Hope has a Name: Zechariah 7

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[0:00] My late grandmother suffered from a condition called scleroderma. I know many even in this church struggle with this condition as well.

! It occurs when the immune system becomes overactive and triggers excessive collagen production and so tissues become hardened.! And my the fear of my grandmother was that it was becoming hard to swallow the tissue in the lining of her throat.
And esophagus were hardening and she was fearful that she may have to be put on a feeding tube unable to eat solid food.
Scleroderma comes from the word sclero which means to harden and derma skin and so it's the hardening of tissue. And I believe all of God's people if not careful can develop what I am calling spiritual sclerocardia.
And I am apologizing to all of you in the medical field. That is a spiritual hardening of one's heart. And it is a condition that comes when we disregard the warnings that are found in Scripture.
[1:12] And so if you are a guest with us today we find ourselves in the book of Zechariah. And in this book of Zechariah it is written to God's people who have returned from exile in Babylon.

They have been there as a part of God's judgment upon them. They have been taken into captivity, exiled from their homeland of Israel. And it was there that they were there for 70 years as part of God's judgment.
And they have now returned to their homeland. They have returned to a lot of Zechariah's context is around the city of Jerusalem. So they have returned to Jerusalem and many of them have come back.
And they have been given permission by Darius. And they are now in the process of rebuilding the temple. Nehemiah will come later. He will rebuild the walls. And so it is a time of rejoicing for Israel. And we find ourselves in the book. Today we are going to be in chapter 7. So if you have a Bible with you I encourage you to turn to Zechariah. If you find the first book in the New Testament, Matthew, turn left.
[2:23] A couple of books you will find yourself in the book of Zechariah. Zechariah chapter 7. We find ourselves there today. And in the previous chapters, Zechariah had a vision. In one night he had eight visions.

And the eight visions, not exclusively, but they are foretelling of a time of one who would come that will both bless and judge Israel. And then at the conclusion of that night, Zechariah wakes up.
The next day, perhaps he is to go and coronate Joshua, the high priest. He is to crown him with his gold crown. He is supposed to take the high priest and put a crown on him.
So what Zechariah up to this point is sharing with us is Israel. There is one you are going to be looking for, the Messiah, who will come to both bless and judge.
And he will hold the office as both king and priest. You are to crown the high priest as King Joshua. That is the one you are looking for.
[3:29] In chapter 7, if you want to put your footnotes in your footnotes between chapter 6 and chapter 7, two years have passed. You will notice in the first verse 1 of chapter 7, it says in the fourth year of King Darius.

Well, in contrast with chapter 1, verse 1, we see we are in the second year of King Darius. So, where two years have passed. He has had the visions. He has coronated Joshua. Two years have passed.
And now, what we are going to take place in chapter 7, what we are going to see is there are these people who are about 16 miles north of Israel. I am sorry, 16 miles north of Jerusalem.

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There are Israelites who are coming down to seek the Lord and they have a question. And it is that question that is going to fulfill or is going to give the content of what chapter 7 and chapter 8 are about.
Today, we are just going to look at chapter 7. So, it is really a response to this question that these individuals have seeking the Lord, coming down to Jerusalem, asking the priests and the prophets, we have this question and we are going to get their answer to this question in the content of chapter 7.
[4:38] So, if you have your Bible with you, we are going to read Zechariah 7, verses 1 through 3 to get our content or context.

In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev. Now, the people of Bethel, that is the town 16 miles north of Jerusalem, had sent Shazazar and Regem Melech.
Those are great names for boys in case you are pregnant. And they are men to entreat the favor of the Lord, saying to the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, here is their question.
Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done so for many years? Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, say to Zechariah, so then Zechariah is now speaking, or the Lord is speaking to Zechariah, say to all the people of the land of the priests and to the priests, when you fasted and mourned on the fifth of the month and the seventh month of these 70 years, was it for me that you fasted?
Okay. So in the fifth month and on the seventh month, there was this fasting and this mourning that the people of Israel did while they were in Babylonian captivity.
[6:05] And they're asking, we're separated from captivity. The temple is being rebuilt. Should we keep doing this? Do we have to keep doing this?

