

“GOD’S GRACE FOR TROUBLED PEOPLE” PT. 2
ZECHARIAH 8:9-17

I suppose everyone likes a surprise (happy) ending to a story. The Bible is filled with stories of unexpected endings — tragedies and loss that are unexpectedly transformed (what one writer calls “redemptive reversals”). These stories begin appearing in the Bible almost on the first page — and they persist throughout the book:

- Abraham and Sarah, who became pregnant, long after her child-birthing years had past
- Joseph, who was sold into slavery and anonymity but resurfaced as the second-most powerful man in Egypt
- A nation of 2 million Israelites fleeing from the Egyptians, finding themselves looking at the Red Sea in front of them and an army behind them, and escaping because the Sea parted and dried, allowing them to cross
- Ruth, whose husband died unexpectedly and early, who was childless and in a foreign country, and yet received a husband and became part of the Messianic lineage
- Three men thrown into a bellowing furnace of fire *and surviving* — and their friend surviving a night in a den of hungry lions
- A group of 12 unknown, uneducated men being used to influence the world — even to this generation
- And of course there is the story of Jesus Himself, who was crucified and buried, His closest followers without expectation of a happy ending, and He was resurrected and ascended.

The Bible is filled with these reversals. And among the sweetest reversals known are the ones where God’s enemies become His friends through grace — when God saves and defends and provides for those who had been opposed to Him and gives them benefits that were unimaginable to them.

It is just that kind of story that we find in Zechariah 8. Fifteen years after the return of the nation Israel back to its land from captivity in Babylon, and the temple still was not rebuilt. Under the influence of Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, the reconstruction was begun. By the time of Zechariah 8, the work was about halfway completed. The people were evidently becoming complacent, so a contingent of leaders from Bethel came to the priests in Jerusalem and said, “Can we stop the fasts we have done for 70 years” (7:3)? They apparently believed that their safety was procured by their ritualistic practices rather than by God’s grace. So in Zechariah 7-8 God responds with a series of four oracles (declarations) in which he corrects the Bethelite leaders. The first two oracles (ch. 7) are condemnations of their unrighteous thinking; the last two (ch. 8) are filled with grace. In the first part of chapter 8, last time we said that *God’s power and grace are adequate to provide for His people*. In 8:9-17 we will see that...

GOD’S POWER AND GRACE ARE ADEQUATE TO REVERSE THE FORTUNES OF HIS PEOPLE.

Because of what God has provided, twice He calls the people to be strong (vv. 9, 13) and twice He tells them not to fear (vv. 13, 15). Because He has promised, they can be strong. **We will see four calls to be strong...**

1. **Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened to **WORK** (v. 9)**
2. **Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened by **GRACE** (vv. 10-13)**
3. **Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened in **TRUST** (vv. 14-15)**
4. **Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened for **TRANSFORMATION** (vv. 16-17)**

- The opening verses of chapter eight spoke of the hope of the Messiah who would establish His Kingdom:
 - ✓ God and His glory would return to reside/dwell in Jerusalem (8:3; cf. Ezk. 43:1ff).
 - ✓ Jerusalem and the temple mount would be known as the City of Truth and the Holy Mountain (8:3)
 - ✓ There would be peace and safety for the most vulnerable of people (8:4; cf. Is. 11:6-9)
 - ✓ God would draw His redeemed people from all the nations back to Jerusalem under a united Kingdom where they would be His eternally (8:7-8; Is. 43:5-7; Jer. 31:8)
- These verses draw out present implications from the future hope for the Israelites of that day — *how should they conduct themselves* in light of the coming Messiah and Kingdom? *They should be strong.*
- “God’s promises of future blessing should always encourage His people in their present tasks.” [BKC]
- The hope of Israel directs us as well — in light of our confidence in Christ, how should we live today? Likewise, *we should be strong.* Here are four calls to be strong...

1. Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened to WORK (v. 9)

