

Gathering People to Himself

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[0 : 0 0] We're turning to Zechariah 10 now, so if you will join me there, we'll read that one out. Zechariah chapter 10, starting in verse 1 to the end.

Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds, and he will give them showers of rain, to everyone the vegetation in the field.

For the household gods utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies. They tell false dreams. They give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep. They are afflicted for lack of a shepherd.

My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders. For the Lord of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his majestic steed in battle.

From him shall come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler, all of them together. They shall be like mighty men in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets.

[1 : 0 4] They shall fight because the Lord is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses. I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph.

I will bring them back, because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them. For I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them. Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine.

Their children shall see it and be glad. Their hearts shall rejoice in the Lord. I will whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as they were before.

Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them.

He shall pass through the sea of troubles, and strike down the waves of the sea, and all the depths of the Nile shall be dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.

[2 : 1 7] I will make them strong in the Lord, and they shall walk in his name, declares the Lord. All right, well, let's pray as we come to God's Word this morning.

Loving Father God, thank you for the gift of your Word, and the gift it is to gather together as your people. Please help us to humbly sit under what you have to say to us this morning.

Help me to speak clearly, and to proclaim the truth. In Jesus' name, Amen. All right, just quickly check that this is working.

Yep. All right, I'll leave that off. Good morning, and how are you this morning? And, yeah?

Yeah? Good? I mean, I don't mean how are you in the kind of superficial way that we might greet someone on the street, but no, how are you really going? Is today looking like a good day?

[3 : 24] Or is it looking like a bad day? Has it been a stressful week? Are you feeling down? Or maybe you're happy and excited to be here and everything's going great.

Maybe just getting out the door this morning was a struggle. If you've had a rough start, I hope that today gets better. If you've had a great start, I hope that today gets even better.

But however you're going, I'm really glad that you're here. Here at church, gathered as God's people, together. I mean, like sometimes this can feel a bit mundane, can't it?

We're just going around, doing the motions every week. Coming to church on Sunday morning is part of that. Sunday mornings can be a struggle to get up and get ready, to be at church on time, helping the kids out the door, feeling exhausted just before you, even before you walk in.

Or maybe this is your first time at church, here at SLBC or at any church. And if that's you, welcome.

[4 : 32] We're so glad that you're here. But wherever you're at, I hope that today in Zechariah 10, you'll see just how wonderful and exciting and precious a privilege it is to be gathered together like this, as God's people.

So we're looking at Zechariah 10 today, continuing our series through Zechariah. And chapter 10 is in the midst of the first of two oracles of the Lord.

So messages from God to his people. Remember, Zechariah is writing in the time when the people of Judah are returning to Jerusalem after the exile to Babylon, and they're rebuilding the temple.

So that's... It's disappeared. There we go. So that's roughly where Zechariah is happening. The return from Babylon has started.

And God is making promises to them through Zechariah about how he will return to his people. Chapter 1 starts with, return to me, says the Lord, and I will return to you.

[5 : 45] And today's passage has some really encouraging things for us to think about as we gather together this morning and every Sunday morning, or whenever we gather as God's people around him.

So let's jump in and listen to what God has to say to us. So starting in verse 1, Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds.

And he will give them showers of rain, to everyone the vegetation in the field. For the household gods utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies. They tell false dreams and give empty consolation.

Therefore the people wander like sheep. They are afflicted for lack of a shepherd. So the land of Judah is the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The land that God promised to give them and that he brought them to when he brought them out of slavery in Egypt. It's a land which God himself cares for and waters with rain from heaven.

[6 : 51] Have a look at what Moses says in Deuteronomy 11. For the land that you are entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it like the garden of vegetables.

But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for.

The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.

And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full. So here in Zechariah, who should the people be turning to and asking for rain?

Well, it's God, of course. God's the one that waters it and cares for it. But who are they turning to? Well, they're turning to idols and false gods, the household gods and diviners.

[8 : 13] Just like the nations around them and the nations that God dispossessed from the land before them, they have worshipped and put their trust in false gods.

And it's because of this very sin that the northern kingdom of Israel is no more. And we read about it in 2 Kings 17. In the ninth year, sorry, the ninth year of Hoshea, it was 722 BC.

