

Zechariah: Restoration Hope

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[0 : 00] All right, before I bring us our second Bible reading this morning, I thought it might be helpful just to give you a little bit of a basic primer on the book of Zechariah. So, just two things really, the structure and the setting.

First of all, the structure. There are basically five important structural markers in the book of Zechariah. Three major ones and two minor ones.

So, in chapter 1, verse 1, in the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah. Then again, in chapter 1, verse 7, on the 24th day of the 11th month, which is the month of Shabbat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah.

And then finally, in the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month. Right, so, you see, these are the three major structural markers where Zechariah tells you the dates of his prophecies.

Right, he's quite specific about his dates, actually. And then in chapter 9, verse 1, and chapter 12, verse 1, you get these two second order markers, kind of subsections, if you like, where Zechariah just labels them oracles.

[1 : 19] Right, in Hebrew, it's just this word, oracles. A divine word or a divine message. Now, using these sort of objective structural markers, Barry Webb suggests that there are two major parts to the book.

He says chapter 1, verses 1 to 6, introduce the whole book. And then the first part of the book consists primarily of nine visions, or eight plus one visions.

Then chapters 7 and 8 serve as a kind of second introduction. They introduce the second half of the book, and that part consists of these two oracles. Now, not everyone agrees with Barry's structure. Okay. The biggest difference, the main difference, between Barry's structure and the more usual kind of breakup, is that most people tend to group chapters 7 and 8 with the first half of the book as a conclusion, rather than with the second half of the book as an introduction.

Okay, does that make sense? Have I got that? Yeah. So, most people go for that, but for reasons maybe that we can get to. I prefer Barry's structure. It's not all that different, but I prefer it.

[2 : 34] I think it actually makes more sense. So, that's what we're going to go with. But that's basically the structure. Now, on to setting. So, you'll notice in terms of the timing of things, chapter 1, verse 1, we're talking about the eighth month in the second year of Darius.

Now, Darius I was a ruler of the Persian Empire. His second year was 520 BC. And because they calculated the month slightly differently, we're talking about, we're not talking about August, we're talking about late October or early November.

Okay. Then in chapter 7, Zechariah mentions the fourth year of King Darius and the fourth day of the ninth month, which takes us to December 518 BC.

Okay. So, 520 to 518 BC, that's when we're talking. Remember, when we're going BC, we have to count down as we're going forwards. That's confusing. Now, if we just zoom out a little bit then, take a look at the whole Bible timeline, you can see Zechariah on the next slide.

Zechariah's there in the little green box. I don't know if you've seen this timeline before, but it starts off at the left over in creation, not exactly dated. Then moving forward through the Bible timeline, eventually we get to Zechariah there.

[3 : 56] So, he's almost 70 years after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. That happened in 586 BC. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.

He took the people of Israel off into exile, the people of Judah off into exile. But in 539 BC, okay, so 586 BC, now 539 BC, the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians and Cyrus I of Persia

allowed all the Jews to return home to rebuild Jerusalem.

So, that's the first kind of arrow going back up. You know, so, if Nebuchadnezzar took them down out into exile, Cyrus I allowed them to come back up. That happened in 538 BC.

The first wave of exiles returned in 538 BC under a bloke named Shesh Bazar, which is a name that has strangely dropped out of popularity. And they began rebuilding the temple.

They laid its foundations in 536 BC. But in 530 BC, okay, so six years later, not very far into the project, it's a massive project, they faced such strong opposition that they were forced to stop the work on the temple.

[5 : 20] So, they stopped rebuilding. And they didn't get back to it until, dun, dun, dun, Zachariah came. Until Zachariah came and started preaching about 10 years later in 520 BC.

Okay, so the work hasn't been happening for 10 years. Zachariah came and started preaching about it. So, if you go to, or actually, I think I've got it up on the screen, don't I, Simon?

If you go to Ezra chapter 5, verse 1, Ezra is, Ezra's writing after Zachariah, about maybe 20 years after or 30 years after.

