

Mission Sunday - Preacher Martin Paterson

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Date: 23 January 2022

Preacher: Martin Paterson

[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. Can I just get an indication that the microphone is on and working? Yes, excellent, that is super. Thank you for inviting us to come and join with you this morning.

My name is Martin Patterson, and I'm here with my wife Jennifer and our kids, and we believe that it started at 11 o'clock this morning. So we decided we would turn up at about 10.30 just for me to get prepped and get a chance to stand up at the front and go through the microphone, and it turns out that you had already started.

So we do apologize for dropping in halfway through the proceedings. I'll be honest, as I looked through, I thought there must be a general meeting taking place at this point in time. Why else would everybody else be there so early?

So thank you for your patience with us and bearing with us as we got here a little bit later. We're going to spend some time this morning looking at the book of Zechariah, and you might be sitting thinking, what on earth has this got to do with World Mission Sunday?

Why would we turn to this passage and part of God's Word? To think about our purpose as God's people, as the church in the world of the 21st century. I hope that what we can see in the passage this morning is that it has a lot to say about what it means for us to be those who God has chosen as his people, renewed through the gospel, and gives us hope through the wonderful man who was to come to be the blessing for all the peoples of the world, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 24] So as we turn, can I ask you to open up your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 8. We'll concentrate our time there, and let me pray as we begin. Father, as we take these moments now, we ask that in your grace and mercy, you would allow your Word to be the highest rule amongst us.

You would allow your Holy Spirit to be our great and divine teacher, and that through these things being so, your greater glory seen in Christ Jesus would be our highest aim and end as we leave this place.

May the nations praise you, and may we, Father, be obedient to your purpose, call, and will. For we ask this in your Son Jesus' name. Amen. Now, what I want us to see this morning is the necessity of faith in God's future purposes for all the peoples of the world.

Bringing people from every part of the world, from every language and nation, is not something which is the concern for an elite few or an obsessive minority, even though sometimes that is what it can feel like.

There are people who are really called to this, and there are people who really, really, really are passionate about being global or mission-minded Christians. I don't think that's what the Bible tells us is the norm for us as the church.

[2 : 51] We are to be passionate about seeing God glorified and Christ exalted amongst the nations. So this is something we need to be clear about. This is not the concern of an elite few or an obsessive minority.

This is the future which God has in store for the entire cosmos. To resound in praise and glory to the one who made all things, and to the one who alone can save people who are rebels against him.

I think, in short, what I'm trying to say is this. Mission is God's design, not ours. So, how can we see this?

Look at the prophet Zechariah. God's people are deeply discouraged. That's the background.

They've been in exile for 70 years. Things have not gone as they had expected, and not necessarily gone as they had wanted.

And then you add to that 70 years another 20 years of opposition. They have come back to the land which they had been ejected from. They have faced opposition and torment from the different nations and peoples who surrounded them.

[3 : 57] And what we see is a small spark of faith in God's promises, where there should actually be a massive fire. Because God has been faithful to what he has said, that after 70 years you will come back to here.

And he has also been faithful in providing everything which they required to get on with re-establishing themselves as God's people back in God's land. And you see, for the people at this point in time, the circumstances which surrounded them became the theme or the lens or the vision which shaped them.

They allowed what they saw around about them to become the defining factor about who they are and about what their purpose was. I think it's fair to say that this sort of despondency is something which has not left God's people.

Too often the church can become like Plato in the midst of a culture which begins to shape us rather than the church shaping that culture.

Our society and external pressures begin to mould us. And the thought of popular opinion begins to be something which controls how we think and how we live.

[5 : 06] When instead, we should have a bold vision of God's purposes for the future which shape us in the present.

Faith in God's future purposes for all peoples is not grounded on wishful thinking that somehow this stuff may or may not happen. It is also not based on arrogant assumptions.

You may be here or listening in and you hear Christians talking about this message of God that has to go to all the peoples of the world and it's arrogant. Well, in one sense, it's either arrogant or it's absolutely true.

