

The Man With a Measuring Line

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[0 : 00] As always, there's an outline if you'd find that helpful, and it's inside the notice sheet, just on the third side there, if you'd find that helpful this morning. I wonder if you have a dream city, a place perhaps you've visited that you long to live in.

I was looking at one of these surveys, well, two of them actually this week, on the best cities in the world to live in, and there was one that had some great photographs. This was a survey earlier this year, the five best cities in the world to live in.

People know what that one is? That's Calgary in Canada. That was number five. Number four is Toronto in Canada.

Number three is Vancouver in Canada. Number two is Vienna. And number one is Melbourne.

In Australia, which just goes to show that you can be a great city, even if it rains a lot, which it does in Melbourne. There was another study just a couple of months ago, the Mercer study, was more comprehensive, looking at cost of living, personal safety, quality of life, access to education, health in these different cities across the world.

[1 : 11] And that actually had five German-speaking cities in the top seven. So Vienna, Zurich, Munich, Dusseldorf, and Frankfurt were all in the top seven on that one. That was quite a comprehensive one.

And Glasgow came in at number 55. There you go. That's not bad. Just ahead of Belfast. And Aberdeen.

But I had concerns about the methodology of the survey because there was another Scottish city that came in higher than Glasgow, at number 46. So something went wrong there. But I wonder, what would make a city ideal for you to live in?

In this Bible reading we've gone back to this morning, we're going back in time, 2,500 years to when it was written. Lots of the Bible was written before Jesus came. But it's still about God.

And a lot of it is about what God was promising to do in sending Jesus into the world. This man, Zechariah, was a prophet. God gave him messages to pass on to the people.

[2 : 15] And in 520 BC, Zechariah had eight night visions over the course of a night that we have in his book today. Through these visions, God is making promises about the future.

And you might be here thinking, but why would I believe them, these promises about what's going to happen in the future? The remarkable thing about Zechariah is that lots of his promises about the future have now happened.

They were incredibly specific promises about the coming of Jesus into the world that were fulfilled as Jesus came. And that affirmation confirms for us as Christians that Jesus really was a man sent from God, that his claims were true.

It also confirms that, I take it, Zechariah's future promises are validated as well. Because everything he promised from the past has been fulfilled.

So God here is describing what he's going to do in the future. And one of the key pictures that he uses this morning is of two cities. It's that you can divide humanity as though everyone lives in one of two places, one of two cities.

[3 : 26] Now before we move on and look at them, I just wanted to reiterate that these are pictures. So this is like looking at modern art in an art gallery rather than hearing something about politics today.

I don't know how many of you like modern art. Perhaps put your hands, show of hands, how many like modern art? Not many, but probably more than in lots of churches. If you like modern art, you'll love Zechariah.

If you don't, then we need to work at it. Because this is one of the ways God has chosen to speak to us. So we need to work at that.

God describes the future for God's people using language that the people would have understood well at the time. They were a people, the Jewish nation. And they'd been given a land by God, the promised land.

And they went into exile from that land when they disobeyed God. And now, by the time of Zechariah, they're back in the land that God had promised them. So when God describes the future that he has in store for God's people that we're still waiting for today, he talks about it as Jerusalem. [4 : 33] He uses the language in chapter 2, verse 10 of daughter of Zion, the language of Zion. He describes their land in verse 12 as the holy land. Interestingly, it's the only reference in the Bible to the holy land.

But it's the New Testament that helps us understand what was going on there. When the New Testament comes to explain how these promises are fulfilled, it never connects these promises to the physical city Jerusalem and the land around it.

So Zechariah is not about the political situation in the Middle East today. It's just important for us to be aware of that as we get into it. It's not about the nation-state Israel today or the right of the Jewish people today to a land of their own.

Zechariah is just using images and languages from his day, from 520 BC. And through those pictures, God makes promises for us about his future new creation, what we might call heaven today, what we're still waiting for.

So let's dive in and see this tale of two cities. First, we've got a city to flee from. You see the command in verse 7. Zion here just means people of God.

[5 : 41] Anybody who believes God will keep his promises. Verse 7 of chapter 2. Come, O Zion, escape you who live in the daughter of Babylon. Now even in Zechariah's time, Babylon didn't exist anymore.