So, he kind of records all of the history before him, which is quite helpful. So, Ezra's writing and he writes in chapter 5, verse 1, Now, the prophets Haggai and Zachariah, 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, who is going to be called Joshua in Zachariah, actually. Okay. But Jeshua, the son of Josedach, arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

[6 : 32] And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them. Okay. So, these verses are actually really helpful historical background for our setting in Zachariah. They introduce basically the key, the four key characters in Israel at the time.

There's Haggai and Zachariah, the prophets. There's Zerubbabel, the governor. And Joshua, the high priest. I'm just going to call him Joshua. It's a lovely name. Now, Haggai, it's just a joke.

Now, Haggai, we could, in a way, we could leave Haggai out. Haggai doesn't actually appear in the book of Zachariah, so we could have left him off the list. But I think it's probably just worth knowing that Haggai and Zachariah are contemporaries and colleagues.

All the dates in Haggai are between August and December, 520 BC. And then, as we've already seen, all the dates in Zachariah are between October, 520 BC, and December, 518 BC.

So Haggai and Zachariah overlap just a little bit. As Haggai is sort of finishing off his ministry, Zachariah is picking up his.

[7 : 42] Now, the key thing to know about Zerubbabel, the next guy, is that he was a descendant of David. So in the big overarching story of the Bible, we are waiting, remember, for God to send the promised king in the line of David, the exile kind of smashes all those hopes.

But then, Zerubbabel, after the exile, in the line of David, is somehow a governor of this province, of the province of Judah.

He's going to be an important dude. He was the governor of Judah, or Yehud, which was a sub-province of this larger province in the Persian Empire called Eber-Neri, or the province beyond the river.

Have I got a map of that? Yes. So the Persian Empire is huge. So even though God had promised this one glorious king, right, of, you know, who would actually rule over the whole world, this messianic king, Zerubbabel arrives, which is exciting, but he's also the governor of this really pathetic little province in a huge, sub-province in a huge Persian Empire.

Okay? So we're talking about Yehud, just down there, which is part of Eber-Neri. And then finally, Joshua, the high priest. Joshua, of course, is going to be important as the temple is rebuilt because he is the priest who's going to re-establish the sacrificial system.

[9 : 15] While the nation is trying to get the temple up and running and rebuild the nation, Joshua is going to be at the very heart of it. All right, so that's just a quick introduction. Does that make sense?

Do you want to ask any questions about that or can I clarify anything before we get into, you know, the meat and the theology and serious things in God's word?

Does that make sense? You with me? All right. Okay, let's read Zechariah 1, 1 to 6 then. Those are not real photos, by the way.

That's chat GPT. Anyway. In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, saying, the Lord was very angry with your fathers.

Therefore, say to them, thus declares the Lord of hosts, return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out.

[10:23] Thus says the Lord of hosts, return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds, but they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Your fathers, where are they?

And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants, the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?

So they repented and said, as the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us. People don't change.

Or do they? It's just one of those age-old questions, and I guess the debate goes on because there's sort of some truth to both sides. Right? On the one hand, people obviously change.

Right? Dramatic experiences, willpower, training and education, all combined to sort of shape and influence people, don't they? To mold people.

[11:23] But on the other hand, there is something about humanity in general, and each one of us in particular, that seems stubbornly resistant to change.

We always keep circling back to the same old problems, the same old struggles, somehow things we thought we were done with, we're right back at square one with.

People talk about how Shakespeare still resonates today because he wrote about everyday, universal human problems. Right? So the clothes might have changed since the 16th century, but the fundamental attitudes, issues, relationship problems we all have, well, they haven't changed.

And perhaps this is a question you've been pondering recently. I would think that there are wives among us who wonder from time to time, why did I marry this man?

Is my husband ever going to change? Is he ever going to start listening to me and stop picking his fingernails or clean up after himself or whatever it is?

[12:33] Perhaps the husbands are wondering, is my wife ever going to respect and admire me the way I wish she would? Is she ever going to notice any of the good things I do? How much I've changed? Perhaps there are some workers among us, wondering this about our employers and managers, all my employees.