What Jesus has said either is completely false and it therefore is an arrogant statement or it's absolutely true that he alone is the way to God, the truth of God and the life which we all need. Now, for us as God's people, we need to have a confident humility, delighting to see beyond what is humanly possible and possibly not to be content to operate within comfortable margins of acceptable society so that the gospel of God will advance to all the peoples of the world so that God would be glorified and that Christ would be made much of.

[6 : 34] That's where we're heading this morning, okay? That's what I want us to take on board and that's what I want us to shape our mind and our hearts as we leave here today. Three things that I want us to observe. First of all, God's purposes for all peoples flow from his word.

God's purposes for all peoples are demonstrated by a renewed church. And then finally, God's purposes for all peoples find their hope in Christ. So let's crack on. Let's go to the first one.

This is not so much a case of verse by verse going through this. What you see are these things coming out time and again throughout this text. First then, we can see that this sort of faith, this future-orientated faith of what God is about to do and what God will do in the future is grounded on a solid foundation and that is the word of God itself.

You can imagine that the deeply discouraged group of people who are hearing this sermon of Zechariah as he preaches this message to them thinking, yeah, mate, we've done this stuff before. We've heard really excited, really exuberant, really passionate guys like you before and it just, it's hard. And it just doesn't seem to go that way.

[7 : 42] People just oppose us and they keep saying to us, no, you can't do this and this sounds like this and we're not going to let you build your buildings. You see, the thing is, God's people can remain as spiritual Eeyores if they want to but I don't think that that is the point of this passage and I do not think that is the point of the Bible.

We are to give up that sort of spiritual Eeyore complex where everything is just a little bit old. We are to ground our thoughts and visions of the future not in ourselves or in our culture or what we think may possibly happen at some point, maybe in the future.

We are to ground what we can see about what is about to come based on the word of God. We are confronted with a message of hope in the word of the Lord and what he is going to do.

Zechariah understands this. 16 different ways or 16 different times he uses a similar phrase that thus says the Lord, the Lord says this throughout this chapter and there is one thing that is very important for us if we want to just take a little bit of Bible reading skills this morning.

If it is repeated a number of times we are probably to pay attention to it. Zechariah is not saying something by himself. Zechariah as he preaches is saying this is what the Lord says.

[9 : 01] I am not coming to you as this passionate and exuberant guy to change your lives. I can't do that he says. I am here to tell you today people of Jerusalem, people of Judah this is what the Lord says.

This is what he will do. Here are his purposes. Verse 7 and 8 act as an excellent example of that. Thus says the Lord of hosts Behold I will save my people from the east country and from the west country 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.

He will gather his people together once again. Now it doesn't become a reality in completeness in Zechariah's day and to the fullest extent of what this is saying it remains an incomplete picture in our own generation.

But what resounds out of this passage is this it will happen. What God has said God will accomplish.

That from east and west that the nations will be drawn to his people and God will delight to be their God in faithfulness and in righteousness.

[10 : 23] All of these statements that you hear are future focused. They are incomplete in the present which means that they needed to and we also today need to exercise that wonderful gift God gives to us called faith.

And as we begin to exercise the gift of faith it means this our actions should look absolutely crazy. What we do with our lives should look absolutely crazy.

That we would take time in our busy week with young families or caring for older relatives to pray for people we have never met in parts of the world we didn't even realise existed and say to God please would you bring your kingdom amongst them.

Please would you bring salvation to them. It means that we would be investing our resources in unreached peoples because we realise that upgrading our lifestyle and our accommodation is not as important as people who don't know Jesus coming to know him.

It means spending our lives in another part of the world forgotten, unknown and die in a place where people probably won't remember us. because we recognise that to follow Christ is more valuable than life.

[11 : 44] You see these actions and these attitudes are either crazy or they are supposed to be the normal activity of God's people in response to the word of the Lord. Effectively we are being asked a question by God I will bring in the nations I will bring in the peoples I will restore my people I will achieve the purposes that I have set for from the beginning of time.