- The main implication that God draws for the people about His promises to them is ***Let your hands be strong...*** And specifically, they are to be strong ***to the end that the temple might be built.***
 - ✓ God has just told them that He would come in His glory to dwell in Jerusalem and that they would be safe in His Kingdom (vv. 1-8).
 - ✓ They might be tempted to think, “Ok — the Messiah is coming; we can stop working and relax...”
 - ✓ This command is a reminder that in spite of the future promises there is still work to be done. The Israelites were not to stop working.
 - ✓ What then is the benefit of the promise of God for the future? The benefit is that the Israelites could be certain that no matter what opposition they might face, God would accomplish His purposes.
 - ✓ This is the same principle experienced by the nation when they entered the promised land (Josh. 1):
 - “Every place...I have given it to you...” (v. 3)
 - “No man will be able to stand before you...” (v. 5)
 - “I will be with you...I will not fail you or forsake you” (v. 5b)
 - “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go...” (v. 9b, 11b)
 - And with all these promises, God repeatedly said, “Be strong and courageous...” (vv. 6, 7, 9).
 - ✓ Why? It is a reminder that even though the Lord called the nation to this task, the calling did not imply that it would be easy. There is inherent hardship involved in serving the Lord. But He wants them (and us) to know that He is with them (and us) along the way. Cf. Haggai 2:4-9.
 - He uses us, but He is our strength; we labor, but we are never the source of strength or victory.
 - He makes us labor to demonstrate we are *inadequate* and that He is always adequate.

- How would they gain strength from the Lord?
 - ✓ Notice to whom this command is given — *you who are listening in these days...*
 - ✓ There is a contingent of people in the present listening to the prophets who had been prophesying in the past and into the present (incl. Zechariah and Haggai).
 - ✓ The implication is, “Have you not heard what you have been hearing?” The indication is that they will be strengthened by listening to (and obeying) the Lord.
 - ✓ They were listening to the promises of God and they were fortified to continue working.
 - ✓ Strength for living is not gained by attempting to manipulate circumstances so life will be easy. It won’t. Life is inherently hard. I sin, you sin, we all sin, and we all live in a broken, sin-cursed world. Life in the day of Zechariah wasn’t easy and it isn’t easy today. But it does not need to overwhelm.
 - ✓ There was strength for Israel in listening to the prophetic Word from God. And there is strength for us in listening to the inerrant full Word of God.
 - ✓ There was no strength when the Lord (and His revelation) was ignored and disobeyed (7:11-12).
 - ✓ There is every strength when God’s Word is taken in — read, meditated, studied, memorized, done.
 - ✓ Do you believe 2 Timothy 3:16-17? (You’ve heard it many times.) What are you doing about it?
 - ✓ What is your intake of the Bible like? What is the evidence (fruit) of your Bible intake (or lack of)?
 - ✓ Israel could only hear the promises of God in the prophetic word. And we can only hear the promises of God and know Him in the revealed Word of God. And only in those promises will we be fortified to endure and persist in the faith. (If you are struggling, is it from a lack in this area?)
 - ✓ Remember Ps. 119:156, 159-60, 165-166. The Word of God is the source of your strength to work.

2. Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened by GRACE (vv. 10-13)

- Notice the word *for* in v. 10 — this is the reason that they are to be strong (v. 9) — because God is treating the remnant differently than the generations that were judged (v. 11). While the earlier days were bleak and difficult, there was reason for hopefulness now (v. 9).
- *Before those days* refers to the days prior to them hearing the message of restoration from Haggai and Zechariah. There was poverty and deprivation in those days (Hag. 1:4-11).
 - ✓ *No wages* for man or animal meant no money and no food. They both worked but were unpaid.
 - ✓ Even worse than what they didn’t have was what they did have — opposition (*no peace*) from their *enemies* — “they met trouble coming and going...”
 - ✓ These enemies appear to be the source of the problem — no peace (at war) because of enemies.
 - ✓ The enemies are contrary, opposed, and hostile. Cf. Ezra 4:4ff.
 - ✓ The last clause is stunning: *I set all men against one another*. God withheld His blessings from Israel and they experienced resentments, animosity, and conflict (which are all the byproduct of disobedience and the absence of God). They experienced the consequence of disobedience.