So this happened about 204 years before this part of Zechariah. Remember, we're in about 518 BC. So to put that in perspective, the first fleet arrived to Australia about 237 years ago.

So less time than that, Israel was destroyed by Assyria. So in 2 Kings 17 verse 6, in the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Hala and on the harbour, the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes.

And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practised.

[9 : 51] And Judah followed suit. If you jump down to verse 19, Judah also did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced.

So instead of asking God for rain, the one who can provide it and who does care for the land, the people have been going after false gods who utter nonsense, the diviners who see lies, who tell false dreams and give empty consolation.

They trusted in things rather than the God who made those things. How have they gotten here? Well, they followed the kings of Israel.

See 2 Kings 17 verse 8 again. They walked in the customs of the nations that the Lord had driven out before them and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practised. The leaders of Israel, who are supposed to lead the people to God, to be first in following Him and trusting Him and honouring Him, have instead led the people astray and to their very destruction.

So Zechariah 10 starts with a big problem. The people are afflicted for lack of a shepherd. They have no one to lead them and they have gone astray.

[11 : 17] So God is angry at the leaders of His people. We're at the Judah point in your outline now. The ones who have led, the leaders who have led the people to worship man-made idols and away from the true and living God who cares for them and provides the rain and sustains the land.

And in the ESV, you might have a footnote on the word leaders that says, Hebrew, the male goats. Male goats are often put among the flock to lead the sheep.

So this is another analogy for the leaders of Judah. They're shepherds or even less than that, they're male goats among the flock themselves who have led the people astray by their wicked ways.

And God promises to punish the leaders because He cares for the flock. Now again, in the Hebrew, there's a clever play on words happening here that we miss in the English.

And I can't read Hebrew, so you shouldn't just take my word for it. But let's see what Michael Steed has to say in his commentary on Zechariah. And I'll just read this out.

[12 : 34] So in the NIV, in the ESV, translation of this, in the NIV translation of this verse, the same Hebrew word is translated as both punish and care.

So it's the same word. My anger is hot against the shepherds and I will punish the leaders for the Lord of Hosts cares for His flock. The core idea of the Hebrew word is to visit or attend to.

But that visitation or attending to might be to punish or to bless. This wordplay, that God will take care of the leaders in order to take care of the flock, highlights the fact that the restoration of the flock and the punishment of the bad shepherds are two sides of the same coin.

The Lord will act in judgment on the bad shepherds because He cares for the flock. It's things like this that make me just go, wow, God's word is so amazing sometimes, isn't it?

It's great. But who is this flock? Well, it's the house of Judah and it's the same people who have rejected God and worshipped idols.

[13 : 44] But look at what God promises for them. He says He will make them like His majestic steed in battle. So rather than wandering lost sheep, they will be like a mighty war horse.

But not just any horse. No, the personal horse of the Lord of hosts, the commander of armies. Right? Hosts means armies. So God is promising to make these lost sheep His own horse.

In battle, horse and rider operate as one. While the rider is clearly in command, the horse has to trust its rider completely.

And the rider knows his horse. So this is a promise of great restoration to Judah. Now, this next part is confusing, so let's have a close look at it.

The cornerstone, tent peg, and battle bow are all descriptions of leaders. The cornerstone being the first and most structurally significant stone in a building.

[14 : 49] And if the cornerstone collapses, the building will follow. And the tent peg is something that secures and holds everything else from collapsing.

They didn't have tents like we have now with the flexible fiberglass poles to give the tent structure. It was all held tight by the tent pegs. And so without the pegs, the whole tent would collapse.

And the battle bow displays military leadership. And the bow sends forth the arrow. It commands the arrow where it should go and with what speed, and the arrow follows.

And then at the end of this verse, from him every ruler, all of them together. Now, on first read, you'd be forgiven for thinking that all of these analogies are positive.

And, I mean, I certainly thought that. Saying that God will provide the cornerstone, the tent peg, the battle bow, every ruler. And that may be true, but that's not what this is saying.

[15 : 54] So remember, the leaders in this passage have rejected God and led the flock astray. And here, the word ruler means oppressor. In the ESV Study Bible, there's a cross-reference from, on the word ruler, back to chapter 9, verse 8, which I think I have on the screen.

Yes. Which says, he will encamp at his house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro, no oppressor shall again march over them. For now I see it with my own eyes.