Now as my people what is your response? Will you be obedient to my word and to the call of me to you as my people? And will you exercise faith in seeing this wonderful purpose I have come to completion?

This is what I love is that we could be in Columbia we could be in Glasgow we could be in Edinburgh you could be anywhere and God by the power of his spirit through his word comes to meet with us in a little church in a little city in Scotland presences himself with his people and asks us will you trust me?

Will you hear my voice and will you trust me? Will you follow me into my purposes and will you hear what it is that I am going to accomplish and will you journey and join with me in announcing the fame and the glory of my son to the nations?

So here's a question to ask how are you exercising faith in God's purposes for the peoples of the world in light of what he communicates in his word?

[13 : 25] how do you do that? How does what is going to come the future orientation of this passage or sections like Revelation chapter 4 5 21 22 how do they shape how you act in the present and what you set as the agenda and the goal of the life God has given to you?

so God's purposes for all peoples are they flow from his word we see that I think quite clearly but we also see that his purposes are demonstrated by a renewed church I've said here yes by a renewed people but in our time by a renewed church I think you see that particularly verses 1 through 6 and 9 through 19 discouragement is hard to shake when it sets in and that's something that we can see in God's people all you need to do is take a couple of minutes and if you look at sports in general I just I'm just going to pause for 10 seconds I love sports you could literally put me

in front of anything I'd be quite happy to watch it golf, tennis, formula one rally driving, football I mean anything I'm happy to watch it and one thing that happens is that when someone makes a mistake it can be compounded by another and another and another and that discouragement tends to lead them not to be performing to the best of their abilities now I'm not saying the church is meant to perform in that sense but we can become discouraged very quickly and when that discouragement sets in it's very hard for us to change the direction of travel years later we see that the people of God who have been delivered just as God had said 70 years you're going to be in captivity

I'm going to send you back after 70 years not a problem 20 years down the line since that has happened and they are still celebrating feasts verses 18 and 19 which commemorate some of their greatest losses and disappointments and failures I mean God has been good to them and he has sent them back just as he said he would and they're still quite happy to say oh yeah I know but it's just not quite working out how it's supposed to oh dear because when discouragement sets in it is hard to shake and we can begin to make one not necessarily completely silly but one poor decision after another based on that rather than hearing what it is God is saying and allowing that to set the agenda however Zechariah explains to them and to us as well that God's delight is to work in such a way not to leave his people in despondency and in discouragement but to renew his people and to demonstrate through them this is amazing to demonstrate through them something of the glorious purposes that he has for the entirety of the cosmos the people have been disparaged by the nations for a long time you see that in verse 13 you become a byword in cursing amongst the nations and they've come under God's judgment because they've abandoned the role that he gave them which is to be his treasured possession they would rather have had pleasure and acceptance among the nations look at verse 9 and 10 or even verse 14 sorry thus says the Lord 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 of the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts for those before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beasts neither was there any safety for them from the fro every man was set against his name things were not working out the way they were supposed to they had abandoned and so they were receiving the curse that God had said but God was once again near to his people that's why Zechariah's sermon is stunning he starts off and says guys

I want you to realize something God is delighting to be amongst his people once again verse 2 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 he's going to transform everyday lives verses 11 to 12 so that they would live as he had intended acting as a beacon of hope for the nations which we see in verses 16 and 17 God's nearer presence to his people leads to there being a wonderful transformation amongst his people if they pay attention and if they are obedient to what he says verses 16 and 17 says this these are the things that you shall do people of God speak the truth to one another render in your gates judgments that are true and that 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 God's purpose in renewing his people was to display his glory through his people for all the nations to see and hear first hand this is the God who doesn't just raise people up cast them off and forget all about them this is the God who offers grace and mercy to a thousand generations of those who fear him and who are obedient to his call to repentance God puts his people on display in the midst of that land and he puts this church and your life on display in front of all the peoples around about us to say here is the God of grace and mercy you're a profound bunch of mess ups Martin Jennifer and family but I am gracious and I renew and I restore the church are the people of God that have been saved by his grace and mercy in Christ they are gathered together to live in peace to speak truth to seek justice to stand up against that which is evil in the eyes of the

