

ZECHARIAH SPEAKS TODAY

The Messages of Chapters 1 & 2

Zechariah, along with Haggai, was God's messenger in the time when those whose spirits the Lord had stirred returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and restore the city. The task they faced was a daunting one. The city had been devastated. The temple was totally destroyed. They were few in number and had limited resources. But God was with them, and through His two prophets brought insight, encouragement and guidance to them. I believe that the messages of Zechariah, particularly in the first two chapters have a special significance and relevance for those of us who, in response to the call of the Lord have left the organised denominational churches and are looking for His way of church life. In this message I share some of the light the Lord has given me on the first two chapters.

THE CALL TO REPENT (1:1-6)

"Return to Me, says the Lord of Hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of Hosts." God's desire is for an intimate relationship with His people. Right up until the fall of Jerusalem religious activity had continued in the city. The temple worship carried on as usual. There were priest and prophets functioning in the system. But these official prophets were all false. Only Jeremiah, who was rejected by the religious authorities, was proclaiming the true word of the Lord. Again and again God had spoken, telling the people that He was not impressed with all their meetings, their offerings, their Sabbaths and their noisy songs. (Isaiah 1:12-14. Amos 5:21-23, Jeremiah 7:1-4) Real personal relationship with the Lord had been lost. By the exile God had removed all these religious props, and now among those who had returned to Jerusalem He was reiterating the call to that intimacy and friendship and communion which the Scripture calls "knowing the Lord." Obedient response to that call would be the key to open the door to the blessing of the Lord in a true restoration.

It is this same message, "Return to Me" which has motivated many who have withdrawn from the life of organised churches. They have perceived that often religious activity had prevented close friendship with the Lord and that devotion to the religious club does not equate with knowing Him. They had been occupied with their church, its programmes, its outreaches, its seminars, camps and conferences. Their energies had been absorbed in all the machinery of churchdom. Now God was saying to them, "It is you I want, not your work for Me. Come apart and let Me teach you to know Me." Or, to put it in the language of Hosea the prophet, "I don't want your sacrifices – I want your love. I don't want your offerings – I want you to know Me." (Hosea 6:6. Living Bible)

There is immense significance in the fact that this message, "Return to Me" is heralded forth right at the beginning of this prophetic book, for there can be no true restoration where this message is not heeded. Such returning is the key to all the wonderful promises and prospects unfolded in the subsequent chapters. So, today, God's word is the same, and if leaving the organised church is for any other reason than a burning desire better to know the Lord, then we are not on track for restoration.

“Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.” (Hosea 6:3) should be the cry of our hearts and the message of our lives.

THE REVELATION OF GOD’S DESIRE & PURPOSE.

(1:12-17)

Psalm 25:14 says. “The Lord confides in those who fear Him: He makes His covenant known to them.” (N.I.V.) In Zechariah’s first vision he hears the angel of the Lord say. “O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt thou have no mercy on Jerusalem?” (ch.1 v.12) This “How long” had been the cry in the heart of those exiles who loved the Lord and longed for the day of restoration. The ruined temple and the desolate broken down city were a constant grief to them. The same cry is wrenched from those who are pained by the fractured, divided, competing churches of the West today. “How long, O Lord of Hosts, until you move to restore the power and the unity of the Church as in the beginning?” Then Zechariah was permitted to hear “gracious and comforting words” revealing the unchanging heart of God, and he is instructed to cry out. “Thus says the Lord of Hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.” What an encouragement! God has not forgotten or abandoned His Church. Its welfare is always on His heart. Furthermore, Zechariah now learns that the moment for God to act has come. “I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion: My house shall be built in it, says the Lord of Hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry again. Thus says the Lord of Hosts; My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.” Note the recurrence of the Divine personal “My”, and that key word of restoration “Again”.

