

The Lord's Anointed

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] It's really good to be with you tonight. I want to thank those of you who have been coming for the three weeks of Zechariah, or for the two weeks so far and this third week.

I really like the way that you as a congregation are keen to grapple with scripture and last week I pushed you really hard and most of you hung on in there, which was great. Six chapters of Zechariah is no mean feat for anyone. Now I don't know that there are many congregations that could handle that.

And so to digest that much in one go is wonderful. So you guys I think are terrific and I want you to keep it up and I want you to keep up your thirst to understand God and his ways.

It is very good. It's great encouragement to me as a pastor to see you doing that. Anyway, let's get started with this week. I want to start by a quote from a man called Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Now he was an American essayist, lecturer and poet who lived through most of the 19th century. And Emerson summarised a sentiment that I think has probably been the catch cry of the generation that we're currently in.

[1 : 09] Emerson said this, with the past I have nothing to do, nor with the future I live in the present. Friends, I think that we currently live in a world that thinks that what really matters is the present.

And there are some great ones who would seem to support that notion. For example, Henry Ford said, history is more or less bunk. It is tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that's worth a tinker's dam is the history we make today.

And even Jesus might be roped in to lend some support to the idea that the present is what really matters. After all, he says in the sermon, I think though you would misinterpret him to read it that way, but nevertheless he says this, Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have enough worry about itself.

We'll worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own. However, let me give you one more quotation. Now, I don't know who the author is of this quotation. I couldn't find out who the author was.

Nevertheless, I want you to hold it in your brains, or perhaps you could just put it in the back of your brains till the end of the sermon when I'm going to bring it out again. So it's this, If you have one eye on yesterday and one eye on tomorrow, you are going to be cockeyed today.

[2 : 30] Friends, I want you to think about whether you think that's true or not. Is it true that if you have one eye on yesterday, one eye on tomorrow, you're going to be cockeyed in the present? Is it true that the focus on the past and the focus on the present, on the future will make you screwed up in the present?

Think about it. Keep it in your brains. We're going to return to it at the end. And by the way, I should say that the question is not really a fresh one. In our first Bible talk on Zechariah, we talked about past, present and future.

And so we're returning to it today, but we're going to return to it in a slightly different way. So let's have a look and open your Bibles at Zechariah. And I've forgotten the page number, but someone can yell it out.

772. 772. Thank you. We were in the book of Zechariah. We have been for two weeks. And Zechariah was a prophet among God's people in the fifth century BC. Nearly 90 years before this prophecy, after centuries of disobedience, God had punished his people for their unrelenting disobedience.

He had cast them off into exile for 70 years. They came back from exile in about 539 BC, plus a year or so. And they have now been back in the land of promise for about 17, 18 years.

[3 : 44] And now there is a Darius the Mede, who is king, and Zechariah addresses his prophecy to the people back in the land who are in the process of rebuilding the temple that the Babylonians had demolished.

So that's our context. Let's review what we've learned so far. Particularly if you're a visitor here tonight, it'll be helpful for you to hear where we've been. So Zechariah 1. In chapter 1, verses 1 to 6, God reminds his people of their past.

He spoke to them in their present, and he urged them to return to him. And he promises, look, if you return to me, your future will be filled with good things. Look at it in verse 3 of chapter 1.

God tells them to return, another word for repent, of past evil. And he says, if you return to me, then I will return to you.

In other words, you repent, and I will commit myself to you. Last week, we surveyed those six chapters. Lots happened last week. It seemed as though Israel got busy rebuilding the temple.

[4 : 47] But as we looked at in these chapters, our focus fell as they were rebuilding the temple on two particular figures. One was a high priest. The other was a figure called the branch.

The branch is a sort of future Davidic king of some sort who's not yet got a name. And somehow, in him, or during his time, the role of priest and king met together.

And that combination, we're told in Zechariah, is going to have an effect on the whole world. Priest and king together, Jewish priest and king together, is going to sort of have an effect on everyone.

And people from outside of Israel, once this happens, are going to be able to come into Israel and participate in their relationship with God. This Davidic king, this Messiah, will build God's temple, and it'll be a temple for all the nations.

So now we, that's chapters 1 to 6. Now we come to Zechariah 7 to 14. Now, lest you start worrying at this point, we are not going to do another week like last week.

[5 : 54] I'm not going to do 7 chapters of Zechariah to beat the 6 of last week. But let me tell you how these chapters function. 7 to 14 falls into two sections.

