

Be Builders for God

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[0 : 0 0] And we're hoping you recognize something like this from the first week, which is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when God set up this perfect place where he was in charge.

But you might remember the next week, and the next image that's going to come up, reminds us that that all changed when the snake spoke to Adam and spoke to Eve and managed to get them to do the thing that God didn't want them to do.

And as a result of that, this perfect place was broken, and Adam and Eve had to leave. Now last week, we hope the children remember this image. Do you see this one? And this is the story of God speaking to Abraham, and God gave Abraham three promises.

Now can anyone tell me what the first of those promises was? Jamie, what was the first one? That Abraham would have children, which was an amazing thing, because Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old, and they didn't think that was likely.

Now can anyone remember the second promise? Someone who's not in my family. All right, Jake, what was the second promise? Ooh, it's good, but not what we're looking for.

[1 : 1 3] What's that in the bag? Ed, Ed, Ed. He would be the father of many. He'd be the father of many, yes. So not only would he have children, but he would have so many children that outnumber the stars and outnumber the sand on the sea.

Can anyone remember the third promise? Again, Jamie, who's not related to me. All right, Jamie, what was the third promise? I think you're going into too much detail there.

So I think if you combine Urans with Jake's answer, we might get nearly the right one, which was that God promised Abraham that his people would inherit the land he was living in just now, even if he didn't get to see it.

And so just before the children go through, after we do some more singing, I thought I'd leave you all with an image, and it's this. Can you see what this is? It's sand, isn't it?

All the grains of sand that God said, Abraham, you're going to have more children, there will be grains of sand all around you. And I'm going to shape these children and their descendants and their descendants and their descendants into a people who are going to bless many nations.

[2 : 3 1] A people through whom the ultimate savior of the entire universe is going to come. And that person is Jesus.

And we're going to learn about that in the weeks to come in the king, the snake, and the promise. We're going to sing together as the band come up. And when we get to the end of the singing, the kids are going to leave and go through the kid zone.

But don't worry, we'll see them again because communion this week is all age, and they'll be coming back to join us after the sermon. So let's stand with Andrew and the band, and we'll sing together. Come on and follow.

Come on and follow. Come on and follow. Come on and follow.

All of us are struggling to speak today after a tremendous football result yesterday. But hopefully my voice will hold out for long enough. And we're beginning this new series in Zechariah.

[4 : 13] I'm really excited about this. I've been praying for us as a church that the spirit will be at work in our series in Zechariah through this old prophet who might at the moment seem to have very little relevance to us.

But I hope that we'll see that what he says is directly relevant for us in our lives. Let's pray together now. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word, the Bible.

We pray that you will speak to us this morning, that each one of us will encounter you, the awesome God. So give us ears to hear your word, heads to understand, and hearts that are willing not to turn from you, but to follow you more closely.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. You might have never read Zechariah before, and it's great to study it because you may have heard people say this before, but just being aware, if you are a Christian, you're going to spend forever in the new creation.

And at some stage, you will meet Zechariah. And he might ask you, what do you think of my book? And if you've never read it, that's going to be awkward. So we're going to look at it together. But you might be wondering, apart from that one awkward moment in heaven, why would I read it?

[5 : 26] So I'd like to start this morning by teeing up the series, introducing us to Zechariah through 1 Peter in the New Testament. And I've got some words on the screen. This is a crucial passage in the New Testament about the Old Testament.

Peter says this. He's just described the Christian message of Jesus. And he says, Even angels long to look into these things.

So just notice three things here about Zechariah's message. The first is that he was inspired by the Spirit of Christ. Did you notice that? Verse 11. When the prophets spoke, it was the Spirit of Christ in them.

So if you want to know Jesus Christ better, here in Zechariah are words that he inspired. 500 years before he came into the world as a man.

He took flesh and was made man. I guess it's like if you imagine finding an old letter. You're doing some clearing out in your house and you find this letter that's been there. You don't know how long it's been there, but long before you moved in.

[6 : 56] And you're not very interested in this old letter. And then you realize that it was written by the person you admire most in the world. It was written by the person you love more than anyone in the world.

It was written by someone who died for you. It was written by the person who made you. All of those things are true when we turn to Zechariah. Secondly, Zechariah is about the Gospel.