Fasting and mourning on the fifth and the seventh month. And you ask yourself the question, why are they doing this? What's with the fifth and seventh month? In Scripture, the only fast that is mentioned in Scripture that they are to uphold in perpetuity, never stop doing, is on the day of atonement.
Around the time of atonement, that is when you are prescribed as Israel to fast. This is not one of those times. So what they have done is they're commemorating something.
Something happened in the fifth and the seventh month in recent history in Israel. That they are ascribing to themselves to say, let us do this. In the fifth month is when the temple was burned by Nebuchadnezzar.
So can you imagine having the temple of God burned? Nebuchadnezzar has breached your city 70 years, about 70, 90 years earlier.
[7:20] He has breached your city. He has burned your temple. And that occurred on the fifth month. And so to mourn that and commemorate that event, they were to mourn and fast while they were in captivity, remembering what had taken place.

Let us never forget. Second, what happened on the seventh month? On the seventh month, the assassination of the governor and the remnant of Israel fled.
Go back 70 years prior. Breached the walls. Burned the temple, Nebuchadnezzar. And Zedekiah was the king and he resisted Nebuchadnezzar.
He was the king of Judah. He was there in Jerusalem. He would not, he would resist. They held out. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls. And so what did Nebuchadnezzar do to King Zedekiah as a result of punishment?
He captured him and he had all of his children before him and he killed all of his children before King Zedekiah. And then he had Zedekiah's eyes plucked out. So the last living memory Zedekiah would have is the death of his children in front of him.
[8:30] Then Zedekiah, you ought to read your Bible. Then Zedekiah is taken to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. As his trophy in Babylon.

Look, the befallen blind king of Israel. In his place, Zedekiah is then replaced with a governor that is friendly to Nebuchadnezzar.
He's now this vassal governor type person who is under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar. He has to rule Jerusalem under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar because they've been defeated.
Well, the living relatives of Zedekiah, who is blinded, they don't like this governor.

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Our father, our cousin, not his children were killed. Our cousin, our uncle, our near relative, Zedekiah held out to Nebuchadnezzar. And here you are, one of us.
[9:31] And you are telling us to submit to King Nebuchadnezzar and all will go well with you. We don't like that message. And so they assassinated him. In fear of Nebuchadnezzar.

Now you've just killed the governor, Nebuchadnezzar, who just has destroyed your land. In fear of Nebuchadnezzar coming and taking retribution on you, what do the rest of the people of Israel do? They flee to Egypt. And so Jerusalem is now emptied of majority of the people of God. They're taken captive to Babylon.
Those left, killed the governor and fled to Egypt. Everyone is fleeing. Now Jerusalem is desolate. So, what did they do?
They held this fast. They mourned every fifth and seventh month while they were in captivity to commemorate this event.
[10:28] I liken it to perhaps what it would be in our culture to some way of remembering what happened in 9-11. Like everyone remembered what happened in 9-11. And so we do certain things in our culture.

We have certain events in our culture to commemorate and remember that day. Much like the bombing of Pearl Harbor was to that generation. We do certain things to remember that tragic event.
Well, liken that to this. We're going to mourn and fast. And so, here's the point. We're several years now. We're back in Jerusalem.
The temple is two more years and the temple will be rebuilt. It's under construction. Things are going well with us. Do we have to keep remembering this event?
That's the question. That's what's being asked. That's what's surrounding what they're asking. And I want to share kind of the point of today's message is that we can have man-made rules that we follow and our heart is not internally motivating us to do it.
[11:40] And this is the warning that Zechariah is going to share, God is going to share through the prophet Zechariah, his people. Is you guys have been doing this external thing all this time, but your heart has never been with me, even though you have returned to the land.