7 and 8 focus on how God's people should live in the present. And 9 to 14 focus on God's future for his people. So let me tell you how we're going to deal with these chapters.

First, I'm going to have mercy on you. And I'm not going to take you through all seven chapters. That's the first great thing. You'll be very glad to hear that tonight. They are complex and detailed, and we simply do not have time, and we want to see the baptism going on as well.

And I'd have you here to midnight if I did all of those chapters, probably. So I'm going to look at chapters 7 and 8. The focus for chapters 7 and 8 is on living in the present, as I said.

Then we're going to just have a look at one chapter after that, chapter 9. And the focus of chapter 9 is on God's future for Israel. So a bit of present and a bit of future. Maybe sometime in the future we'll come back to Zechariah 10 to 14.

[6 : 58] Who knows? Tonight we're simply going to look at three chapters of the book of Zechariah. Now with that in mind, let's get down to work. Take a look at these marvellous chapters, because they are marvellous.

And you'll want to have your Bibles open as we do it. And you might like to keep an eye on my outline, and perhaps even take some notes, particularly if you're regulars, but it won't do visitors any harm either.

So taking notes, you see, sharpens your mind, and taking notes will help you see what's going on. And the last thing is, if you have a look at the, you'll see how far I've got to go. So that would be good for you as well.

So let's have a look at verses 1 to 3. Look at verse 1, chapter 7, verse 1. We're told. 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.

Verse 1 sets the time for these incidents. Zechariah began his ministry in the second year of Darius. His ministry focused on the rebuilding of the temple. That rebuilding was finished in the sixth year.

[7 : 58] So we're about midstream. The temple is probably about half built. We're in the middle of Zechariah's ministry. The work of rebuilding the temple appears to be progressing well. Good progress has been made.

And people are beginning to think about the changes that the temple will make to their lives. Look at verses 2 and 3. Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharazah and Regimelech and their men to entreat the favour of the Lord and to ask the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, should I mourn and practice abstinence in the fifth month as I've done for so many years?

Let me tell you what's going on. Apparently, you see, those who were not sent off into exile but stayed around Jerusalem and in Judea had regularly kept days of fasting. Fasting is often associated with mourning.

So they were mourning that their city had been made desolate, their land had been destroyed. And now that the temple is being rebuilt, the question of the people of Bethel is a good one and a natural one.

They're saying, look, and in fact, it's probably one that many people have been asking, look, the temple's being rebuilt, we've been mourning these 70, 80 years and we've been fasting alongside with it.

[9 : 16] We've been doing for so long. So now that the temple's being rebuilt, can we stop? To fast or not fast? That is the question at this point.

So let me see if I can summarise the answer. There are a number of parts to it and each one starts with Zechariah receiving a word from the Lord. Have a look at it there, verses 4 to 7.

The first word from God basically says this, to fast or not to fast is not the issue. What matters is your motivation in fasting. In the past, your motivation for fasting had been false.

It was focused on yourselves and not on God. Okay, in the past, your motivation was false because it focused on yourselves. It was not on God. Part 2 of the answer can be found in verses 8 through to 14.

My summary of this second word of God would be this, to fast or not to fast is not the issue. What really matters is godliness, love of neighbour and obedience to God.

[10:20] And that's what God has said before in many places in the Old Testament, particularly say Isaiah 58, and he hasn't changed his mind at all. Godliness, love of neighbour and obedience has not, however, been part of Israel's past.

They've been grossly disobedient. They've not loved God as they should. And, you know, they haven't been terribly godly. And God punished them for their failures in this area.

So I wonder if we can summarise and sort of draw the application that the hearers might have heard from this. God appears to be saying that when there are things to mourn for, then it's not a bad idea to do some fasting.

But if you're going to fast, for goodness sake, do it properly. Do it with correct motivation. That is, you're doing it for God with a focus on God.

And do it with correct lives. That is, lives of godliness with a focus on your neighbour. In other words, if you're going to fast, take your attention completely away from yourself.

[11:24] Focus on God. Focus on others. Love God. Love others. Love God. Love your neighbour. Then you'll be fasting properly. Okay, let's turn to part three.

Part three begins at Zechariah 8, verse 1. And it runs through to verse 17. And the core of what is going on in these verses can be found in verses 14 to 17, which I'm going to read.

14 to 17 of chapter 8. For thus says the Lord of hosts, Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, so again I purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

Don't be afraid. There, these are the things that you shall do. Speak the truth with one another. Render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace.