- ✓ The nation was broken financially, politically, militarily, and socially. Nothing was working. It was like barren Sarah, imprisoned Joseph, immigrant Ruth, and exiled Daniel. Where was hope?
- **But now** (v. 11) is one of those remarkable interjections of God — “But God...” (Gen. 8:1; 17:19; Eph. 2:4). And notice who is speaking — **Lord of Hosts** — YHWH Almighty. Omnipotent God, who says...
 - ✓ **I will not treat the remnant...as in the former days...** The past is in the past and there is a new plan (filled with grace!) that is coming for God’s people. The One who acts is **I** (emphatic) — YHWH.
 - ✓ In previous days there was discipline, and despite the arrogance of the Bethelites, God was blessing and would bless Israel in astounding grace. It might have been a day of “small things” (4:10), but that was all about to change!
- The changes promised by God are revealed in vv. 12-13 — and they all flow from His grace.
 - ✓ In verse 10, there was no peace for the people; in v. 12, there is **peace for the seed** — that is, there is such presence of peace that crops are planted, grow, and are harvested. No war to destroy.
 - ✓ There will be **dew** and rain so that the **vines** will be **fruitful** and **the land will yield its produce**. Previously, there was work without profit; now there is work with abundance of provision.
 - ✓ In v. 10, the nation experienced the consequence of disobedience, but here they experience the blessings of grace: **I will cause the remnant...to inherit...** The Lord is the source of the consequences of their rebellion and also the blessings of His grace. And when He uses the word **inheritance** it seems like something more than just crops, doesn’t it? Sun and rain are blessings, but they aren’t considered to be an inheritance. God expands in v. 13...**It will come about...**
 - **You were a curse** refers to how they had been defeated, plundered, and taken captive.
 - **House of Judah...house of Israel** points to the unified blessing to all the nation — they were taken captive (under the curse) as separated tribes; but now they will be reunited as one nation.
 - Before they become a blessing, God **will save** the one nation. That is, He will fulfill His promise of a redeemed nation (Gen. 12:1-3; Jer. 31:31-34; Rom. 11:26, 28). “God’s words ‘I will save you’ make all the difference.” [Laney]
 - Finally, **become a blessing** reveals God’s purpose in saving Israel — it is so spiritual blessings of salvation will be experienced by all people everywhere (Gen. 12:3; Rom. 4:22-25).
- Because God is a God of grace, the nation was called to **be strong**. (And being strong also meant not being **fearful**.)
 - ✓ To be fearful meant they had no confidence in God that He would save the nation.
 - ✓ The command **do not fear** demands that they control their thinking (hearts) and their conduct. Because of God’s promises (vv. 11-13), they did not need to cower before the nations as they continued rebuilding the temple. They could be bold and courageous in troubling times.
 - ✓ Further, to **be strong** meant that they trusted God; they were not self-confident (7:3) but God-confident. God had not abandoned His people and had even reinforced His promises.

- ✓ What an amazing reversal — instead of being accursed by the nations, they are a means of blessing to the nations. And because of this coming blessing, they could persevere in their day.
- ✓ Friends, we have so many blessings in the past from God (and we do well to remember them). But we also have many blessings and promises coming in the future. And those also should fortify us for being confident today. God has been gracious in the past and will be gracious in the future.
- ✓ Be strong. He will keep you and will not abandon you.

3. Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened in TRUST (vv. 14-15)

- You know that one of the key chapters in the Bible is Genesis 12 — it is where God makes His covenant with Abraham to make a nation through him that would belong to God eternally.
 - ✓ Along with Genesis 12, Deuteronomy 28-30 are also key chapters, for they explain the blessings and cursings (discipline) that will come to Israel for their obedience and disobedience. The OT exposes the cycles of how Israel repeatedly experienced the discipline of God for violating those chapters.
 - ✓ Verse 14 is another example of the discipline incurred by Israel for her rebellion.
 - ✓ Notice that the experience of Israel was not accidental but purposeful — God ***purposed to do harm to you...when your fathers provoked me***. That is, when the Israelites rebelled, God let them experience the consequences of their rebellion (which had been revealed to them previously).
 - ✓ He also says, ***I have not relented*** — He could not relent from the discipline, or that would have been unjust — God cannot ignore sin. So He was faithful to Himself and disciplined His people.
- Yet in the midst of God's righteous wrath, there is also grace — much grace (that's v. 15).
 - ✓ In the same way (and proportion) that God also ***have purposed in these days to do good...*** There is not only a strong contrast between vv. 14 and 15, but “the strongest contrast.”
 - ✓ Notice that the blessings are for ***these days***. That might be for the days of Zechariah and the rebuilt temple, but more likely He is speaking of “these days” as the coming days of vv. 1-8, the MK.
 - ✓ Remember, the temple being rebuilt was not as large as Solomon's temple (Hag. 2:3) and that had led to many weeping over the loss of the temple (Ezra 3:12). But when God builds His temple (1:16) there will be no weeping in sorrow but only rejoicing. God will do ***good*** to the nation.
 - ✓ The good God will do will be as extensive and significant as the wrath they experienced.
 - ✓ “Everything God promised in the past, in terms of judgment for Israel's rebellion against Him, was fulfilled. Therefore, everything God ordained and promised for Israel's future, in terms of salvation and blessing, will also be fulfilled.” [MacArthur] He was faithful to judge; He will be just as faithful to be gracious to those who have faith in Him.
- Why are these things revealed to the Israelites? So that they would not be afraid: ***Do not fear***.
 - ✓ This is the 2nd time God commands that in this passage (v. 13). (Also in Hag. 2:5 — and 75x more!).