Now the Gospel is the news of what Christians believe. It's the news of who Jesus is and what he did. And in verse 10 Peter says, The prophet spoke of the grace that was to come to you.

And in verse 11 he says, The Spirit of Christ predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. So when we look at the prophets like Zechariah, their message fundamentally is about God's coming grace when Jesus comes, about the sufferings of Jesus Christ when he came into the world to die for sins, and about his glories that he rose and ascended and is coming back to judge.

Thirdly, Zechariah was written for us. So the prophets like Zechariah had the privilege of God speaking to them, and yet they would have rather been us.

[8 : 06] They longed to know what their predictions were about. Often they made predictions that had a sort of initial fulfillment in their time, but they knew there was something deeper going on, and they searched and inquired carefully.

What was it they were predicting? And it was revealed to them, verse 12, that they were not serving themselves, but you, but Christians. So do you see how privileged we are this morning?

The prophets and the angels long to look into these things that we are looking at today. I hope that it makes us want to spend time in Zechariah.

It's going to take some work to understand his message, but it was written by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ about the gospel to serve us today at St. Silas.

But when we read the writings of a prophet like Zechariah, one big question I guess we often ask is, how do I apply this? What do I do with this? And thankfully, with Zechariah, we can work that out.

[9 : 07] We're going to do that now. What's key for us in Zechariah is that one of the pictures of the Christian life today is that together we, Christians as God's people, are the temple of God.

Before Jesus came, there was a temple that God instructed his people to build, and it embodied his presence in the world. It was a symbol of where he was specially present among his people.

Then Jesus came, and so God came not as a temple anymore, but as a person into our world. For us today, we as believers in Jesus Christ, we are the temple of God, because God dwells in us by his Spirit today.

And we see that again in 1 Peter, this New Testament letter, just in the next chapter, some words on the screen. Peter writes, See that?

To be a holy priesthood. So what is God doing in the world today? He's building a temple. He builds out, as we speak, God's word about Jesus to the world, and other people turn to Jesus in faith, and they become stones in the temple of God, God's Spirit living in them.

[10 : 29] And God is building the temple up. As we speak God's word to each other at St. Silas, and we grow in our knowledge and love of God together, we are being built on the living stone as the temple.

So this is really important. We are God's construction workers today. We are bricklayers, laborers, surveyors, if you like. And God is building his temple today through our work for him, as we prayerfully speak God's word to each other and to the world, and as we live lives of joyful obedience to the word.

And God wants us to use all that we are and everything we have for that great construction project. We give our money to support other builders. We give our gifts and our time.

We invest in each other to build each other up for the glory of God. So what does all that have to do with Zechariah? Well, we have to understand the Zechariah effect.

When Zechariah was alive and God gave him this message, this prophetic message, what effect did he have? What was the Zechariah effect? I just made that term up, by the way.

[11 : 41] It's not a theological term, but the Zechariah effect. Now, Zechariah was speaking and writing in 520 BC. And here's the story so far. God had chosen a people, the descendants of Abraham, to be his people.

He turned them into this great nation, and he brought them into the promised land. And then his people rejected him. God sent prophets to warn them, and they didn't listen.

And in 587 BC, he sent his people into exile for rejecting him. It was a catastrophe. The Babylonian Empire was raised up by God. They went to Jerusalem. They destroyed the temple.

They took the people out of the land that God had given them. Now, by 520 BC, God has graciously been on the move again, and he's brought his people back out of exile.

He raised up a new emperor, the Syrian Emperor Cyrus, who took over the Babylonian Empire. He marched in in a bloodless coup. And the first thing Cyrus did, in God's sovereign plan, was allowed the Jewish people to go back to their homeland.

[12 : 44] And they went back to Jerusalem. Let's just see that together by turning to Ezra. Now, this is going to come on the screen as well, but if you wanted to turn to it, I put my bookmark in it, on page 476 of the church Bibles.

Ezra is describing this moment when the people of God got back into the land God had promised them. Now, in Ezra 3, they put down the foundation to rebuild the temple so that God could be with them again.

And there was great rejoicing, although some of them who'd seen the old temple wept because it wasn't as grand. But then, in Ezra chapter 4, there is opposition from the nations around.