That's Zechariah's tone. That's what the Lord is going to say through the prophet Zechariah. And so let's look at God's word. So what are the warning signs that we may be drifting away from the Lord? Notice in verse 3, there is a tone of weariness. Say to the priest of the house, the Lord of the hosts, should I keep and abstain in the fifth month as we have been doing for so many years?
Those last three words are this hint of weariness. We have been doing this for so many years. They are tired of going through the motions, what had formerly been meaningful to perhaps other generations and activity.
Those generations perhaps have died. And why are we still observing this? It seems to be outdated. It's ironic. But true to human nature that these people were concerned about something that God had not commanded.
[13:06] God had never commanded them to do this. This is something they themselves said, let us observe these things. At the same time, they were neglecting what God did command them to do.

God did command them to do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with their God. This is what God did command them to do. But they were concerned about something that God did not command them to do.
I remember a friend who took it as a point of conscience.
He was convinced that the old King James translation, 1611 translation of the English Bible, was the authoritative translation. And if you hold that conviction, that's great.
My favorite translation for you is the one you will read. And so that's my favorite translation. So we are, but he had this as a conviction.
[14:07] God never told us that is the authorized translation. But he imposed that rule upon himself and he wanted others to follow it. And yet I confronted that brother because I said, but everything about you, your tone, the way you treat other people, these things God has commanded, has spoken into your life, and you hold this one thing very dearly that God has not commanded and you ignore the things that God has commanded.

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He didn't like that. I think it's important, especially for those of you who have children in your home, to make it a healthy practice to take inventory of why we do what we do and to teach the why behind what we do.
And it is at this point that I want to share with all of us and remind all of us why we do what we do, especially in attendance on a Sunday morning. Mom and dad, why do we go to church?
Number one, God has commanded us. In Hebrews we say, let us not neglect the assembling of ourselves together, as in the manner of some. Let us not do that. God has commanded us to gather.
But what is the purpose for why we gather? We gather to worship the Lord. There is something called a regulative principle that we practice here at 4th that essentially says this, that everything we do in the corporate gathering must clearly be warranted in Scripture.
[15:47] If we see it warranted, if we see it in Scripture, then we want to practice it when the church gathers together to the worship of the Lord. And so I want to break down what you see when we do here on a Sunday morning.

And we could say it this way, we read the Bible, we preach the Bible, we pray the Bible, we sing the Bible, and we see the Bible, meaning visibly we see baptisms and we see ordinances.
Why do we gather? How is it that we worship the Lord? What do we see in Scripture? We read, give attention to the public reading of God's Word, we're told. So we read the Bible. Second, we preach the Bible.
Thirdly, we pray the Bible. I pray at the conclusion of our service, Pastor Jay or myself or an elder, I hope you hear God's Word being, when we pray, we pray for things that we see in God's Word, for us and for this world.
And then we sing the Bible. And at this point, Matt, can I have the first song we sang this morning? I want us to look at the lyrics. Matt doesn't know I'm doing this.
[16:51] I don't even know what I'm doing. Okay. Listen to the words that we sung this morning. It's like a creed. We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty Maker of all, the one who rules and sees the seen and unseen.

We believe and we adore. Remember, why do we gather? We gather to worship the Lord, but we sing that which is true of Him. Keep going, Matt, please. Jesus Christ, one Lord of creation, from the Father begotten, not made.
He is the light, the light eternal, the God of every age. Keep going, Matt. Now look at this. We just said in an earlier verse, we believe in one God, the Father.
But now notice there's a Trinitarian form to this. We're teaching sound doctrine through song. All glory to the Father now. All glory to the Son.
And praise the Spirit now and always. This is the God we love. Now we're teaching, we worship one God in three persons. We read the Bible, we preach the Bible, we pray the Bible, we sing the Bible, and we see the Bible and the practice of the ordinances.
[18:13] That's what we do. But all of it is done to the glory of the Lord. That's why we gather. I just might get excited. Okay.