Is my boss ever going to notice me? Are my colleagues ever going to help me? Is my team ever going to listen to me? Oh, how I wish people were smarter, kinder, more hardworking, more easygoing and compassionate, right?

We all want people to change. Just as a bit of an aside, in fact, I've received a lot of very good advice over the years from therapists and psychologists about precisely this issue, the fact that we all want others to change and so we try to change the people around us but really we shouldn't do that, right?

Because we can't change other people, we can only change ourselves. Yes, it's great advice. But then again, wonder if that last part is true even, is it?

I mean, can we even change ourselves? Certainly easier said than done. Again, I wonder if you want to change. Perhaps you wish you were smarter, kinder, more hardworking, more easygoing, more compassionate or whatever it is but for whatever reason you just can't seem to be who you want to be.

[14:08] You're stuck. So you keep flying off the handle, losing your temper and you'd really like to learn to be calm and patient and forbearing but you just can't seem to crack it.

Perhaps you'd like to be more outgoing, more generous, more open and vulnerable with people but whenever you get the chance you just cramp up your anxiety keeps you from being who you want to be.

Perhaps you'd like to give up smoking, drinking, gambling. I don't know what it is but you're addicted. All of these things that keep us from being able to change ourselves into the people that we want to be.

So what does the Bible say to all this? Well, the book of Zechariah if this introduction is anything to go by is fundamentally a book about change.

Zechariah wants to start his book talking all about change. Now the first key I think to understanding the book of Zechariah is understanding the impossibility of change or at least I should say the impossibility of real deep lasting change.

[15 : 22] Right? So in verse 1 in the eighth month in the second year of Darius the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah. Now I know we've already talked about the historical significance of that verse but I wonder if you've thought about the theological significance of it.

Namely why is Zechariah a Jewish prophet dating his book according to the reign of a Persian king? Right?

I mean if you read through the books of Kings or Chronicles often you'll see the authors you know date the histories according to the kings of Judah and Israel but not Zechariah. Why?

Why? Well theologically speaking let me put it to you like this ultimately it's because Israel hadn't and wouldn't and actually couldn't change.

Let me show you what I mean from the book of Leviticus I don't think I put this up on the screen so come with me to Leviticus chapter 26 Leviticus chapter 26 Now Leviticus is one of those books one of the books of Moses written about a thousand years before Zechariah just as the nation of Israel is coming to existence the Pentateuch the first five books of the Bible are kind of like the constitution of the nation and in Leviticus 26 God lays out two possible pathways for the nation two possible pathways ahead for the nation in verses 1 to 13 Leviticus 26 verses 1 to 13 he lays out the positive pathway pick it up in verse 3 if you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them and I will give you your rains in their season and the land shall yield its increase and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit your threshing shall last to the time of the great harvest and so on and so on it's all very positive skip down to verse 11

[17 : 25] I will make my dwelling among you God will live with them and my soul shall not abhor you and I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people isn't that a wonderful promise an exciting verse God walking among us remind you of anyone but anyway I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt that you should not be their slaves and I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect and it's a wonderful promise but then in verse 14 we get the pathway of disobedience this section is quite a lot longer you might notice that to begin with but if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments if you spurn my statutes and if your soul abhors my rules so that you will not do all my commandments but break my covenant then I will do this to you I will visit you with panic with wasting disease and fever that consumes the eyes and make the heart ache and you shall sow your seed in vain for your enemies shall eat it

I will set my face against you and you shall be struck down before your enemies those who hate you shall rule over you and you shall flee when none pursues you and if in spite of this you will not listen to me then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins now skip down to verse 21 I want you to start noticing a pattern here repeated idea there's lots of judgment various plagues and afflictions that God will send upon his people verse 21 then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me I will continue striking you sevenfold for your sins then verse 23 and if by this discipline you are not turned to me but walk contrary to me then I also will walk contrary to you and I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins and skip down to verse 27 but if in spite of this you will not listen to me but walk contrary to me then I will walk contrary to you in fury and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins and you see the repeated refrain it's like a descending staircase or a death spiral if Israel continue to sin then God is going to continue to ratchet up the punishments right the discipline delivering harsher and harsher punishments and then rock bottom comes in verse 33 when God says and I will scatter you among the nations and I will unsheathe the sword after you and your land shall be a desolation and your cities shall be a waste so unfortunately this is what happened

