

Zechariah: A City of Peace and Faithfulness

Zechariah 8:1-13

Introduction

The State of Emergency that has been in place due to the corona virus pandemic has been lifted, and, after a long time, I am very happy to be able to gather with you all here at KDDI Hall for worship. I feel like I'm back home! However, as is often said, even if the virus is under control, our daily lives and society will not completely go back to "normal." From now on, our daily life and social life will have to be clearly different from what it was before the Corona virus. Will it be the same for the church?

The prophet we are going to look at today is Zechariah. He speaks of spiritual renewal and hope for the future, to a people who have returned to their homeland, but are still struggling to get everything back to normal—to get everything right. This called for a new challenge. They needed to be spiritually renewed and have a clear view of the hope of the future. This seems to reflect our own desire to be restored in the midst of the Corona pandemic.

Zechariah 8:1-13

¹ And the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying,

² "Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.

³ Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.

⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age.

⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts?

⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country,

⁸ and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness."

⁹ Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets who were present on the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. ¹⁰ For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in, for I set every man against his neighbor.

¹¹ But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts.

¹² For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

¹³ And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong."

The chapter we just read, chapter 8, is the closing of the first half of the book of Zechariah and provides a connection to the second half. Zechariah's prophecy can be summarized in two ways. The first is spiritual renewal and encouragement. This is

especially for those who will be involved in rebuilding the temple and rebuilding the nation, so that they can be spiritually renewed to meet the challenge.

In the second half of the book (chapters 9-14), Zechariah shows hope for the future. That hope extends to the distant future when the Messiah will come and the Kingdom of God will be realized. These are the two main points of today's message. They are foundational for us as we live in the here and now—spiritual renewal and hope for the future.

1. The Prophet Zechariah

The prophet Zechariah was active in the 6th-5th century BC. He worked with the people who returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple and to rebuild the nation. Zechariah's name means "the Lord will remember." It is likely that he was of priestly descent. At this same time, there was also a prophet named Haggai.

Ezra 5:1-2. Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

In fact, the reconstruction of the temple was not going smoothly. It had the backing of the Persian Empire (King Darius and King Artaxerxes), but because of interference, the people's morale dropped and the reconstruction had to be stopped.

4:6. Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

Zechariah encouraged the returning Jews to trust not in their own strength or wisdom, but in the power of God's Spirit. In the distress of hindrances and interruptions, the key is to trust in the Spirit of the Lord.

2. Spiritual Renewal

In Zechariah chapter 8, which we just read, there is a declaration of God's jealousy.

8:2, 3. Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.

God was jealous for the people because of his great love for them. Just as the people working to rebuild the temple needed to be constantly renewed and encouraged by God's love, if any of you want to rebuild, redo, or renew your life, let God pour His love into your broken heart. Let's renew our identity with God's love. What is needed most immediately is a transformation of the heart, a spiritual renewal. This is an encounter with the God who loves you so intensely that he describes it as jealousy!

This phrase, "I am jealous . . . with great jealousy," is often used in the Old Testament (and can be applied to you as well). The relationship between God and Israel is likened to that of a husband and wife. Israel's sin and unbelief is portrayed as a wife leaving her husband and committing adultery. The husband is jealous. He is intensely heartbroken and even resentful, but he loves! It is real love, unadulterated, pure love.

In the business magazine "Toyo Keizai Online," there was an article which stated: "Workaholics are more likely to fall into depression after an illness. It's hard to regain a lost identity." This is especially true for people who have devoted their time and passion to their work, but for some reason, such as illness, they are unable to continue their work or business.

According to psychiatrists, it is very difficult for people in this situation, to rebuild their identity because they have lost a large part of it. But this is something that many people have to deal with. It's not just illness. Job failure, strained relationships, one's own mistakes and sins, harassment, sexual harassment, divorce and bereavement... There are many trials and tribulations that lie ahead. Anyone can lose their identity, become depressed, and fall into despair.

Therefore, the Bible says that all people need to have their minds and hearts renewed by God's love. Let us be spiritually renewed by rebuilding our identity as those who are loved. The intensity, yes, even jealousy of God's love makes us realize our need to repent of our unbelief and sin. Your newness of life will not be real until you respond to God's love with repentance and faith. True heart renewal takes place only when you accept God's love and respond with repentance and faith!

To do this, listen over and over again to the words of God's love. In Zechariah 8, the phrase, "Thus says the Lord of hosts," is repeated nine times. This is because people are not listening and are spiritually insensitive. It is because they are deaf and they need to hear it over and over again, ponder it, and come to a deep understanding in their hearts.