So, rather than saying, he will provide all the rulers, what is actually happening, is God is talking about his judgment on the leaders, his visitation on them.

He will take care of them. From him shall come, is rather, from him shall go out. And the CSB translation is slightly more helpful here.

There we go. So, the cornerstone, the tent peg, the battle bow, and every ruler will all go out from him together. So rather than being, like, sent and provided by him, God is driving out these oppressors, these bad shepherds and leaders from among his people.

[17 : 07] And then in verse 5, And they, that's the flock of Judah, shall become like mighty men in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets. They shall fight, because the Lord is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses.

So these wandering lost sheep will be made great. God will remove their oppressive leaders, who have led them away from him and into falsehood, and they will become mighty, like his war horse, like mighty men in battle.

They will overcome their enemies. But notice, not by their own strength, no, but because the Lord is with them. This tiny remnant nation will put to shame the enemy cavalry.

So that brings us to the next point, Joseph. So God promises in chapter 6, sorry, verse 6, I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph.

Now, Zechariah's listeners of the day would have been pretty shocked at this statement. Strengthening Judah sounds great, they are returning from Babylon and rebuilding the temple, but saving Joseph?

[18 : 28] Joseph refers to the northern kingdom, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as we saw in 2 Kings, they have been defeated and carried away by Assyria over 200 years ago.

That's 2 Kings 17. And if we have a look, this is going to work for me. Simon, can you change the slide for me?

Yeah, so back to that diagram. You can see there when the line divides into south and north, south Judah gets exiled to Babylon, but then they return and the line continues, but the northern kingdom, they are exiled to Assyria.

And that's it. And then the next one, this is a map of the land in the time of Zechariah writing.

And you can see where that red circle is, that little red area, that's Judah as it is. Jerusalem's roughly in the middle of that. But the northern kingdom doesn't exist. It's all Persian-controlled area.

[19 : 43] So, what does God mean when he says, I will save Joseph? It's too late. They're gone. They're destroyed. They're scattered.

And so far in Zechariah, we've been hearing about the house of Judah, the ones who are returning from exile and rebuilding the temple. But now, those same promises are extended to Joseph, the northern kingdom that has been scattered among the nations for the last 200 years.

And what follows is a great message of hope for God's people. people. To this day, those tribes have been scattered. They haven't returned to the land of Israel, not in the way that Judah did.

But that's not exactly what God is promising here. In fact, he's promising something far greater. So, let's read on and come back to that thought. So, in chapter, sorry, verse 6, I will strengthen the house of Judah and I will save the house of Joseph.

I will bring them back because I have compassion on them and they shall be as though I had not rejected them. For I am the Lord their God and I will answer them. Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior and their hearts shall be glad as with wine.

[21 : 02] Their children shall see it and be glad. Their hearts shall rejoice in the Lord. So, God's promise is to restore Joseph completely. Here we see God's character so clearly.

Even though these people have rejected him utterly, even though they have turned away from him, they have worshipped things made by their own hands and have run off after the gods and falsehoods of the nations, God will save them.

Though his judgment is perfectly just and good to cast them out, scatter them and despise them, they deserve that, but he is faithful to his promises and he has compassion on them and promises to save them.

He will make them as strong as mighty warriors and they will be overcome with joy and rejoicing. He says in verse 8, I will whistle for them and gather them in for I have redeemed them.

They shall be as many as they were before. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me and with their children they shall live and return.

[22 : 18] I will bring them home from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon until there is no room for them. Zechariah 10 verse 8 is in contrast to Isaiah 7 verse 18 where God whistles for Egypt and Assyria to come and enact his judgment.

Instead now he whistles for Israel to return from Egypt and Assyria. At first there will be as many as there were before but then notice in verse 10 the land will be completely full.

There will be no more room. Though God scattered them they will remember him and this doesn't simply mean that they will recall or look back with nostalgia or have a sense of longing.

No, they will remember that the Lord is God and they will turn back to him. They will repent. They will return to him with their children and remember how Zechariah started right back in chapter 1 return to me says the Lord of hosts and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts.

He will bring them back from the nations that carried them away. Now a consistent theme in the Bible is that God's judgment involves scattering and we see it right at the beginning in the Garden of Eden which is the pattern of the kingdom, God's people living in God's place and enjoying God's rule but because of their sin, their rejection of his good rule, God banishes Adam and Eve from the garden from living with him in his place.