Israel chose the pathway of disobedience despite God's persistent warnings despite God's stern parental discipline they continued to spiral further and further and further into idolatry and immorality they did not change and the truth is they couldn't change they couldn't change in fact we won't go there now but in a very similar passage in Deuteronomy chapter 31 as Moses is preaching this to them he says he knows they won't be able to change he knows they'll choose the pathway of disobedience that's why he's not going to bother very long on the pathway of obedience they're such rebellious and stubborn people he says so even though he lays out these two pathways for them he knows which one they're going to choose of course they'll continue to be rebellious he's

experienced their stubbornness throughout all the wilderness wanderings and he's saying to them people don't change sinful people can't change now the new testament teaches exactly the same thing you remember

Jesus words in John chapter 8 he says truly truly I say to you everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin in other words sin is like the perfect drug once you do it it no longer becomes a choice it's more like an addiction you become enslaved to it you can't escape it it won't let you go so this forms I think the most important theological backdrop to the book of Zechariah the theological context people can't change sinful people can't change now so far we've just been thinking about verse 1 why has Zechariah dated his book according to the reign of a Persian king well the theological answer is because the people of Israel didn't change wouldn't change in fact they couldn't change despite the terrible warnings and punishments that God sent upon them so eventually just as he promised God destroyed their cities and scattered them among the nations now this brings us to point number two the necessity of change you see in verse 2 so in the eighth month in the second year of

Darius the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah the son of Berechiah the son of Ido saying the Lord was very angry with your fathers so sin makes change impossible but it also makes change absolutely necessary right if we want to avoid God's anger and just by the way the word for anger here is stronger than usual I think a better translation would be fury or rage right and on top of that it's repeated twice by the way in the Hebrew so literally in Hebrew verse 2 says something like this the Lord was furious with your fathers with fury right so the ESV adds that little word very he was fuming he was livid in the Hebrew doubling is a way of intensifying the verb now I don't know sorry I do know that we don't like to talk about God's anger and trust me

[23 : 42] I don't like it any more than you do but the first thing to say is make no mistake it's righteous and good God doesn't fly off the handle like we often do he doesn't lose his temper he's patient he's kind and compassionate for centuries and centuries and centuries and then when he gets angry it's because the right response to evil is anger in fact we should praise the Lord that he is not an indifferent God that he is an angry God that's what the saints do in the book of Revelation imagine how much worse it would be if God was indifferent and if he just didn't care about how we treated one another or treated him bow down to idols sacrifice your children to Moloch you know it doesn't bother me would that be a good God no so even though

God's anger is terrible and terrifying it's also righteous and good it's not something God is embarrassed about as if it's a character flaw it's not something we should be embarrassed about or downplay so first thing God's anger is good but secondly God's anger is real sometimes I think theology can feel a bit like a play thing a bit like a toy you know you've got your ideas and I've got my ideas we're just sort of kicking around you know philosophizing together kicking around our thoughts on divinity but one day theology is not going to feel like that is it where the book of Zechariah is heading actually in the very last chapter Zechariah is going to talk about the day of the Lord the day of the Lord that is the day when God is going to arrive in all his fearsome majesty and bring the judgment and you see then all of a sudden it's not going to matter how you like to think of God right is it you know perhaps you like to think of God as endlessly merciful and patient he will never bring judgment if you like to think of God that way you're going to get a shock when he does on that last day the only thing that's going to matter of course is what God is really like and if you are still in your sins if you are unchanged if you are unforgiven and my friend one of the things Zechariah is trying to warn us about is that you are going to come face to face one day with a very angry God and still under this heading of the necessity of change notice verse 3 so verse 3 therefore say to them thus declares the Lord of hosts return to me says the Lord of hosts and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts now I think the thing that's sort of impossible to miss here is how many times