[19 : 31] Lord we are not a monastery of detached living from the 21st century we are to become an active community among the peoples of the world living for the fame of God's name to be known honoured trusted loved cherished and exalted but discouragement can lead us to 21st century monasteries you've been there I've been there it's just so much easier isn't it I mean there's no point in pretending you've not been there we've all been there it's nice it's cosy you can put a fire on you can maybe read a nice Christian book and pretend that it's all fine and the reality is quite different God calls us as his people to put faith into action in radical ways so that his glory may be received

among the peoples of the world and you might sit and think Martin this is all too much you just calm it down a little bit this is a bit too much I don't know how I fit into this

I don't know how this is going to happen and in one sense I would say that's part of the point it's meant to feel too much it's meant to feel beyond our capacity it's meant to feel beyond our ability because that leads us away from self-reliance and dependence towards dependence on the one who has promised that he will achieve and accomplish this purpose what Zechariah is preaching seems to me a message of gospel renewal the people were not to take confidence in themselves but to turn back again to God they were to turn back again to God and recognize they depend on him for the breath that they take next the drink of wine that they've had and for putting the bricks in the wall of the buildings that they were making in the land and I would suggest today that the church in Scotland needs this sort of gospel renewal again a genuine hope filled confidence that God has said what he has said that he is full of grace and mercy that he loves to welcome in repentant sinners and that his gospel is the truth that all of the peoples of the world need to hear this sort of renewal in our minds and hearts will radically alter what it is that we do with our lives and that can be something which is scary it can be something which pushes us way outside of what we will be comfortable with but God meets us here with his authoritative beauty do you see that in verses 13 and 15 twice within a couple of verses he says fear not let your hands be strong verse 13 and then 15

I have purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah fear not are you scared about what gospel renewal might mean for your life quite happy to coast along with Christ because you know that he is gracious that he is kind and that you'll see him one day and yes we will be accepted and loved by him but to truly be renewed to truly be transformed to truly offer over our lives in complete and utter wholeness and fullness to him that just seems past what I want to do and he says to you this morning fear not I have purpose to do good what might that gospel renewal look like for us as disciples in our everyday lives with our families with our career choices with the subjects that we study with our leisure time or as a church what might gospel renewal mean for us in terms of our commitment to seeing the gospel take wings and fly throughout the world for the glory of Christ to be known amongst peoples who have yet to hear his name from a little church in a little city in

Scotland what might that look like thirdly and finally we see God's purposes for all peoples find their hope in Christ as Zechariah ends his sermon of encouragement for the people of God he leaves the most staggering and best bit till the very end it's lovely it's stunning let's just read it again verse 20 through 23 says this thus says the Lord of hosts people 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 favour of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts I myself am going many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favour of the Lord thus says the Lord of hosts in those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a

Jew saying let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you there will be people from everywhere and every people and every language and every nation who will come into the presence of the Lord as a result of one person one man from Judah do you hear the future aspect of what Zechariah is saying he's not saying look this isn't necessarily going to happen right now yes in some ways it would have happened but a little bit like how Paul speaks it's like a dim reflection of what becomes the reality that we can now see the people of God are preparing seeking renewal obeying God's word and they are waiting and they are waiting and they are waiting and they are waiting and they are waiting and one day Christ pierce the Bethlehem sky as the tiny screams of infancy which are pregnant with salvation resound