They see what's going on, and they start persecuting the people. And in verse 24 of Ezra 4, this is what happens. Thus, the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

That's the crisis. The work on the temple has stopped. Then chapter 5, verse 1. Now, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Idil, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

[14 : 00] Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, son of Josedach, set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

Do you see that? Do you see what happened? So the application for the book of Zechariah is build. That's why we have to understand what our great construction project is for God today.

As we read Zechariah, we need to ask ourselves, how does what I'm hearing here motivate me to devote myself to building the temple of God today?

Now, for God's people then, in the 6th century BC, building the temple was with bricks and mortar. For us now, the church today, we are the temple of God, and we build it by prayerfully speaking the word of God to each other and to our non-Christian friends in Glasgow.

The Zechariah effect. We should expect that the Lord will use our time in Zechariah in our hearts to make us want to build for him. So let's dive into chapter 1.

[15 : 09] And our first point from chapter 1 is the history of Israel and a call to repent. So it's October 520 BC, and God speaks to Zechariah, and it's a stern message in verses 2 and 3.

The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore, tell the people, this is what the Lord Almighty says, return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you.

So this is a new generation back in the land, and they're in danger of giving up on God. And it's very serious. They know that just by looking at what happened to their forefathers last time they were in the promised land.

It's a cautionary tale. Verse 4, Do not be like your forefathers. They stopped trusting the God of the Bible. They started worshipping the gods of the people around them, and God judged them for that.

They were worried about the harvests, and instead of praying to God, who they knew through the Bible, they saw that the nations around them had these other gods, fertility gods, and you could pray to them.

[16 : 19] And so they started building shrines to these other gods in the land. And that offended God deeply. You see, the God of the Bible is a jealous God.

He describes himself like that in verse 14. I don't know if that jumped out at you when we read it. I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. I don't know what you think about that, but sometimes we find that hard today because we tend to always use the word jealousy in a negative way, meaning a bit as a bad thing.

But there is a godly jealousy, a good jealousy. You see, it's not wrong to be jealous if something is rightfully yours and it's taken away. If a man loves a woman and they make a commitment of marriage to each other, and then the wife chooses to love somebody else instead, it's not wrong for the husband to feel jealous in that situation.

He feels jealous because he loves her and she had promised her love to him. Well, in a similar way, God loves his people like a marriage relationship. God is like the husband, the people like the bride.

And when his people love other things more than him, he's jealous for the love that should rightfully be his. And so, God warns the people from Israel's history, be faithful to God.

[17 : 46] And then you notice what the Lord said, he said, return to me. Not that we return to a set of commandments or rules that we have to obey. Above all, the Christian faith is about a relationship with God.

Return to me. Come back to God and know him personally. I don't know whether you've ever been to Madame Tussauds, the waxworks museums. But you go around and there's these wax models of all these characters from the present time, celebrities, and from history as well.

And I remember this happening to me that when I was a boy, I went round and as a child, you don't know who all the people are. And I remember seeing this amazing waxwork of someone sitting on a bench and I went over and I was looking really closely at them and they moved and I realized it was a person who just stopped for a rest.

But I didn't know that. I just thought they were a character from history. And I can remember it because it was very frightening. But suddenly, this person, they weren't a character from history, frozen in time by a model.

They were a real, living person. And that's the experience of every Christian when we come to put our trust in Christ, that suddenly Jesus isn't just this historical figure that we might have a picture of.

[19 : 00] He is alive today and we know him. Christianity is a religion based on a relationship with its founder, with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Lord calls us to put that relationship first in our lives, knowing God as our Father through the Lord Jesus, our brother who died for us.

return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you. And we can't get on and build for God today, serve God wholeheartedly, if we're not nurturing that relationship with him ourselves by his spirit, listening to him day by day in his word, talking to him in prayer as we go through life.

But if you've been in Jerusalem when Zechariah brought this message, I wonder if you'd have been quite shocked because if you looked around in Jerusalem at that time, the shrines that had been erected to false gods, people weren't going to the shrines anymore.

Lots of them had been torn down. So what would you have seen to make God warn the people so sternly, return to me? Well, the answer is nothing much.

[20 : 15] The people of God back in the land, they'd have looked like every other nation. they were just getting on with their own lives. And that's exactly the problem. They've been given a major job to do to rebuild the temple of God so that God dwells with his people again and they weren't doing it.