I encourage everyone here to do the same. Hear the words of God's love in the Bible every day. Ponder the declaration that the Lord is with you. Carve out some time in each day to savor his words.

Charles Hummel in his book, Tyranny of the Urgent, writes that there was no one busier than Jesus. He goes on to say that the root of Jesus' power and wisdom was his conversations with God and his focus on what God taught him to prioritize. That is why Jesus always prioritized his time for dialogue with God. For us, this would be time for Bible reading and prayer.

Also, we need to be encouraged and affirmed of God's love in our communities.

8:4, 5. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

This is a picture not only of the rebuilt Jerusalem, but of the Christian community today and the coming Kingdom of God. It is in community that we experience the reality of God's love. Without community, we cannot experience the truth of God's word in an experiential way. The beauty of the gospel comes to fruition in relationship and community. Spiritual renewal and God's love are made personal through community.

Do you want to experience the joy and fun of God's love? Commit to the community! But to do so, you need to be diligent. This is what it says in our Community Group Leader Training Manual:

Because we have been raised in a culture that encourages extreme individualism, our ability to energetically participate in community life has been severely diminished. The muscles necessary for life and living together have been weakened and have declined. ... (But) it is better to have community, even if it is small and immature, than to have no community at all. The more we do, the better we will grow. We need to rededicate ourselves to flexing the necessary muscles to become God's new community.

3. Hope For The Future

What kind of future can we look forward to since we are loved with such intensity by God, and are renewed spiritually? I would like to share three things with you from the book of Zechariah. These are: 1) a close relationship with God, 2) a fruitful life, and 3) truth and peace.

Verse 8 says, "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness." This phrase is repeated throughout the Bible. At the heart of God's grand design is an intimate loving and trusting relationship with God. We need to grow and mature in our intimacy with God.

All good things flow out of this living, intimate relationship. Therefore, after the encouragement to rebuild the temple, God speaks of the blessings of a fruitful new life.

8:12, 13. For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong.

As you can see from this, your work and family life are important. God is seeking to bring blessings to you through your work. Work is not just about making money or making a living. Let's rethink the nature of work with a God-centered perspective from the Bible. Through your job, you are to bring God's blessings and love to your neighbor.

As you work, God is also working together with you. It is easy for us to put a premium on our jobs and become jealous, self-hating, proud and arrogant. For example, housework and childcare done by a housewife/husband is legitimate work, and should be seen as worthy work that brings God's blessings to this world. It is said that housework and childcare is equivalent to a job that pays 5 to 10 million yen a year (admittedly, there is a wide range).

And thirdly, Zechariah speaks of the hope of truth and peace in a society infested with sin, oppression, injustice, and exploitation. The realization of social justice is God's hope, an expectation generated by the gospel of the cross.

8:16, 17. These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the Lord.

However, when will this be realized? Is the hope of the future that the prophet speaks of nothing more than a figment of his imagination? The prophet speaks of the certainty of God's word (promises) in the context of historical facts.

8:19. Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.

The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months referred to here are not religious acts. They refer to the invasion by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian empire in the middle of the sixth century B.C. He besieged Jerusalem, drove the army into a food shortage, and finally caused the city to fall, killing its leaders. However, God rescued Israel from Babylon, brought them back to Jerusalem, and gave them joy and pleasure.

Furthermore, Zechariah also points to the coming Savior, Christ, when he says:

8:20-22. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.' Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.

The Gentiles will come to inquire about the Lord and to see His face. Jesus proclaimed the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy when some Greeks who had come to the Passover festival asked to see Him through His disciples.

John 12:23, 24. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Zechariah also prophesied that Jesus would ride on a donkey when he would come to Jerusalem to accomplish salvation (9:9-10), and that Judas Iscariot would betray him for 30 pieces of silver (11:12-13).

So, in closing, if you want to experience spiritual renewal and rebuild your life in the blessings God brings, seek Jesus and gaze into His face. God's love, his jealous love, was realized in the cross of Jesus, who died like a grain of wheat in the ground. God's enduring love was expressed in words in the Old Testament. But now, through the pain, suffering and self-sacrificing death on the cross, Jesus poured out this love for us. Hallelujah! Praise be to Jesus, our Savior!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise Your holy name. We thank You that You love us with an intense, jealous love. Lead us to walk in our identity as beloved people. Thank you for the enduring love expressed in the cross of Jesus. Please lead us to honestly repent of our sins, believe in Jesus as our Savior, and always walk in a spiritually new way. May the desires and requests of our hearts be in accordance with Your will. Please use us by the Holy Spirit to bring about the peace and truth that the gospel accomplishes. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.