Zechariah repeats the phrase the Lord of hosts what it means is the Lord of armies three times in quick succession in the Old Testament this expression occurs nearly 300 times it's obviously a reference to God's great might and power now although at times it's used to refer to God's rule over earthly armies like the armies of Israel perhaps like the armies of Assyria and Persia and Babylon that God is the Lord over all the armies who's been using the armies his way but I think in the first instance it probably is referring to God's command over the armies of heaven God commands an array of fiery chariots and horses as it were a mighty angelic horde that we sometimes get glimpses of but again the point that Zechariah is wanting to impress upon us of course is the necessity of

change isn't it because not only is

God very angry but he's also very strong it's not as if God is just a toddler you know or a puppy dog who's really really angry you know worked up about something but has absolutely no way of enforcing their rule no God is a mighty warrior God is a military general who commands a vast army of a magnitude that we couldn't possibly imagine on to point number three so still in verse three notice the reward of change there is a conditional promise here if we return to the Lord he will return to us so return to me says the Lord of hosts and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts it's like those fundraising offers

[28 : 58] God is going to match our returning the word for return is the typical Old Testament word for repentance it means to turn back to change course not just a little bit but to do a complete 180 I had a friend who said once accidentally that it's to do a complete 360 but that's not true then you're facing the same way so do a complete 180 okay and what God is saying is that if we start treating him differently he'll start treating us differently if we start respecting him and listening to him he won't be angry with us anymore he won't hold a grudge he won't turn us away he will welcome us back notice in verse 4 Zechariah uses this word again don't be like your fathers to whom the former prophets cried out thus says the Lord of hosts return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds but they did not hear or pay attention to me declares the Lord now it's worth noticing that repentance then is about turning from something and turning to someone right do you notice that so in verse three it's about turning towards God in other words it's a personal relational kind of thing in verse four it's about turning away from your evil ways and your evil deeds right it's a moral behavioral kind of thing now of course these are two sides of the same coin you can't do one without the other but I think it's helpful to kind of distill them so that we can inspect them closely and clearly repentance is a moral deeds kind of thing on the one hand it's about committing to a changed lifestyle a new way of living that will please God because it's also a personal thing on the other hand it's about coming back into a relationship with

God knowing God wanting to live your life to honor him as your creator and father to live in relationship with him to walk in a way that pleases and glorifies him now of course when God is described as turning again it's not he's turning away from evil deeds or anything like that it's not as if his character needs to change but in verse 3 he is also described as turning or repenting or returning because he is promising to stop being angry with us like the prodigal son if we will return to God he will welcome us home with open arms we don't need to be scared or afraid that if we come back to God he will cast us out Jesus said that whoever comes to me I will never cast out so the reward of change is a perfectly restored relationship with God no more hostility no more barriers between us and God he's not going to give us the cold shoulder and he's going to welcome us and we'll have a peaceful harmonious loving friendship with

God again okay but finally we're up to point number four the hope of change now I hope that by now you've sort of half realized that this passage or at least my talk doesn't really make sense right I mean after point number one what really was the point of point number two and three and now four I mean if change is impossible then surely judgment is inevitable and we should all just go go out drinking and wait until the inevitable happens but then in verse 6b you get this strange comment totally out of the blue so they repented and just to be clear that word for repented there is exactly the same word we saw in verses 3 and 4 translated return

I'm not sure why they've changed the translation but in the Hebrew it's exactly the same word this is actually the passage in the Old Testament where that word is more frequently repeated than anywhere else this is the highest density of that word repent or return turn it's the key word in the passage I want you to just think about how striking and shocking that line is so they repented what how did that happen where did that come from I mean after a thousand years of stubborn rebellion hard heartedness Moses knew they wouldn't change they ignored prophet after prophet that God sent them after a thousand years the impossibility of change so they repented how did that happen I think it raises at least two questions for us number one who repented and number two how did they do it but even before we just sort of answer those two questions at least just have a think for a moment about how significant those little words in verse six are this is why these verses should fill us with hope