And do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. And love no false oaths. For all these things are things that I hate, says the Lord. Now I wonder, can you see what God is saying here?

[12:31] He's saying, in the past, your lives have not been a raging success. You have not been the most godly people. And as a result, your life has been associated with covenant curses.

God has poured out covenant curses upon you. However, God's focus in the present and in the future is somewhere else. You see, what God wants to do is pour out blessings of the covenant for you.

After all, you see, God's jealous for his people. He wants to bless the land with all the covenant blessings of his presence. So in the words of verse 19 and 13, have strong hands to rebuild the temple.

In other words, in the words of verses 16 and 17, be godly, love your neighbor, be obedient, and flee evil. In other words, love God, love the things of God, hate the things that God hates.

Now, part four, we're nearly to the end of these couple of chapters. Part four runs from chapter eight, verse 18 to 23. And basically, God says this to his people.

[13:35] He says, look, what is coming upon the world is blessing that comes from my presence. And in this coming world of blessing and my presence, fasts will be redundant.

Fasts, in fact, will be turned into feasts. Abraham's descendants will be what they were designed to be. They'll be the agents of blessing to the world and Gentiles will just come streaming into God's kingdom.

It's a lovely picture, isn't it? They'll say, we've heard that God's with you. Can we come too? So what's the summary? The focus is really not on fasting, is it?

They come with a fasting question and they don't get quite the answer that they're looking for. The focus is on God and the focus is on God's purpose for his world and God is clear.

God loves his people and he loves his purpose and history is going to match his word and his purpose. History is going to match what he wants.

[14:38] I wonder if I could just close this little section before we get to the grand chapter 9 with some comments about fasting and Christians. Here are a few things to consider. If you're thinking about fasting, here's a few things to consider.

One, Jesus said that when you have the bridegroom with you, there is no need to fast. Luke 5, 34 and 35. So when Jesus is with you, you don't need to fast. However, he gives hints that when he's taken away, that is, when he goes to die and when he's taken away into heaven, then it might be appropriate to fast then.

At the same time, he doesn't regulate fasting or make it a test of spirituality. In other words, friends, if you can hear me on this, fasting is fine. But fasting is not required after the feast of knowing Jesus and the blessings of forgiveness and God's presence that Jesus brings.

So, what else can I say? Second point about fasting. Fasting is generally encouraged in scripture. I bet, no, no, I know there's at least one person here who practices it. But I bet most of us don't.

Most of us never thought of fasting. Fasting is generally encouraged in scripture and is an entirely appropriate way of humbling ourselves before God and bringing particular prayers and requests to him.

[15:56] It's a good thing to be doing. At various times in my life, I have fasted. It's been helpful for focusing in my life before God. Third, don't focus on outward deeds such as fasting before people.

I've just told you I fast at times. But when I next do, I'm not going to tell you because I'd be doing it for what you think about it.

So, instead, focus, I should be focusing on being godly. Godly in my relationship with God and godly in my relationship with others. A fasting person who doesn't love their neighbour is fasting emptily and in vain.

Let's move to chapter 9. It's a great chapter. There are three sections to it. Look at verses 1 to 8. Verses 1 to 8 focus on God's purpose, presence and proclamation.

9 and 10 focus on his coming king. 11 to 17 focus on what the king accomplishes. Now, let's have a look at each section. These next chapters are very complicated. So, I'm going to deal with what I think is reasonably straightforward in this chapter.

[17:06] Let's see what we can make of the first eight verses. First, take a scan through the nations. Can you just scan down through 1 to 8? See if you can pick out the key nations.

Damascus in verse 1. Tyre and Sidon in verse 2. Some cities of the Philistines in verses 5 to 7. Let me tell you a bit about each of those. They are Israel's traditional enemies.

And on them, God wages war. That's what happens in these verses. However, notice that the emphasis is not on the past but on the future. In other words, God talks about Israel's ancient enemies and they're sort of escalated into the future as though they were the sort of arch enemies of the future.

God is saying, no known enemy that you know is going to be able to stand against me, God the warrior. I will fight against the enemies of you, my people, and I will be victorious.

This is God's sure word to his people. That's his purpose for his future. Now look at verse 9. Let me read it to you. Then I will encamp at my house as a guard so that none shall march to and fro.

[18:17] No oppressor shall march over them for now I see with my own eyes. What do you reckon God's house is here? It's his temple that they've been rebuilding.