It had been overthrown. It had been and gone. But in the Bible, this word Babylon becomes like a mythological word. It describes humanity ignoring God.

So if today we're going to describe the different dividing lines across the human race, we might think there are loads of dividing lines. We might think of economically, how people are divided, the global south, the west, the Asian tiger economies.

Maybe we think politically about the divides. Ethnically, if we were thinking religiously, we might think of how there are lots of dividing lines. But the Bible says that ultimately, you can divide the whole human race into two.

There are the people who trust and follow the living God who made us, the God of the Bible. And then there are the people who are not following him. And Babylon is that second group of people.

[6 : 49] In other words, the people in Babylon are not Christians. They might be very religious, following their own ideas about God, their own ideas about morality.

Or they might be completely irreligious and saying there's nothing beyond what I can see. I can make up my own mind how to live. But either way, they've pushed the living God, the God of the Bible, out of their lives.

In that sense, Babylon is the godless city. And Babylon can look very secure and powerful. So in verse 18 of chapter 1, Zechariah describes the nations around God's people as weapons.

Then I looked up, verse 18, and there before me were four horns. Well, horns were weapons at the time. They were used for goring and tearing and terrorizing.

So they're symbols of military strength. A bit like if Zechariah was having this vision today, he might have seen four aircraft carriers to demonstrate the security and strength of the world without God.

[7 : 52] And what does Zechariah say? It's really helpful for us. Zechariah keeps asking what the pictures mean. I asked the angel who was speaking to me, what are these? He answered me, these are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

God's people have been conquered and pillaged and taken into exile by the nations around them. And God says, the days are coming when Babylon will be destroyed.

So in Zechariah's vision, he describes how he sees the horns being terrified and thrown down. And then in chapter 2, verse 9, just have a look at what God says. Chapter 2, verse 9, So the Bible promises very clearly that there's a judgment coming for everyone who lives in God's world today without putting him at the very center of our lives.

And a lot of us find that very difficult, the Bible promises that. But the Bible also assures us that that will be a day of good news for our world.

That God is a God of justice. And nobody on that day will be looking at somebody else saying, this isn't fair on that person. They didn't do anything wrong to deserve God's judgment.

[9 : 21] But you might still be thinking, how is it fair for God to judge the world like that? Why can't I make up my own mind what's right and wrong? What if I disagree with God about the best way for me to live my life?

Now we might find that way of thinking very attractive, because we have very clear ideas about right and wrong. But on reflection, none of us really thinks like that consistently. You can tell that just by asking yourself the question, is there anybody anywhere in the world today doing something that you think is wrong, even if they think it's right?

Of course there is. Of course there is. And yet without God, there's no way of saying that there is objective, right and wrong, good and evil. We're just accidental collections of atoms.

We're being driven along by natural forces. Good and evil are just our personal preferences. And we might see something we think is profoundly evil, but actually that's just our view.

And we've got no grounds really for saying that our view trumps theirs. Well the good news of the Bible is that there is a God who's perfectly good and just, and that he will judge everybody in the world with perfect knowledge for everything that's ever been done wrong.

[10 : 42] The problem for us is that God's standards of righteousness are much higher than ours. No doubt we've got terrible cultural blind spots.

You just look at societies in history and societies around the world, and you see these obvious blind spots, things that we're sure are wrong, that people just didn't see, people just didn't realise in the past.

We must be the same if we've got the humility to admit it. And even with the things we can see, we know we're not the people we ought to be. Just think, if the five worst things that I'd ever said and thought and done were put on the screen to demonstrate this to you, I'd just have to leave Glasgow and never come back.

It'd be so embarrassing. Surely it would be the same for all of us. And God sees all of that. The perfect God who's far more bothered by the way we've treated each other and the way we've treated him than we'll ever be.

So when he promises that his judgment is coming on Babylon, we need to flee. Flee the city. We need a way out of that judgment. And that's what he offers us next.

[11 : 55] That's our second point. A city to flee from. Secondly, a city to long for. The Lord then describes what the future holds for anybody who trusts Jesus Christ.

In chapter 2, verse 1, he shows Zechariah a man with a measuring line in his hand. In verse 2, I asked, where are you going? He answered me, to measure Jerusalem.