I mean this verse is about the possibility of the impossible this verse is about the miraculous miraculous change this wonderful news at the end of a devastating passage someone somehow changed repented and number one who repented a lot of ink has been spilled over this there are

basically two possibilities on the one hand some people argue that Zachariah is talking about the fathers okay the fathers so you see in verse four I just want to read through it so you can follow the pronouns okay so in verse four do not be like your fathers right if you're just sort of kind of following along like that

[35 : 29] I think on a first reading we've been talking about the fathers it sounds like it's the fathers who repented right the former prophets would be people like Jeremiah or Isaiah going back even further prophets who were preaching before the exile and during the exile these are the major prophets that God sent to the people of Israel to warn them of the exile and their impending doom and in verse five notice that the fathers and the prophets have now died out in contrast to God's ever living word which overtook the fathers that word overtake is very often used in military context you know when you see one army hunting down catching and conquering another army right it's as if God's word here hunted down the people of Israel and destroyed them God said that he would punish them if they persisted in their rebellion and eventually God's word did catch up with them and then they repented perhaps you might think of someone like

Daniel so in Daniel chapter nine Daniel is reflecting on the book of Jeremiah Daniel prays a prayer of confession and repentance on behalf of all the people I'd love to go through the whole thing actually because the themes are really interesting you could read it another time but he says starting in verse 18 oh my God incline your ear and hear open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by your name for we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness obviously but because of your great mercy oh Lord hear oh Lord forgive oh Lord pay attention and act delay not for your own sake oh my God because your city and your people are called by your name right so reading reading Daniel some people think that Zachariah is talking about the fathers how God's word caught up with them they were scattered into exile scattered into the nation but then they repented people like Daniel and others having seen where their sins led them on the other hand and I think I prefer this view or maybe I prefer the view that it's both that it's both and but anyway I wouldn't go to the stake for this but others think that

Zachariah is talking about his own original hearers so if you imagine the speech marks right so the punctuation in the Bible is an original okay so if you imagine that the speech marks end halfway through verse six and then Zachariah is telling us how his message were was received so my words are my statutes which I command my servants the prophets did they not overtake your fathers that's what he said to the to the generation and then the narrative picks up so they repented and said as the Lord of hosts purpose to deal with us for our ways and deeds so has he dealt with us in other words this verse is about the fact that Zachariah's generation finally learned the lesson their fathers didn't they returned to the Lord and what we're going to see Dave's going to show us next week how since they repented since they returned to the Lord the Lord returned to them that's exactly what we're going to see next week the

Lord coming back to live among his people and to renovate and restore them from the very heart of the nation okay but then the second question is whoever it is if it's the fathers or if it's the generation or if it's both how did they repent after so many years of stubbornness what changed and I think this is a question that Zachariah's introduction just leaves hanging for now we have to wait for the rest of the book to find out the answer to this question how do people change how does real lasting change happen at the moment verse 6 is just a little bit of a teaser if you like of what's to come this is going to be a book all about change all about restoration the hope of restoration and how despite the impossibility of change God is a God who can do the impossible God is a God who can miraculously work in your heart and in the hearts of his people to bring transformation and change all right so I'm going to leave it on the cliffhanger too time to wrap up we've seen four things at first the impossibility of change because humans are enslaved to sin second the necessity of change because

God the mighty Lord of hosts is angry with us and he demands that we do change third the reward of change that if we do change God will change too if we turn away from our sins and turn back to God God will turn away from his righteous anger and welcome us in love and fourthly the hope of change or the miraculous possibility of change the hope of change is the miraculous work of God which we're going to see in the rest of the book so far all we've been given is a little teaser but as the book of Zechariah unfolds we're going to see more and more of God's plan to bring real lasting renewal and restoration for his people now as we wrap up though I just want to add one last point about the time for change is it time for a change for you see one of the helpful things about the book