So what are the signs that you and I may be developing this spiritual hardening that we can see in this passage? Number one, let's look at verse seven. We can refuse to pay attention to God.
In verse 11 it says, we read this. They refuse to pay attention. They turn to stubborn shoulder. We'll look at that later and stop their ears from hearing. They may not hear. Who was it that are these former prophets that they did not pay attention to?
And we see them in verse seven. We don't need to go there. But they were Isaiah and Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, Micah, and others had warned the people that they were developing this spiritual disease, this hardening of their hearts.
But the people ignored their warning. They dodged the prophet's message and they stepped on their toes. Perhaps they adjusted matters outwardly, but they would not look inwardly at their own heart.
[19:30] I don't know about you, but this may be a little autobiographical here, but have you ever been to a doctor for a routine checkup? And again, I'm sorry for those in the medical field.

They will ask, are you feeling okay? And you know what they're asking about when they ask the question. They ask about your diet and what is it that you usually eat?

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And you know what they're getting at, and you've gained some weight since the last time that you've seen them, but you don't tell them the whole truth. You tell them what he wants to hear, and you fail to mention the potato chips or the ice cream that are part of your basic food groups.
And he warns you that you need to take off 20 pounds, or 25 pounds, and you need to eat more fruit and vegetables and less red meat, and you nod in approval, and about a week goes by, and you cut back on some junk food, and then you begin to sneak some potato chips and ice cream in.
And you think to yourself, well, the doctor doesn't need to know. But it's not the doctor you're hurting. And that's what it's like with us, with the Lord.
[20:47] He has given us commands. He says, hey, hey, do this. It will go well with you. This is for your benefit. And we think, oh, we ignore him.

And this is what Israel was doing. We ignore what the Lord was saying, but it's not... Yes, you're ultimately hurting the Lord. You're also hurting yourself. And to teach you that lesson, Israel went into captivity.
So what was the first problem? They stopped paying attention to the Lord. Second problem is they refused to submit to spiritual authority. It says they turned a stubborn shoulder, it says in verse 11.
So they refused to pay attention. They turned a stubborn shoulder. What does turning a stubborn shoulder mean? It's a yoke and oxen analogy. And so imagine the owner of an oxen is wanting to put it under authority and work this oxen.
And he puts this yoke. And what this oxen is doing is turning his shoulder. He's not wanting the yoke to be put on him. He doesn't want to be subjugated to his master. And that's what is happening.
[21:55] And so what is Israel doing when these prophets of God are speaking to them? What's their response to that? Is they refuse to submit to spiritual authority?

I have dear friends close to me who are disenfranchised with a church.
And so they have chosen a gathering of them together, have chosen to gather together because they've been hurt by a church and whatnot, to just gather amongst themselves where there is no authority.
It's just a band of people who gather in a home and they have deliberately chosen not to appoint anyone as an elder. They just will do the Christian things. And so when I look at that, I think, what did Paul do on his first missionary journey?
He went out, he proclaimed, he went to the last city, and then he backtracked and he appoints elders at every church of people who responded to the gospel. So people respond to the gospel.
[22:58] They've come to believe. One of the first acts that a church is supposed to do is to appoint elders. Who is it that is a qualified man to discern truth from error, who can correct bad doctrine, and who is it that the people of God are to submit themselves willingly under to be their shepherds?

But those individuals are not here today. But I wonder in each of our hearts the ways in which we also don't like to have spiritual authority over us.
So we may be in attendance, but our arms are crossed inside of us. And so long as no elder, pastor asks, or the Lord asks us to do something, we're going to be okay.
But the minute something is asked of us that we don't like, we will refuse to submit ourselves to spiritual authority too. Thirdly, found in verse 7, or 11, sorry.
They refuse to pay attention, they turn a stubborn shoulder, and they stop their ears that they may not hear. They stop their ears. What are the different ways that we stop hearing from the Lord?
[24:12] How is it that we do that? Have you ceased reading God's word yourself? Do you spend time with the Lord in his word, getting to know him?