- ✓ That they are told twice not to be fearful suggests that they already are. They need to stop fearing.
- ✓ How do you stop fearing something that is compelling your fear?
 - Not being fearful is not a matter of saying, “Terry, don’t be afraid, nothing bad will happen.”
 - Not being fearful is learning to evaluate the circumstance from God’s perspective.
 - For the Israelites in this day, God’s solution to mitigate their fear was to remind them to meditate on His final provision for them —
 - ... God’s temple would be built
 - ... They would inhabit Jerusalem as God’s people
 - ... The temple and city would be places of peace and truth where all would live in safety.
 - Freedom from fear, and ability to trust is rooted in confidence in God’s grace. He has promised to keep His people safe (both OT and NT); nothing on this earth should compel fear.
 - When we know the end, we can persevere in the middle.
 - My mom had a habit of reading the last chapter of novels first — “I want to know if it is worth reading.” In this passage, God is telling the Israelites the last chapter — and knowing the last chapter makes the part they were in (and we are in now) worth living.

4. Because God Has Promised, Be Strengthened for **TRANSFORMATION** (vv. 16-17)

- There is one final implication of God’s promises for us — ***these are the things you should do...***
- They had been leaning on their fasting as the source of their righteousness (7:2-3); YHWH calls them to exhibit acts in keeping with genuine righteousness (not just an external appearance of righteousness).
- These verses provide the concluding response of this section to God’s response to their request to stop fasting. Fasting was irrelevant; they were being called to demonstrate genuine faith and trust in God, through the four qualities of vv. 16-17.
 - ✓ ***Speak the truth to one another*** — The necessity of truth is essential in this section (6x in chs. 7-8). They are to be truthful because they are related to one another in God’s covenant promises (an idea that Paul borrows for the NT church as well, Eph. 4:25). Truthfulness is fundamental to a life of faith.
 - ✓ ***Judge with truth and judgment for peace*** — This repeats **7:9** (Micah 6:8). Whether in the courts or in interpersonal relationships the Israelites were to live in integrity with one another.
 - ✓ ***Let no one of you devise evil in your heart...*** — This is akin to **Ps. 15:2** — even when suffering from others, no evil is committed or even planned (desired) in the heart. Godlikeness and truth is an inward issue of the heart supremely, not some external act disconnected from the inner man.
 - ✓ ***Do not love perjury*** — It is evil to love falsehood and false things. Every deceitful action and thought was to be shunned. And not only were they not to do false things; they were not to love false things (or enjoy attractions to false things). They were to hate falsehood. [Do you and I consistently identify things as false and shun them? The world attempts to make everything attractive and we need to be attentive to every enticement to love the lies of the evil one.]

- ✓ (Did you notice how all four of these relate to the truth? The godly person loves truth; Ps. 119:163.)
- All four of these commands are reminders that God wants the lives of His people transformed (sanctified). That's not an OT idea. It's not a NT idea. It's a Bible truth. He saves His people so that His people will be freed from the snares of Satan. If you are not a Christian, this is what God will give you.
 - ✓ Yes, God promises Heaven and eternity with Him (which is part of what vv. 1-8 are about).
 - ✓ But He also promises a most remarkable life now — a life increasingly liberated from sinful actions and desires. Sin is a trap, and believing in Christ gets you out of that trap *now*.
 - ✓ To receive the gift of salvation you must repent (turn away from your sin and to Christ), and believe (that Christ paid the death penalty of your sin and that He is worth following and obeying now).
- Why cultivate these practices? Not because they were trying to merit God's favor, but because they were called as God's children and ***these are what I hate***. How can God's people do what He hates?
 - ✓ The reason that they are to repent of all these things is that God hates them and is opposed to them. They should not presume to do what He hates. There is no favor with God (no matter how much fasting) when one does what He hates.
 - ✓ "Loving that which the Lord hates is equivalent to hating God himself." [Klein]
 - ✓ That's why we hate what He hates. [Do you and I hate what He hates?]
 - ✓ And transformation comes by hating what He hates — when you abhor sin, you won't do it (every time we sin, we are expressing some level of desire and love for that sin).
 - ✓ The way to be strengthened for transformation is to believe the promises of God that He has something better for you than the sin offered by Satan and the world.

CONCLUSION: What is your trouble? What is your overwhelming pressure? (We all have something.)

God can reverse it. And if you are believing in Him, He will reverse it. It may not be reversed on earth. It will be reversed in Heaven. You can trust Him for that day. And because you can trust Him for that day, you can trust Him for this day. And that is your source of strength. Be strong because a reversal is coming.

BENEDICTION (Don): Jude 24-25