As I perceive it, there is in the spirit of many who have abandoned the life of the religious clubs (churches), a sense that we are again living at such a divine moment. Their coming out has not been a coldly rational move taken after much intellectual pondering, but it has been a response to an inner urging of the Spirit of God, and sometimes to the Lord speaking to them “with his strong hand upon them”, as he did to Isaiah (Isaiah ch.8:11) For me personally it has been one of the most exciting features of my experience over the past five years to find more and more brothers and sisters, who have shared this compulsion of the Spirit and are walking in the same path. Among us there is an awareness that this stirring of the spirit of people to come out simply to the Lord who says, “Return to Me” is steadily gathering momentum. “You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favour to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity.” These words from Ps. 102:13-14 are particularly relevant. Those coming out do cherish the Church. They have grieved and wept over its present brokenness and weakness. They long to see her recreated as the pure Spirit-filled vessel of Pentecost, and deep within they have an assurance that God Himself is rising up to do something new in our day.

PUT AWAY YOUR MEASURING LINE!

(2:1-5)

In this next vision Zechariah sees “a man with a measuring line”, and on inquiring he finds that he is going “to measure Jerusalem, to see what is its breadth and what is its length.” But before this surveyor is able to begin his task an angelic messenger intervenes: “Run, say to that young man, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her.”

This passage, I believe, is one of the utmost significance for us. The Spirit is urging us to hear it well! Did you notice who has the measuring line? It is a man. **Man has an inveterate need to measure and demarcate. He wants to define, to limit, to bring everything within the bounds of his human understanding, to organise and to control. It is this “measuring line” mentality which has quenched the Spirit so often, when God has moved to revive and renew. Just when the fresh life and vitality infused by the Spirit begin to burst beyond the predictable bounds of previous experience, someone steps in with some doctrinal or organisational measuring line. Before long the life is confined and boxed in and quenched within the boundaries of another denomination or organisation. There is a strong warning here for us. If we are going to experience restoration God’s way, we must be prepared to throw away our measuring lines. God will not confine Himself to the limits of our conceptions.**

In his commentary on this passage Peter Craigie has captured the essence of it. “Zechariah’s vision emphasises the fact that the future is different from the past, and God’s coming actions cannot be projected on the basis of what used to be.—The implication of the vision is that the Holy City would belong to a different order of reality than that to which the old walled city had belonged. For Zechariah, as much as for his people, it was vital at that critical time in history to grasp the possibility of a future greater than they had imagined. Simply to project into the future the memory of past grandeurs would ultimately be a restraint upon the work of God.” And also pertinent are the comments of Leupold; “The young man represents the average opinion of the day. He believes the city will be rebuilt. But his conception of the city of God is poured into too small a mould. He fails to discern the far greater things that God has promised. He cannot as yet see that God has destroyed the historic Jerusalem in order to build “the Jerusalem that is above.”

There is much talk of revival today. You hear it on every hand. But what people are looking for, and even praying for, is something that will fall under their measuring line. They are looking for revival within the existing order. They are looking for church buildings to be filled, for denominational adherents to multiply, for church growth principles to be fulfilled. This passage is telling us in language that cannot be plainer, “Forget it! God is not going to do it your way.” He is not even going to repeat past revivals. There is danger in the study of past revivals, in that we think they can be reproduced by duplicating the instrumentalities of previous generations. No! The revival that is of God will shatter our divisions and will break our carefully constructed conceptions of New Testament Church. His new thing will be far greater, grander and more wonderful than anything we can imagine with our measuring line mind-set.

“Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls.” No more

humanly measured off walls Hallelujah! Something much more glorious is in view. The only wall will be the protecting Divine fire surrounding God's people, and the sole glory within will be His presence. As Isaiah puts it, "The haughtiness of men shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low: and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day." (Isaiah 2:17) In this restored church there will be no room for the religious superstar, or the church growth entrepreneur. No man will have his name up in lights, or his ministry qualities paraded in the press along with his photograph of course! The indwelling glory of the Lord will wholly extinguish the glory of man. The inhabitants of the restored Zion and Jerusalem will be a people walking humbly with their God, confessing that all is of His grace.

