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Zechariah 1:7-17
Minor Leagues:
Insights from the Minor Prophets
A Glimpse of The Future

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Well, after taking a break from our series for a couple weeks as Rob Mathis and Gwen North both preached from the Gospel of John, we return to the Minor Prophets. Paul preached on Haggai three weeks ago, and Mona Chicks preached on Zephaniah the Sunday before that. I'm thankful for all four of our guest preachers who filled in while I was out, and I hope you were both challenged and encouraged by their messages.

So today we return to the Minor Prophets. And as you heard a couple weeks ago with Haggai, the time frame is now shifted to after the exile, as God's people begin the slow process of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and rebuilding their nation. Based on the dates given in the two prophetic books themselves, the prophet Haggai and Zechariah overlapped by about 3 months. So they were contemporaries.

Zechariah, by-and-large, is a hope-filled book. It's a glimpse of the future with a universal message for humanity where Israel is restored and the nations from around the globe are brought under the reign of the Lord. It's a message about God's presence with His people, and that "His people" is not defined as just the nation of Israel, but is much broader than that, including the people of many nations, much as we see in the Christian Church today.

Today's passage is very specific about when this vision happened: in the month of Shebat (a winter month that encompassed parts of January and February). This is about 3 months later than the word of the Lord that came to him in the first 6 verses. And in this second time of God speaking to Zechariah, God comes to him in a vision that he has one night. The man riding the red horse standing among the myrtle trees is interpreted by many to be Jesus himself, though Zechariah calls him an angel. An angel of the Lord was considered, in essence, to be a visitation by God himself, which we see expressed elsewhere in Scripture where they are interchangeable. So here we have this angel of the Lord, perhaps Jesus, riding a horse and then standing among some myrtle trees. This is really more of a shrub, which grew wild in

Israel, today is grown more intentionally, and can reach heights of up to 20 feet or so.

The myrtle bush was a common symbol of blessing, and even a symbol of the nation of Israel itself. So: **This is a vision of a representative of God, or of God himself, standing in the midst of these trees which represent the nation of Israel.** It's an encouraging picture of God's presence with them and good things to come.

With this representative of God are three other horses (maybe more than three, but three colors of horses are named). In verse 10 we find out they have gone throughout the earth. They're a symbol of how God watches over the earth and is aware of his Creation. They come back with a message that the whole world is at rest and peace. Normally this would be good. We all want peace in life. Who wants stress and anxiety and worry and all that kind of stuff, right? That's what's so great about vacations. Out of the last four weeks that I was gone, about 2 ½ of the weeks were vacation. And I really checked out from all things that bring me stress in my life: I didn't check email, I didn't think about sermons, I didn't think about bills to be paid or school starting soon, or the fact that next year at this time I'll have a kid in college. Talk about stress-inducing. Gwen and I even ditched our kids for about 5 days ("grandma camp"), because as awesome as our kids are, they still can cause stress. It was the most peaceful 5 days I've had in years. They might say the same thing, having 5 days without the parents.

And so here is a message from these horses (angelic horses? They talk in this vision) that the whole earth is at peace. This brings about a response that for us is maybe unexpected when the angel pleads with God, **"How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these 70 years?" (Zechariah 1:12).** There is a questioning of why there is this peace everywhere, which seems odd. Well, in Haggai 2:21-22 (just a few months earlier) there was a prophecy that God "will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother." It's speaking of a future time of calamity for the nations around Israel, as God

then elevates and completely frees Israel. That has to happen before Israel itself can really have peace. And the people want that to happen sooner rather than later. Well, the fact that these angels here in Zechariah report that the world is at peace is a sign that this overturning of the nations prophesied in Haggai hasn't yet happened. It's in God's timing, not theirs. So Israel still has them as a threat. They may all be at peace, but Israel isn't.

But the vision in Zechariah continues with an assurance of a future that *is* positive. God will take care of them. In verses 16 and 17 we read that **God will “return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt, the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem...My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem” (Zechariah 1:16-17).**

I want to focus on these two verses, because in them are four glimpses of the future that bring comfort to God's people as they work to rebuild Jerusalem, and they bring comfort to us more broadly today as well. First, we see here that **God will return to Jerusalem with mercy.** We all need mercy in our lives. It's not a word we use in our Christian faith quite as much as the word “grace” and they're similar. But they're different, too, and I think mercy is under the umbrella of grace. We can think of grace as getting what we don't deserve, or getting what we haven't earned. I would suggest that mercy is something God gives us that we don't deserve – it's an act of grace. Eternity with God is the ultimate and final act of grace, but they can show up in less eternal kinds of ways as well: A relationship, a job opportunity, a gift, and so forth. That's grace.

“Mercy” on the other hand is not getting what we actually deserve to get. A parent who chooses not to punish a child, or to make the punishment less severe than it could have been, is having mercy. When the Huskies could beat the Cougars 56-0 but they instead run more conservative plays later in the game and pull all their starters and instead win 42-0 or something like that, is an act of mercy. We see that one frequently. 😊 And so we see mercy here as well, as God will return to Jerusalem with mercy; they've been a wayward people toward God, but he will be merciful toward them.