If that is true of you, may I encourage you, please start with just five, 15 minutes in God's word. Read a chapter a day.
Pastor Jay last Sunday shared with us that we encourage the men, I encourage you to read a chapter in the book of Proverbs every day, whatever day it is. Today is May 24th.
Read the 24th Proverb. And let's gain a heart of wisdom of what it is to live a life of wisdom. Have a New Testament reading plan.
Google a Bible reading plan. Somehow, with motivation in your heart, to say, Lord, I want to know you better. And I will spend time with you in your word.

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[25:16] This is God's special revelation of himself to you. It's such a gift. Such a gift. Verse 12 looks at the severity of this.

They made their hearts diamond hard, lest they should hear. The people's refusal to heed and submit to God's word through the prophets led to such hardening of heart that in the end, they would no longer hear what these faithful men proclaimed over them, the prophets of God.
People with an advanced case of spiritual hardening seldom, if ever, pick up their Bible with the intent of submitting their hearts to its message. They don't want to hear a sermon that confronts their hypocrisy or their sin of their heart.
The spiritual hardening, there's a blockage. And God's word cannot get through to them. And so what did the people do in the Old Testament when they got to this point is they killed the prophets and it's at this point I'm grateful in America that murder is illegal.
But on a serious note, instead of murdering pastors or elders who may lovingly try to move in on a situation where we've witnessed someone spiritually struggling and becoming hardened, today pastors or elders are not murdered, but they are criticized, maligned, and or people just find a different church.
[26:57] And so they will find a place maybe they have itching ears just to hear what they want to hear. So those are the signs of a spiritual hardening.

But what is it that, what is the result of a spiritual hardening? Notice verse 12. First thing that results from the spiritual hardening is they incur God's fierce discipline.
I'm sorry, verse 13. As they called, they would not hear. So they called, and I would not hear, says the Lord. That is, God is silent when they cried for help in verse 13.
God was silent to them. If we refuse to hear God when he speaks, at some point he returns the favor. You're going to cry out and maybe the Lord will not hear at that time.
And he will allow you to suffer the consequences of the sin and refusal to hear him for some time. But what I do love is the Lord promises us in God's word in the New Testament that if we're faithful and if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive you of your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.
[28:20] So I plead with you to confess, return to the Lord, repent. A word to parents.

There is a lot of soft parenting in our culture where we do not allow children to feel the consequence of their disobedience and their wrongdoing. I know a set of parents who have prayed this prayer over their children.
Lord, do not allow our children to get away with it. Let their sin be exposed. Let their deceit be found out.
And then give me wisdom to know how to discipline and how to appropriate the nature of who you are in that circumstance. What a great prayer.
What a great prayer. Because you are to be teaching them God's ways of how he would discipline. And God sees every sin that we commit, every form of deceit.
[29:29] We're not getting away with anything. And so parent in such a way and pray in such a way for your children. We incur God's fierce discipline.

God is silent when we may cry for help. And the third consequence we find in this verse is in verse 12. God turns our prosperity into desolation. Notice one of the consequences was for the people of Israel, I scattered them with a whirlwind among the nations that they had not known.
Thus the land they left was desolate. And so that no one went to and fro and the pleasant land was made desolate. Remember when I shared when Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls and tore down the walls, burned the temple, and then they had that rebellion where they murdered, they assassinated the governor, the Nebuchadnezzar.
Jerusalem was desolate. And it was once a thriving, producing land. And so God turns prosperity into desolation if we don't hear him and return to him and with the motivation of our heart do what he's asking us to do.
The land was pleasant. The people were living comfortably. And I wonder if that's something like where we are. We're living in a land. We're enjoying prosperity. Things are easy.
[30:55] But when we live in rebellion to the Lord, our heart motivation is not for the Lord. Perhaps he will lay waste to us as well. What may that look like?