To find out how wide and how long it is. So this man, he trusts that God is going to rebuild his city for his people again. And he wants to measure it to get ready.

And then God says, put the trundle wheel away. Look at verse 3. Then the angel who was speaking to me left. And another angel came to meet him and said, Run.

Tell that young man, Jerusalem will be a city without walls. Because of the great number of men and livestock in it. So the man's future vision, even though he's a man of faith, he's got the dimensions all wrong.

[12 : 56] He's underestimated what God is doing. That the city of God, what we're looking forward to, there'll be too many people in it for walls. And if we go on to chapter 2, verse 11, the Lord expands on that promise.

Verse 11, So for anybody, from any nation, no matter what they've done, no matter what they've become, the offer is open.

And all over the world today, people are accepting that offer from God. In Scotland today, we forget that. What's going on globally for the church.

We miss that God is doing something across the world today that the first followers of Jesus could barely have dreamt of. And because we forget that, we lose our confidence in speaking about Jesus to our own friends.

Because we get cynical and we think, they won't be interested. It doesn't work. Let me just quote from the writer David Field. He says, It took 1,400 years for 1% of the world's population to become

Christians.

[14 : 06] For that to double to 2% took the next 360 years. It was then 170 years for that to grow from 2% to 4%.

Then between 1960 and 1990, the proportion of the world's population who were Bible-believing Christians rose from 4% to 8%.

Now, one-third of the world's population confesses that Jesus is Lord and 11% of the world's population are evangelical Christians. The evangelical church is growing twice as fast as Islam and three times as fast as the world's population.

South America is turning Protestant faster than continental Europe did in the 16th century. South Koreans reckon that they can evangelize the whole of North Korea within five years when that country opens up.

And then there's the Chinese church. tens of millions of Christians who've learned to pray, who have confidence in Scripture, who know about spiritual warfare, have been schooled in suffering, and over the next hundred years, we trust, will burst onto the global mission field.

[15 : 18] Well, God says, the city of God will be incredible. And we see the effects of that today as God builds his people ready for that city.

Then the Lord tells us a few other things about the city. And let me just say, the reason it's a city is to emphasize that there's going to be so many people. So, if cities aren't really your thing, just think of something that is your thing.

It's not that it's going to be a concrete jungle that God is building. Look at what else he offers to us in this city. There are protected people. When God said there'd be no walls around the city, in 500 BC, you'd be thinking, it's not safe.

But look at verse 5. The Lord says, and I myself will be a wall of fire around it, declares the Lord. And I will be its glory within. Just imagine that.

In a world of threats, we live with the threat of terrorism, of crime, of antibiotic resistance, of climate change, of domestic violence, of bullying.

[16 : 24] And in God's promised city, there's nothing to be afraid of anymore. There's not even anything to worry about anymore. Protected from harm by a wall of fire that is God himself.

Notice as well that the people of this city are a precious people. They are precious to God. We have that in verse 8. For this is what the Lord Almighty says, after he has honoured me and sent me against the nations that have plundered you, for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye. Well, the apple is the pupil, that most sensitive, most valuable part of the eye. I don't know if you can think of a time when your eye was hurt, when you were hurt in the eye.

It makes you wince, doesn't it, just thinking about having your eyes hurt. And the Lord says, if you're a Christian, that's how I feel when anything happens to you.

You are the most precious, most valuable thing that I have. And the people in this city are a happy people. Happy because they know God.

[17 : 34] That's the key. God is there. In verse 10, shout and be glad, O daughter of Zion, for I am coming and I will live among you, declares the Lord. Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people.

I will live among you. Well, friends, that was what we were made for, to know God. And we've lost it. And the Lord offers us a relationship with him through Jesus Christ today.

But in the future, we look forward to a day when we'll know him fully and perfectly in a way that will be infinitely and inexhaustibly satisfying. A happy people.

So, friends, this is the city that we long for. It's the United Nations. There are protected people, precious to God, and happy because God is with them.

For us this morning, the offer is there. If you've not done it before, you could turn back to God today and share this hope. You could come and be part of this. For those of us who've already done that, this vision should really inspire us.

[18 : 45] It should stir up the hope within us about the future, about what's coming. Don't dream about moving to Vienna.

Don't dream about moving to Canada. And it's good to love our great city, Glasgow. It's good to. It's good to serve the city and love the city. But we should never feel too at home here.