It's the symbol of his presence. And what God's saying is clearly saying, I'm going to set up camp in your midst, in my house. I will be guard over you, my people.

No enemy's going to get near you or be a threat to you. This is my solemn word to you, my people, and it can be trusted. That's not all. God's word, God's presence, God's purpose are capped by a very significant event in verses 9 and 10.

Now these are the purple passages of Zechariah. And if you don't recognise them, you can read any of the gospel stories and you will find them referred to, except for John's gospel.

Okay, look at verses 9 and 10. I've put the English Standard Version in those little outlines I've given you and look at what it says. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

[19:24] Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he. Humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Now I want you to tell me the key words in describing God's king. This is, you know, there are about four or five of them. You tell them to me. Words that are used to describe God's king here.

What is he like? Righteous. Good. Thank you. Humble. He has salvation.

He's your king is important. Yeah, so he's your king. He's Israel's king. So he's an Israelite. And one more, he is gentle. In other words, can you see what's being said here?

Think about this as a king. What sort of picture of a king do you get here? He's unarmed, non-aggressive, on a donkey rather than a war horse. It's a striking image of an ancient king, isn't it?

[20:27] Most nations would not worship such a king. In verses 1 to 8, God is righteous, protective, warrior God. In verse 9, he appoints a king.

And that king is righteous, gentle and saving. By implication, you see, God's giving you a choice. You can have 1 to 8 or 9 and 10. Which would you like? 1 to 8 or 9 and 10?

You can be on the side of this God and receive the rule of this king who is appointed by God or you can be opposed to God and you'll get verses 1 to 8, his judgment.

Now look at verse 10. Look at the accomplishments of this king. He will proclaim or command peace to the nations and that peace is peace with God. He will exercise or be given total dominion.

He'll rule over every land. That is, from sea to sea, that's like saying everything. From the great river, that's the Tigris and Euphrates River perhaps, to the ends of the earth, that's sort of like everywhere.

[21:31] Do you recognize this king though? Do you recognize the king spoken of here? We've seen him in action in the New Testament, haven't we? Of course we know who he is. When Jesus marches into Jerusalem toward the temple of God, the words of this passage, verse 9, are said of him.

But the echoes are throughout the New Testament. Listen to this passage from Philippians. Have 1, 2, 8, and 9, and 10 in the back of your brain and listen to Philippians 2.

So just sort of close your eyes, listen to Philippians 2, see if you can hear Zechariah. Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.

But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him. and has bestowed on him the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[22 : 57] Did you hear all the references, all the echoes? One who humbled himself, one whom God will declare as king of all the earth. here is the humble servant who offers salvation and to whom God will give dominion and power and eternal rule.

Let's get to the final section then we can wrap things up. So I want you to notice the language of the final section. God has used the language of, God uses the language of Exodus and God as warrior. He's used the language of his purpose for his people.

He's used the language of kingship taken from Samuel. Look at verse 11. He talks about the blood of the covenant. In the Old Testament this is only mentioned one other place, Exodus 24. In the New Testament do you know when it's mentioned?

This is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. That's in the Lord's Supper in other words. But there are many more echoes in Israel's past.

God talks about, can you see it there, Judah and Ephraim? That's a way of saying all of Israel. Then he talks about how they'll fight against great powers. Now in the days of Zechariah a rising world power was Greece.

[24 : 04] And so it's appropriate that if God's going to battle the biggest human power he will battle Greece and win. God will stand over his people. He'll do cosmic battle for them. He will empower them.

He'll protect them. And in verse 16 we're told that his people will shine on God's land. The language comes from the past, isn't it? And it echoes the present and it envisions the future.

The future is spelled out in the language of the past. Look at it, verse 16 again. On that day the Lord will save them. Fertility and blessing will flourish in the land.

This is the stuff of an eternal future. This is where God's purposes are headed. You see, God's going back to Eden, back to the security of God's presence, back under the protection of God in the garden with everything secure.

So with that in mind, let's return to where we started. Do you remember the quote I started with? The quotation was this. If you have one eye on yesterday and one eye on tomorrow, you're going to be cockeyed today.

[25 : 06] I want to tell you, friends, tonight, that in God's world, life is not so much determined by the present. In God's world, life is not so much determined by the present.

You see, God is a God who by nature is a God of history. And God shapes world history according to his plan. And he reflects his plan in his works in the world and among his people.

So if you look at history, you can get a glimpse of what God is about and what God is like. In other words, the past can guide you to the nature and character of God. We've seen that in this passage.