The second good word here is that God’s house will be rebuilt. This is certainly a word about the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. But there’s something more going on here as well, and we see it in Zechariah 2:1-5, because the rebuilding of God’s house is not just about a building. It has much more to do with the people. And it’s not just a metaphor for the rebuilding of Israel – joining the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom back together as one nation, gaining their freedom from the different countries whose rule they had been under, and so forth. There’s still more. Zechariah 2:1-5 reads:

“Then I looked up, and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, “Where are you going?” He answered me, “To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.” While the angel who was speaking to me was leaving, another angel came to meet him and said to him: “Run, tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will be its glory within’ (Zechariah 2:1-5). So this “house” is not about a building, it’s about the people. No walls will be able to hold them all together. It’s a “house” without walls, and the Lord will be its glory within. He will dwell in His people, not in a building built by people.

The third good thing we see in 1:16-17 is that Jerusalem – and probably by extension, the rest of Israel as well – will expand. He says, “the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem...” There will be growth in the city – not just in numbers, but its borders: it will get physically bigger. What you see today is not what it will look like in 20 or 100 or 300 years or more. There will be expansion and growth of the city.

And then the fourth good glimpse of the future and promise of God is that the “towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.” We oftentimes think of “prosperity” as material blessing. There is a whole strain of Christianity known as the prosperity gospel that centers its theology on material wealth as a sign of God’s blessing. I think it has a lot of challenges to hold water as a viable theological perspective, beginning with the fact that Jesus himself was

never monetarily rich – as he himself said, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). That certainly doesn’t mean material wealth isn’t a gift from God...but it just isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, and it is mostly a tool God asks us to use to be a blessing to others. And these words here in Zechariah remind us that prosperity isn’t really about material wealth, because although they will again overflow with prosperity, He goes on to day what that means: “The Lord will again comfort and choose Jerusalem.” To be in the good graces of God our creator and in a good relationship with Him *is* to be living with prosperity, and His grace and mercy are all the riches that we need when it comes down to what really matters. So those are four glimpses of the future that God gives them through Zechariah.

Perhaps the greatest glimpse of the future, however, comes in prophecies about a future king who will rule over Israel and even over all the earth. For instance in Zechariah 9:9 we read words that are probably familiar to many of us,

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah 9:9-10).

All four gospels report that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey just a few days before he is crucified and then raised from the dead. Matthew and John explicitly quote verse 9 to show Jesus’ fulfillment of it, and verse 10 shows us that God doesn’t just have Israel in mind, but the nations of the world will have access to this peace that this king will proclaim.

Later in Zechariah 12 we see another glimpse of the future that is fulfilled by Jesus. Zechariah hears the Lord in a vision say these words to him, **“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son”** (Zechariah 12:10). Once again, it’s a prophetic word fulfilled by Jesus, as God moves in ways that we could not possibly anticipate or expect, as his only Son is pierced through his side on the cross.

And so these verses, and Zechariah as a whole, paint a picture of hope for God’s people as they try to rebuild their cities, their nation, and their lives. And at the center of it, in the midst of it with them, is God. He’s standing with them, just as he is there in the middle of the myrtle trees. This is really good news – for them, and for us. We might say that we are “grafted in” to the myrtle tree of Israel through faith in Jesus, and what brings comfort to them brings comfort to us as well. We even get a glimpse of Jesus with us and for us as he rides not a mighty horse (the animal of kings and princes and the wealthy), but a lowly donkey, the animal of the commoner; and we get a glimpse of just how far he will go for us with this prophetic word of his piercing which also came to be. So He is with us and for us.

Where is God present in your life, and perhaps you’ve missed Him?

Perhaps you’re too caught up in the details of something and missing Jesus - as the saying goes, you can’t see the forest for the trees. Maybe in the midst of the myrtle trees of life you can’t see him there. Perhaps some sin has a hold on you and you need God’s mercy in a new way as consequences set in. Maybe like they needed expansion of Jerusalem, you need some kind of expansion – perhaps an expansion of influence for the gospel, or expansion of a ministry you’re involved in. Maybe you’re stressed out with no peace, and wondering how to get through life and you need the peace-giving presence of God to be made known to you. It’s not that He’s not there offering all these things. He’s promised them. He’s offered them. He’s gone beyond that, even, in Jesus and offered eternity through this king who rode a donkey and was pierced for our transgressions. He’s exceeded our expectations. But maybe you just haven’t seen that he’s there with you, or

maybe you have seen that previously – maybe followed Jesus for many years – but lately you’ve struggled to see that God is there for you, and working in your life. I pray that this passage, this glimpse of the future, would help us to see Jesus new and afresh this week, to see that he is with you right where you are, in the midst of life. Let’s pray...Amen.