[24 : 06] And at the Tower of Babel God confused their languages and scattered them across the earth. The exiles of Judah and Israel are scattered from the promised land but God's salvation involves gathering.

He gathers back his people and ultimately in the new creation all of his people will be in his place with him as their God and king.

God's people in God's place living under and enjoying God's rule. And in Zechariah God is promising a new exodus and that promise is going to come up again as we keep going through the book.

He will humble the proud nations and gather his people to himself and they shall be strong in him and walk in his name. Friends, look around.

We are this promised gathering. We're waiting for its ultimate completion and fulfillment in the new creation of course but right here, right now, this is a taste of it.

[25 : 11] People from many nations whom God has called and gathered together. this promise was made over 2,500 years ago but we get to experience part of its fulfillment.

How incredible is that? How great is it to have one another, to be gathered here as God's people around him and his word? God. How has this happened?

How have we been gathered from among the nations to be here together today? I'm sure you know the answer, through Jesus but let's explore that some more. So we're now at the solution.

So this passage started with a problem. The people have been afflicted for lack of a shepherd. The leaders have led them away from God and into falsehood and lies and idol worship but God has fixed the problem.

He has driven out the oppressors and bad shepherds and has appointed a king who will reign forever. The promised priest king of chapter 6. The humble king mounted on a donkey from last week.

[26 : 24] The righteous king bringing salvation. A shepherd over his flock who cares for the sheep. Jesus Christ has fulfilled all of these promises. He is that shepherd priest king who will reign forever.

And he has sent his call out to all the nations extending these promises far beyond Judah and Joseph to include you and me. Not only does God show compassion on Israel who rejected him time and time again but now he has extended his compassion and salvation to all.

To you and me who were enemies of him. Rejecting him and ignoring him that he sent his son into the world to suffer his judgment that we rightly deserve.

He took that on himself so that we might be saved. In Romans 15 Paul describes how Christ has done this so that we too might glorify God and it should come up on the screen.

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised so that is to the Jews to show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy as it is written therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing to your name and again it is said rejoice those Gentiles with his people and again praise the Lord all you Gentiles and let all the peoples extol him and again Isaiah says the root of Jesse will come even he who arises to rule the Gentiles in him will the Gentiles hope may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope so if you aren't trusting in Jesus or following him as king then this call is for you return to him and he will gather you in he has paid the price for your rebellion and he now offers grace and mercy to those who remember him who return who turned from following other things and to follow and serve and trust in him as king if you are trusting him as king then be encouraged be strengthened you're a part of the fulfillment of promises made millennia ago we here today get to taste the new creation where all of

[29 : 04] God's people will be gathered back to him and in the meantime rejoice encourage one another keep coming along to church gather together with God's people as much as you can it's such an incredible gift that he has given us and we get to tell others see this call the announcement that Jesus is king and is reigning and is calling all people to himself that call is going out on the tongues of those who have turned to him and as Jesus says in Matthew 28 he came to them and said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age so Jesus the king has given us a great duty to herald the call so that all nations may hear and turn to

Christ the king and be saved it's time to wrap up so Israel and Judah had turned away from God their leaders led them into idol worship and away from the true God who cared for them and provided rain on the land that he had promised to them so God punished them he scattered them among the nations but he is still faithful to his promises and promised to restore them he has provided a good shepherd king who will reign forever and who is gathering people from all nations to himself us being gathered here this morning is proof of that and what a great privilege it is to be counted among God's people as heirs to the promises he has made throughout history to to live and dwell with God as his people in his place and enjoying his rule so however your day started today however your week has been so far

I hope that you can feel encouraged to be here to be a part of the fulfillment of God's promises to be united together under Jesus our shepherd priest king who has called us back to him even while we were rejecting him so let's encourage one another with this truth let's pray loving father thank you that you are faithful to your promises that though we turn and reject you you call us back to yourself that you sent Jesus to be the perfect shepherd the perfect king who will reign forever he has made a way for us to be brought back to you that the punishment we deserve he took on his shoulders please help us to continue to trust in him as king and to find joy in gathering together as your people knowing that this is a small taste of heaven and we long for the day when we see its reality in all its fullness in

Jesus name we pray amen