Are we prepared to throw away our measuring lines? Are we ready for God to utterly surprise us in what He does? Are we determined never, never to attempt to organise and control the work of the Spirit? We will be bombarded with questions from those still within the religious systems who are afraid to follow Abraham's example and step out with God not knowing where He is going to lead them. They will want us to show them the measure of the Church we have gone out to seek. They will ask about its leadership, its ministries, its structure and we will have to reply, "We don't know the measures. Only, they will not be the measures of the past or those our minds can comprehend." True, God has said. "The measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem." but that measuring line is His, not that carried by the man. God's measuring line is not marked in humanly understood units, but we can be assured that the restored Church will not be a thing of anarchy and confusion. It will be theocratic. Christ in truth and reality will be its Head, and Divine order will obtain.

THE THREE IMPERATIVES OF RESTORATION

In vs. 6-13 of chapter 2 there are three commands to which we must give careful heed. The first is **FLEE!** "Flee from the land of the north, says the Lord.—Ho! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." This is an explicit command to abandon the organised religious systems of men. They are all spawned by the spirit of Babylon. Not only to those still in the churches is this call issued. We who have come out must heed it too. It is one thing to come out of the organised church, but it is another to have organised church purged from our souls. I meet folk who profess no allegiance to any denomination or fellowship, but who are still seeking to perpetuate the "ministry" they had within the system, and to set up opportunities to perform in that role, or to exercise control over others as they did in church. All of that has to be abandoned. All the religious paraphernalia we have carried has to be stripped off and from it we must flee.

The second command is, **"SING AND REJOICE!"** (2:10) And why are we thus to celebrate? It is because of God's sure promises to restore His Church and cause it to prosper. It is because multitudes from many nations will be joined to the Lord in that day of God's revival. There will be no more this church and that church but all will be God's people. The "One Body" will be restored. "And the Lord will inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem." There is too often a defensive and apologetic attitude prevailing among those who have come out in search of "the City which has foundations, whose architect and builder is the Lord." Rather should we be overflowing with joy and exulting in the sure work of the Lord.

His call to us is as it were the down-payment guaranteeing the fulfillment of His promises to “build My house.” May I encourage you to meditate on the promises of Ch. 2:10-12. Let them sink into your Spirit. Know that they are for you. Then, I am sure, the wellspring of joy will be opened, and your diffidence and defensiveness will give way to rejoicing and singing.

The third and final imperative is, **BE SILENT ALL FLESH BEFORE THE LORD, (Ch.2 v.13)** Again the reason for the command is given. It is because “He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling.” There can be no stronger expression than this of the fact that the restoration of the Church will never take place by the schemes or ingenuity of man. All that is of the flesh, all that emerges from the reasoning of man in regard to the recreating of the Church is to be silenced. This work is God’s and His alone, and what is more He has roused himself to perform it.

We live in an age of crusades, campaigns, church growth programmes, seminars and religious technology. The fertile brain of man is constantly devising new and up-to-the-minute ways to promote the church and multiply its members. The church resembles the Temple court which Jesus so ruthlessly cleansed. It is like the noisy hubbub of a market with conflicting raucous voices hawking their wares, and ever the clinking of money. Into it all rings the prophetic voice of Zechariah, “Be silent all flesh before the Lord” We have to know once and for all that we of ourselves will never bring restoration to the Church. We have to put aside for ever all the plans and schemes of the flesh and wait, yes wait on the Lord. He has the plan. He has roused himself and all that He asks of us is to be ready and humbly obedient to His voice.

In Isaiah 64:1-3 there is recorded the urgent cry that God would rend the heavens and come down. It speaks of the quaking of the mountains, the making of the Lord’s name known to His adversaries and the divine fire. After such a stirring supplication for heaven-sent revival one would expect a call to action, but the following verse says, “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides Thee, who works for THOSE WHO WAIT FOR HIM.” May such expectant “loins- girded- and- lamps- burning” waiting be our response to these great prophetic messages of Zechariah, which the Spirit is quickening afresh in these momentous days in which we live.

Jack Gray.