But of course, we most see it in Jesus, don't we? In this, in the act of God in Jesus in the past, God reveals his plan and his purpose for his world.

And he says, this is where my purposes are headed. Back to Eden. Back to the security of God's presence. Back under the protection of God. So with all of that behind us, let's return again to where we started and think more.

[26:09] Friends, in the purposes of God, humans are designed to be in right relationship with God. The plan and the purpose of God is accomplished in a humble, gentle and sacrificial death by his son.

In other words, if I can put it this way in the language of Zechariah, God's purposes are wrought through the shedding of the covenant blood of Jesus Christ. It's also accomplished by God doing war on evil.

And he does this in Jesus. And he'll keep on doing it in this world until evil is done away with. Please understand what I'm saying. I'm saying the best way to have straight eyes, not cock eyes, right?

The best way to have straight eyes is to have one eye on the past and one eye on the future. To look at the past and to look at the future. The future will tell you where God is going.

The past will tell you how he's going to get there. Let me say it again. The best way to have straight eyes is to have one eye on the past and one eye on the future.

[27:21] The future will tell you where it is that God is going and the past will tell you how he's going to get there through his son. With that in mind, I want to close by giving two points of application.

One for those of you who are Christians and one for those of you who are not yet. Friends, if you're a Christian, then you've got to live in the present, don't you? We all live in the present. That's life. The present is where you work out your godliness.

It's where you care for the underprivileged. It's where you show kindness and mercy. It's where you share the gospel. It's where you act rightly in your relationships. It's where you obey God. It's where you demonstrate your love for God by loving your neighbor.

However, your life in the present is not predominantly formed by the present. It is formed by the past and it's formed by the future. That is, your godliness is formed by the fact that you have been saved through God's great action in Jesus.

Friends, tonight we are going to put some people in water and we're going to put their head under. I think we're going to do that, aren't we, Mark? And then we're going to lift them out of the water and that is going to show that they have a past and a future.

[28:38] The past has gone now because they are new people in Jesus. Friends, if you're a Christian you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

You've been bought with a price and therefore you must glorify God in your bodies. However, your life must not only be formed by your past. It is also formed by the future.

You see, if you're a Christian then you know that one day God will wage a final and climactic war against evil. He will judge evildoers. So the radio station people here they're in trouble you see because God will judge evildoers and those who are set against God.

God will judge Satan and deal with him. God will consummate his kingdom. Christ will appear for all the world to see that he is Lord and Christ.

He is Lord and King and only people who have lined up with God's plans in Jesus will be members of that kingdom. Your present if you are Christian is between these two appearances of Jesus.

[29:50] Once in the past to deal with sin and once in the future to be judge. So be zealous for good deeds in the present. Live by faith in the Christ who died for you.

Look forward in hope to his blessed appearing. And I've got one more word to say and that's for those of you who are not yet Christians. Friends we are so glad that you are here with us tonight if you've just come to join a friend or you come to see a baptism you come to be here with a friend we're really so glad that you are here and if you are here and you're not yet Christian I want to tell you the most momentous news which springs from our passage tonight and which flows through Jesus the bottom line of all of this is that God created the world and is heading it towards a future and that future is where he and his purposes in his son will triumph.

That future is one where anything and anyone not lined up with God's purposes in Christ will be done away with. I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that because that's what God says in his word.

So tonight if you're not Christian yet I want to plead with you to be one to become one. We all want to plead with you those of us who are Christian here tonight.

Embrace God's humble and gentle and saving king who is Jesus. He is God's final offer. Please submit to his rule.

[31 : 23] We know that it is just and kind and gentle and that he is the best ruler that you could have. And so tonight we will rejoice at seeing our sisters go into the water and remember that.

Why? Because we know that they have fled from the dominion of the evil one to the kingdom of God's son. And that is a massive thing to rejoice in and we wish that those of you who are not yet Christians would go there too.

because we know that Jesus is a kind just gentle ruler the best you could have and we long for you to embrace him and his rule.

Let's pray. Father thank you for your word. Thank you for your word which points us back in history to what you have done and points us forward to what you will do.

Father we pray that we take this news about all that you have done and are doing in your world and will do and take it to heart. Father we pray for those of us who are Christians that you would help us to live rightly in this world between these two appearings of Jesus.

[32 : 39] And Father we pray for those of us for those people who are not yet Christians that you would work in them to flood them with the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ that they might embrace him.

We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.