They were just living for the same things that everyone else lives for. The priority for their life wasn't their relationship with God. So let me just say, I just wonder if the same could be said of us in Glasgow today, that sometimes we just look too much like everybody else.

We're busy studying for exams, improving our homes, investing in our careers, heading off on our holidays. Not that those things are wrong, but our priority day by day stops being building the temple of God.

And we need to hear the Lord saying to us, return to me. repent and put your relationship with me first again. That's Zechariah's message.

Now things are left like that for three months. And then comes the 15th of February, 519 BC. It's perhaps been an ordinary day in Jerusalem, but look what happens in the evening in verse 8.

[21 : 38] During the night I had a vision and there before me was a man riding a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses.

This is our second point. The horse is on patrol and a peaceful world. Zechariah sees this wood in a steep valley, probably a picture of the darkness, of the mood in Jerusalem.

And then there are these horses. They're around myrtle trees, which is a picture of kind of hope and new life. And then these horses have four different colors, one for each point of the compass. And what are they for?

Verse 9, Zechariah asks what we're asking. What are these, my lord? The angel who was talking with me answered, I will show you what they are. Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, they are the ones the lord has sent to go throughout the earth.

Kathy and I watch Musketeers, this BBC family drama. It's a bit of a guilty pleasure. And in the Musketeers set at the time of the French Revolution, these brave musketeers were there to defend the king.

[22 : 47] They spent a lot of their time just kind of going around on horseback around France. But it's a message to the people. The king is in control here. The king is watching what happens in his country.

Well, likewise, the lord says, my horses go out across the world. They know what's going on. God is watching. And what these horses find as they gallop across the globe is the first key reason why the people weren't building the temple in verse 11.

And they reported to the angel of the lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, we have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and peace. It sounds like good news, doesn't it?

But it's not good news. That's the problem. For Israel, the nations around them had conquered them and taken them off into exile and then ganged up on them to stop them living for God and rebuilding the temple.

And when they looked at those nations, they were doing very well. So they were thinking, where's the justice? Living for God doesn't seem to make sense. Why should we spend all our resources building this temple for God when the nations that live for themselves are having a great time?

[24 : 03] And we face exactly that kind of struggle today. One of the reasons we don't want to build for God is the way of the world seems to work, doesn't it?

A lot of the time. What I mean by the way of the world is the non-Christian world, the world ignoring God. We see it all around us. In Glasgow, we see a lot of suffering and poverty, but we see a lot of non-Christians having a great time.

And we want what they've got. being a Christian construction worker, a temple builder, is going to take our time, our money, our energy, our gifts, and we look at the people around us and they seem comfortable.

And we want to join with that instead. So we drift away from God and his priorities. And the horses give us a message. We need to be assured from God that he is watching the world all the time.

He sees the apparent contentment of people who don't live for him. Perhaps even the smug way they look down at Christians. And one day, God is going to act.

[25 : 13] Verse 14, that the angel who was speaking to me said, proclaim this word. This is what the Lord Almighty says. I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am angry with the nations that feel secure.

I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity. God's judgment is coming. It came on the empires that were around at that time in the ancient Near East as God brought them down.

They no longer are empires in our world. And ultimately, that was a foretaste of what God promises is coming to our world. In Acts chapter 17, the Lord promises that he set a day when he will judge the world with justice.

He will send Jesus Christ to do that. He has raised him from the dead to prove that that is what he will do. And as far as the Bible is concerned, we as God's people should hear that promise as good news.

It is good news. It means that every wrong will be accounted for. There is a Christian, Gary Haugen, who heads up the International Justice Mission. He goes around the world trying to seek justice in hard places.

[26 : 26] And he writes this, Standing with my boots deep in the reeking muck of a Rwandan mass grave where thousands of innocent people have been horribly slaughtered, I have no words, no meaning, no life, no hope if there is not a God of history and time who is absolutely outraged, absolutely furious, absolutely burning with anger towards those who took it into their own hands to commit such acts.

See, God's justice is good news for our world. We long for justice and the Lord assures us that justice is coming. God is perfectly good and he's watching. The challenge for us is to see that about our friends who live nice lives but ignore God because God is angry when people live in his world as though he's not there.

And if we're against God by ignoring him, the source of all the goodness we're enjoying, then he will be against us when he demonstrates his justice. So instead of being lured away from God by the comfort we see people enjoying around us, we need to return to him.