of Zechariah I think what makes it particularly helpful for us is that it's not quite a black and white and binary kind of a book it's it's sort of gray in the sense that it's sort of about incomplete half baked change right so Zechariah was living in a time of real change where the people of [41 : 23] Israel were repentant and they were being restored and renewed the nation was being rebuilt right the temple was rebuilt the population was rebuilt even the moral and kind of spiritual character of the nation was changing was being rebuilt but also all of these changes ended up being rather pathetic the temple was smaller than it had been previously and Israel never really returned to her former glory which of course was deeply disappointing especially given that the exilic prophets had foretold not just a return to the halcyon days of the past you know the good old days but that Israel would reach new heights of glory think about the spectacular promises in Ezekiel for instance where he promises a massive new temple that will bring life to the whole world you know with the river flowing out of it and causing all the all the life to spread everywhere well in Zechariah's day people were listening to these promises they were trying to rebuild the temple and yet it must have seemed that these things were more distant than ever and more incredible than ever unbelievable famously in Zechariah chapter 4 verse 10 Zachariah refers to his day as the the day of small things and that's what it was right it was it was not a day of nothing but it wasn't a day of spectacular greatness either it wasn't a day of big things it was a day of small things now we have moved forward in salvation history you know a long way forward actually we have lots more wonderful things than Zachariah and his generation knew about but on the other hand I think sometimes we can feel caught between the now and the not yet of God's promises on the one hand we know that King Jesus has been anointed we know his name is Jesus we don't just have Zerubbabel anymore we have Jesus himself ruling over us we have his Holy Spirit dwelling within us we've been born again through his resurrection we have Jesus with us always to the end of the age so we really do have the power and the help that we need to live new lives now to to throw off our old selves we have the power to change sounds like a great Christian group you could join at the campus we have the power to change right to make all these wonderful maybe changes that we want to make if you're stuck with a with a temper or you're stuck with lust or you're stuck with arrogance whatever it might be you have the power to change think of 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 where Paul says therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come actually again I love the punchiness of the Greek in that verse actually is a bit more hits you he says if anyone is in Christ new creation you know it's sort of just like bam that is the new creation it's not just that he is a new creation it's that the whole new creation that is coming you're witnessing that now it's there you can see it the old has passed away behold the new has come in you or in this person or again in Romans chapter 6 I'll pick it up in verse 3 Paul says don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father we too might walk in newness of life right and he's talking about right now you can walk in newness of life today so if you're sick of chucking temper tantrums if you're sick of holding grudges or speaking crudely or living stupidly or whatever it is and instead you want to walk in humility and gentleness and patience you want to learn to be forgiving and kind right now thankful peaceful respectful right then you can with the help of the spirit of Jesus through Christ all things are possible you can change turn away from your sins embrace Jesus as your Lord and he will embrace you take all your sins and griefs to him and throw yourself in his mercy and ask him for his help he won't turn you away he will set you free from your sin but of course on the other hand right those those of us who have been Christians for a while know this and if you are new I don't want to you know the promise or confuse you those of us who have been Christians for a while know that change doesn't always happen overnight none of us are perfect yet so even though the Holy Spirit can and does bring real change into our hearts his renovation work will not yet be complete until the redemption of our bodies until the whole new creation arrives so I take it that as we work through Zechariah this will be really helpful for us to we need to be patient in our day of greater but still small things in that way there's much more yet to come we need to be patient while we await the glories that we know are coming that Christ's resurrection guarantees we have the first fruits of the spirit within us but the full harvest has not yet matured so we need to hold on and press on waiting for the day when we shall all be changed let me finish with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 this is wonderful news for those who are desperately wanting to change I'll just let

them ring out just as we have born the image of the man of dust we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven I tell you this brothers flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of [47 : 52] God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable behold I tell your mystery we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed let's pray loving father God we thank you for the miraculous work of Jesus that's in our hearts now to bring renovation and change we do so desperately want to leave our sin behind and live to honor and please you and to glorify you we pray for help strength guard us against temptation even now help us to walk in step with the spirit to so closely resemble our Lord Jesus that people see him clearly through us and we pray as well that for patience help us to hold on as we wait for that wonderful moment where our change our renovation will finally be complete help us to encourage one another with these words evermore as the day is approaching we ask these things in Jesus name amen