Set your heart instead on this city. The city of God's promise. The real city to long for. But what about the present?

Well, in the meantime, we've got a job to do. A job to get on with. That's our third point from these visions. Remember, Zechariah saw the horns that were going to get smashed down. Well, let's look at how they get smashed in verse 20 of chapter 1.

Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. I asked, what are these coming to do? He answered, these are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise their head.

[19 : 52] But the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people.

Why craftsmen? Well, we looked at this last week and the sermons online to introduce you to Zechariah. The point is the big project that God's people had to do at that time in 520 BC was rebuild the temple of God.

So this is the ordinary people of God getting on with the task that God had given them to be craftsmen. And today God's people, Christians, have a different kind of building project.

Not with bricks and mortar. Christians themselves today, we, the people, are the temple of God. And God calls us to build.

God builds his people by his spirit as we prayerfully speak God's word to each other. He builds his temple as we prayerfully speak about Jesus to people who don't yet know him and they put their trust in him.

[21 : 01] The temple grows. The temple grows as we lay down our lives more committedly in obedience to God as we grow up as stones in the temple. If I speak to a friend about Jesus and I just move them a step closer to putting their trust in him and eventually they become a Christian I've played a really significant part in building the temple of God today.

That's the task for us as the ordinary people of God and we can trust God to do the rest that he will build his city and that's really important for us today because faced with the problems that we can see around us it's tempting to start thinking that the task of sharing your faith of evangelism of speaking about Jesus is some kind of little sideshow it's not the most urgent thing and maybe it's not even the most important thing today and yet that is the primary task that the Lord has given us as his church we make disciples of Jesus Christ in Glasgow for the world and God has promised that he's the one who will put the whole world right if you look at verse 13 be still before the Lord all mankind because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling in other words God will do this not that we just do nothing as Christians we should be concerned for our world and people in need but we watch expectantly in awe of God we let him be God and our place is simply to trust him and get on with the job he's given us to do obeying him prayerfully speaking God's word to each other and to the world but if we're not the ones who God is going to use to create this new city that we long for how is God going to do it well that's our final point this morning so we've seen a city to flee from a city to long for we've heard our job to get on with and lastly we have a mysterious guest there is a real tension in Zechariah 2

I don't know if you noticed that as you read it a confusion as you read it just look again who is speaking in verse 9 about Babylon have a look in verse 9 who is this I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them well it can't be Zechariah can it raising his hand to do that that must be God doing that raising his hand in judgment but then look at verse 8 just above it this is what the Lord Almighty says after he that's the Lord Almighty has honoured me the speaker and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you verse 9 I will surely raise my hand against them then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me the Lord is being sent by the Lord same mystery comes in verse 10 who is speaking in verse 10 shout and be glad O daughter of Zion for I am coming and I will live among you declares the

Lord so who's coming the Lord clearly the Lord is coming in that promise but look at the end of verse 11 I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you the Lord is the sent one and the one who is sent later in Zechariah we're going to see in the coming weeks that mystery goes deeper we hear of the one who is sent into the world that he will suffer he'll ride into Jerusalem on a donkey as God's king and be struck down by God and then the Lord says in Zechariah they will look on me the one whom they have pierced well it's a mystery that could only be resolved by what happens 550 years later when Jesus Christ steps into our world God the son sent by God the father on a mission to die to save Jesus spoke about two ways to live two cities if you like one that faces the judgment of

God one the hope of eternal life in John chapter 5 as the sent one he says this very truly I tell you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but

has crossed over from death to life two places two ways God has stepped into our world once in the person of his son so that we can trust him and become forgiven people of hope and he promises the Lord Jesus will come again to take us to the city that he's promised here let's pray together father God we marvel at the glorious recreation you have planned we thank you for our glimpse this morning of the new Jerusalem the city we wait for open our hearts we pray and enable us to set our hope on this great city of cities where the nations dwell in security precious to you and enjoying your presence and on this day of Pentecost when we celebrate the gift of your spirit we ask that he will empower us to be your craftsmen today by our obedience by speaking your word that the temple of your church will grow and we will together be a suitable dwelling place for you while we wait for the city you have promised that we long for in Jesus name we pray
[26 : 49] Amen