But living for God isn't just about avoiding God's judgment, it's also the way to prosper and that's what we see in our third point. Zechariah's first vision ends with this great promise, the word of the angel and a glorious future.

Just have a look with me at verse 16. Therefore, this is what the Lord says, I will return to Jerusalem with mercy and there my house will be rebuilt and the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem, declares the Lord Almighty.

[28 : 09] God is using language that the people then would have understood to say the glory days are coming. God is going to build his temple and his kingdom again. He will come back to be with his people forever.

And as Zechariah goes on, as we'll see it in the coming weeks, it becomes more and more clear that he's not describing anything that could have been fulfilled and finally finished with before Jesus came.

There's something deeper going on here. What God is promising here is the new heavens and the new earth, the future we're still waiting for. Verse 17, proclaim further, this is what the Lord Almighty says, my towns will again overflow with prosperity and the Lord will again comfort and choose Jerusalem.

It's like the people of Syria today being promised a day when their towns will be rebuilt, their homes will be secure, they'll be able to go to schools and hospitals because they'll reopen.

Days of prosperity coming again. And that's the glorious future that God promises to us if we turn to Jesus Christ. Above all, we'll enjoy his presence forever.

[29 : 15] That's the highlight of our future hope. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. So I was listening to Radio 2 recently on a Friday afternoon. It's Simon Mail's Drive Time. I don't know if any of you listen to Simon Mail's Drive Time.

But I've been listening to Simon Mail since he was cool and on Radio 1. And I've got older and he's got relegated to Radio 2 where people like me now listen. But people phone in on a Friday afternoon and they put in a song request and they tell Simon Mail what they're doing at the weekend.

And recently when I was listening, Susie and Sam are on their way for a weekend break in Cornwall. So they request this 90s nightclub song.

Gary is spending the weekend watching his son playing sport. Phil tells us that he's running an Ironman. John says that he's at home cooking a nice dinner for his wife and the wine is already open.

And I look at the clock on my car and it's still 5 o'clock. Now, that's not wrong. None of those things that I've just described are sinful, of course. Some of them are great things to do. That's normal life for lots of people.

[30 : 19] But put together, what that radio show tells me, the message is, life is about you. You spend your weekend indulging yourself after your busy week at work because you deserve it.

How do you want to spend your time for you? And it feels with the happy songs that they request and their excited voices as they're as though that way of life really works.

That's what life's all about. You know, nobody phones up Simon Mayo in my experience and says, Simon, I'm actually, I'm really shattered because last night I was at International Cafe at my church trying to show God's love to the internationals.

Tomorrow I'm hanging out with a Christian friend who's struggling. I'm going to look at the Bible with them. And on Sunday, it's a big day because it's church and it's hospitality and it's caring for others and being at church. No one says that.

So I listen to Drive Time and I think, I want my weekend to look more like their weekend. You know, if I just shape my life a bit more around this stuff instead of around God and his building project, maybe I'd be happier.

[31 : 27] Well, if that's how any of us feel, God says, that is no way to make your life count. He says, return to me, put knowing me first, and I will return to you.

The world without God seems to work today, but it's not right and it faces a dreadful day. And God's people face a wonderful future when he'll fully and finally be with us forever and we'll prosper.

We're going to hear more about that in the coming weeks, what that will look like and how God will accomplish his plan through Jesus Christ. But for now, our response should be that we turn back to God in our hearts and we build for him.

Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much for the privilege that you work through us.

That your work of great mercy in the world today of building your people, building your temple, is a work that we see you do as we ordinary people do our best for you.

[32 : 36] Father, we thank you for your mercy that you warn us in your word to return to you and you promise that when we do that, you return to us. Father, we pray that you'd help us to see this world, this world, your world through the eyes of your word.

That when we see the world seeming to prosper without you, we would remember your promise that a day of judgment is coming, that we will remember your horses watching.

And Father, we thank you for your promises that we look forward to a day when you will fully and finally be with us forever and we will prosper. Help us to set our hope firmly on those promises that we might build for you today and see you grow your church.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. We're going to respond to God's word by singing together now. There'll be two songs. As the second song begins, our group threatening to be commanded by the congregation is the most part of God's opportunity.

Amen.