondered where history is going? How it is all going to end?

Some say:

1. History repeats itself. We just keep going round & round & round & round. A *simplistic view*.
2. History is spiraling upward. [Unwrap the circle.] Eventually we'll reach some sort of utopia. This is the *optimistic view*.
3. History is spiraling downward. It goes on & on, but not headed toward anything in particular. Of course, this is the *pessimistic view*.

What's your view?

- When ZECHARIAH says [in **ch. 14:9**]: “*The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.*”
- When PAUL says [in **Phil. 2:10-11**]: “*That one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*”

That tells me that history is ultimately in God's strong hands, not spiraling downward or out of control!!! He really does have “*the whole world in His hands*”.

The Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ. And all of history will climax when He returns. He is coming back. What a day that will be! When He does, His Kingdom will reign forever & ever.

We can understand Jesus' FIRST COMING, because we're on the other end of it looking back.

But it's harder to believe in His SECOND COMING, because we haven't lived through it yet. It's been so long. Sometimes we wonder if it will ever happen.

ILLUSTRATION: When we went on vacation a couple weeks ago, we had to board our dog JADA. When I walked away from her in that kennel and saw her perplexed expression, I said: “It's OK, Jada, I'm coming back.” She couldn't understand. I wish I had some way of communicating it to her. But no matter, it was still true—I was coming back.

We have so much more. We have the Prophets + the inspired Word of God (Old Testament & New Testament) + the clear words of Jesus Himself. What more do we need?

God knows and controls the future! You & I can only see a short distance ahead; we look through a glass darkly, and see but a poor reflection at that. But that's OK, because the future belongs to Him.

Remember, your future is as bright as the promises of God!!!

~ AMEN ~