[25 : 54] Jesus is the true Hebrew the true Jew the only hope for God's people and the only hope for every nation in the world he alone is the only true savior and he is the person who fulfills this section perfectly something which I hope you can see on this side of the cross and the empty tomb we no longer need to wait to see who it is that leads the nations into the presence of God where the peace of God is offered to all peoples we can say with absolute certainty our Jesus who died and who rose again is that man and what is staggering is that the hope of all peoples to go with one who God is with has an even greater fulfillment because he is not just one who God is with he is the God who is with us it is Jesus who leads the people into the presence of God and announces peace with all who will hear no wonder the people are willing to sacrifice their security that's what we're

supposed to take when it says in verse 20 and 21 we're just going to leave our city cities are places of security cities are places where people's jobs and their families they're saying we're going to leave that we're going to let that go we're going to go with this part because something unbelievable is found with him they wanted to be counted as part of the people of God because they recognized there this is the picture which

Zechariah is given by the Lord has the motivation for his people to continue to exercise faith in God's purposes and promises the nations will join in worshipping the Lord one day the earth will resound to the praise of God's glory as the waters cover the sea one day we will know the reality of Jesus words hallowed be your name may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven we will know that in its fullness one day you know unlike the people who received this message in Zechariah's day we have the privilege of knowing Christ more clearly but also to see that God's future purposes for all peoples to know him are founded on his words and they are coming to fruition we live in a day where we should not become despondent but we should become encouraged we live in a particular time in a particular generation where we can say with absolute authority and confidence that what

God said he would do to build his church to bring people from all the nations to repentance faith and obedience in him we see it happening before our very eyes if we take the time to look up and out from where we find ourselves and it would be a great encouragement to the church in Scotland there are people who are flooding to know God all over the world and that should bring us joy and gladness it should give us confidence that what he has said he is actually doing and so therefore we are motivated by him by his word being fulfilled in our generation to continue on in faithful obedience yet there still remains places all over the world where Jesus is yet to be known I had the privilege a number of years back to go to a particular country and visit the second biggest Tibetan Buddhist monastery outside of Lhasa who knows about

Jesus there as you walk through the streets and idols are being crafted in front of you and prayer wheels are being manufactured by pretty much every shop on the street where flags which wave in the wind will potentially offer prayers to heaven and ascend for your next birth when we can tell people about the amazing hope that there is new birth in Jesus Christ that we have certainty and hope that God will not deal with us as our sins deserve but he will give us everything we don't deserve because of the righteousness of his son people will live and die without hearing the gospel of God maybe never encounter a believer certainly never come across an active church how comfortable does that make you feel

I think that that is where the rubber then hits the road for us it may be that we are discouraged and our circumstances are confusing but like the Old Testament people of God we must be willing to live our lives with such a future focused audacity in the purposes of God amongst all the peoples of the world and for his glory that we would make different decisions in the present for the eternal well-being of many so that those who would be wanderers would join with us as worshippers so that those who have never heard the voice of Jesus would hear him say come to me and rest because I will provide rest for your souls let me pray in light of what we've heard and then we'll sing together as we finish the time of worship father your word is designed to unsettle us from the comfortable rhythm and rut that we often put ourselves in and so my prayer is for all of us as your people that you would remind us that you have communicated to us by your word and that you're speaking with authority with beauty and with truth into all of our lives is designed to bring about renewal to bring us to faith in

[32 : 34] Christ Jesus for the very first time and I pray father that if there are people who are hearing and don't yet know you that that would be the case for them today but for those who do that we would be renewed for the thousandth or ten thousandth time in the truth that God has sent his son to renew me his wounds make me whole his blood speaks a better word and from that father we would recognize that he alone is the one who is the hope of all peoples and that that would enable us to have such a future focused audacity that we would live life to a very different drumbeat in the present so that the nations would know and then there would be many come on bended knee to give praises to our God and King for we praise you in him our Lord Jesus amen well let's finish up our time this morning thank you for allowing me to spend time with you in God's word today we're going to sing this wonderful hymn across the lands which speaks of God's purposes coming to their fulfillment let's stand and sing praise to our God