Sin and rebellion always take a toll. Perhaps there has been a physical reversal, a financial reversal, families and relationships that are shattered, bitterness and heartache and grief may

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abound.
It's never pretty. There may be a scarcity in life. And yet what is often tragic is when we are found to be in sin and relationships are severed and these things, these consequences to sin may be a happening.
Oftentimes, the one in that condition may think, it's not my fault. And that's that severe hardening. And my plea with you is to repent, child of God.
Return to the Lord, confess your sins, own where you are at and plead for his mercy. You cannot live in sin and have your relationships around you not pay a consequence.
[32:03] It's true of me. It's true of you. So what is the solution to this perhaps spiritual apathy? This, first of all, change the motivation of your heart to glorify God alone.

We all struggle with mixed motivations to do things for our benefit and not for the benefit of another or to glorify the Lord. But I would pray, what was it that they were doing?
What's the problem? They were observing this fast in this time of mourning on the fifth and the seventh month and they were like, do we have to keep doing this? That we had this form of religion and this form of remembrance but our heart is not in it.
Do we have to keep doing this? What if the motivation of their heart was, oh Lord, I want to keep doing this.
The change, the motivation of your heart. Look with me in verses five and six. Say to the people of the land and the priests, when you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and the seventh for these 70 years, was it for me that you fasted?
[33:17] This is the Lord. Was it for me? Did you do that to glorify me? Did you do that? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?

yourselves? You're observing these things but your heart in observing these things and doing these religious activities is far from me.
Their motivation needed to change. when one's motivation for living primarily becomes self-oriented, that is doing things to please oneself, that individual will pay the consequence.
Grow old, likely as a lonely person. One's friends will pay the consequence for that. One's health will pay the consequence for that. One's spouse, one's children will pay the consequence for that.
And instead of fasting and feasting for themselves, they should have been doing it unto the Lord.
And that's why we read in 1 Corinthians, when you eat and drink, do whatever you do, do all to the glory of the Lord.
[34:20] It is God's will that should cause us to action. It's God's word that should be our guide to our action and God's glory should be the goal for our actions no matter what it is.

So may the motivation of our heart, for example, just simply, why did you attend church today? Did you want to do this primarily out of the motivation, Lord, I want to glorify you today.
I get to do that with the gathering of the saints here under the shepherding of this bunch of elders. Lord, I can't wait to collectively get to sing praises unto you, declare that which is true about you, together with the saints may you receive honor and glory.
Was that the motivation for why you came today? Second, proper motivation.
It's obvious when someone has a proper motivation because others benefit from that. Look with me in 9 and 10, verses 9 and 10. Thus says the Lord of hosts, render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another.
[35:35] Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor. Let none of you devise evil against another in your heart. Whose benefit? Who will benefit from our motivation of our heart to please the Lord?

One another. The end of verse 9. Show kindness and mercy to one another. How will they benefit? You will render true judgments.
You will show kindness. You will demonstrate mercy and compassion. You will not take advantage or pay back. You will not take advantage of someone who can never pay you back like the widow. You will not make it harder for the fatherless. You will not oppress the sojourner or the poor. Here's the point. Your relationships around you will bear witness to whether the motivation of one's heart is to please the Lord.
Others always are blessed. So you do things unto the glory of God and for the benefit of others. Others will benefit. Spiritual hardening sneaks up on us all gradually.

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[36:49] And we may drift from the reality that God is the one to whom we do everything. So do a checkup. Are you really is the motivation of your heart truly to please the Lord in all that you do.

May Lord may you be glorified in every word that I say every thing that I set my eyes upon every thought of my mind the motivation of my heart Lord may it be truly pleasing to you and oh how relationships around us will benefit.
Let's pray. Father thank you so much for this day Lord thank you for your kindness and goodness Lord I pray that truly the motivation of our hearts would be found pleasing to you may we do all things to glorify you may we understand the why of what we do that would help us maintain our motivation Lord you are worthy I think it and back to a sermon or two ago Lord the search in heaven to find the one worthy to open the scroll you are worthy you're the only one worthy not only to open the scroll but to live a life found well pleasing in your sight to do all things that you are our chief motivation and chief affection Lord thank you for this day thank you for the gift of your word and it's in your beautiful name we pray amen

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