

01/11/26

Here we are in Mold in 2026 and we press the button in our time-capsule and start to go back through time. Back through covid, back into the 70's when everything was in black and white, through the great wars, past Daniel Owen and the Victorian era. Keep going back through the Middle Ages and the little market town here into the Dark Ages, the Norman invasion and the castle building, back through the Roman occupation and further back to the time of Jesus Christ, and the Celtic Iron Age and the Hill Forts. We head south through the woodland, across the channel to Gaul. We move on around the Alps to Italy and the early democracy and philosophy of Greece. Cross over to Turkey and the frontier of the Persian world, what we call Iran. The Persian Empire went from the Indus River in India and Pakistan to Egypt. Roughly 5.5 million square Kilometres. All these people groups were under the iron fist of the Persian emperors Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great. (c550-486) We travel south to the great city of Jerusalem expecting to see a thriving city, a bustling trade centre and the beautiful temple. As we climb the Judean hills to the plateau in the central ridge we see a massive bomb crater, a sign of terrible, terrible devastation. There are ruined buildings all over-grown with weeds, grass and trees inhabited by wild animals. The great walls are all broken down and there is little sign of human habitation. There are the foundations of something great that has been reduced to a day of very, very small things. There are a few bedraggled people eking out a living and grubbing out an existence mainly from Iran and Iraq. The great king Cyrus had ordered the people to return to their land of 90 years ago to rebuild the cities and the temple to the glory of the Persian Empire and the present emperor Darius the Great.

Here in Jerusalem, God has raised up leaders, two of which are Haggai and Zechariah. God gave these men his word to give to the weak, struggling, depressed and frustrated inhabitants of this desolate country. God was calling out to them even if they were not looking for him. Zechariah had dreams. He was a visionary who saw things. It is more comfortable to stay as we are so when someone comes along and says, 'I have a dream, a hope, a plan so let me tell what the Lord would say to you.' How will they react? He tells them that God has something he wants them to do for him. If they will do it, he will do something for them. He will meet you. He will help you and bring the dream to pass. Trust the word of the Lord and that thing, that dream, will come to pass.

First God says let's talk about the past. Let's talk about how we got into this miserable state in the first place. It makes me wonder how we got into the state we are in today since the reformation 500 years ago. Who is responsible for our present mess where instead of there being a place of worship on practically every street corner and little villages with several places of worship. Everything was not all rosy but there was a general sense of the gospel of Jesus Christ. How did we get to the place where if 150 people meet together we think we are a big church? Here's the analogy: there was a great city and the house of God was glorious. Now here is just a small gathering of people in weakness and no house of God to speak of. All there was, was a dream, a vision that said 'the best is yet to come'. To pursue that you have to believe it and throw your heart, strength and mind into it. You have to do the thing that God is calling you to do. When these people looked at their forefathers, they didn't do what God said. Decline and decay come when people don't listen. They don't listen and they don't do. James tells us if you hear the word and don't do it you are deceiving yourself. (James 1:22) This is the path of ruin destruction, decline. The Lord was very angry; in the Hebrew, 'with anger, God was angry'. His anger was full of anger. In his love for people God sends his word full of rescue and hope, salvation and promise. God speaks and people don't listen, they don't understand, they don't ask questions. (Luke 9) It is the road to destruction. This generation in

Zechariah have inherited the bad choices that their forebears made. Someone once said, "Where there's a will there is a family". The family gathers around to hear the reading. "To my first-born son, my empty coffers; to my second born, my broken bed; to my third, my debt". This generation inherited the mismanagement, the irresponsibility, the ignorance, the rejection, the rebellion and the disobedience of their parents and their forebears. Now they are sitting in the ruins of what had been passed on to them. But God sends them his word.

It's exactly the same word he sent to their forebears. It's the gospel friends. The gospel just doesn't change. The message of the Bible is the same from generation to generation. The difference is whether we hear it and obey it. If you don't, "The wages of sin is death" but if you will, "Eternal life". Whenever I go to a family gathering the older relatives tell me I look just like me Dad. That makes them happy because they miss him as do I. Here Zechariah is beginning to see that the generation he is speaking to is just like the generation before them. Rather than bringing joy to the prophet, they are bringing deep concern. His urgent call is, "Will you carry on in the same way or will you return to the Lord?"

Zechariah's language is apocalyptic. There is no time to waste. There is an urgent sense of danger. If people don't respond now, the consequences will be devastating and impossible to recover from. The promise is 'return to the Lord and I will return to you'. No matter how badly we get it wrong or for how long, he will return to us and help us. This is pretty tough do or die kind of preaching. But it seems it was exactly what they needed to hear. "Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'" (v6) God has a remarkable way of finding his way into our hearts. If you hear the word of God regardless who brings it, and it moves you to change to the path of eternal life there is much to give thanks for. There is much praise for the God of heaven who has sent his servant to you even to rebuke and correct you, to set you right and warn you. If it gets you to where Zechariah got his people there is pause for thanks. In saying those words in verse 6, these people took responsibility for themselves. They did not blame their ancestors for the mess they were in. They recognised that it was right that they were in their situation. They stopped complaining and feeling sorry for themselves. This little group of people turned to God, he turned to them and they ended up rebuilding the city and the temple. They left a spiritual legacy for the generations that followed.

The great king Hezekiah made a catastrophic mistake near the end of his reign. He knew that the consequences of his mistake would not be visited on himself personally but on the next generations. He gave a sigh of relief as if he had dodged that bullet. That is an absolutely reprehensible attitude. His generation did not lay up a spiritual legacy for those who came after them. What is the spiritual legacy we are leaving for those who will come after us next? What will be here for them if anything? What foundations are we laying for them? How will we give them a step up into the future? How will we set them up with spiritual riches and help so they can live and prosper and see the gospel grow and flourish in the days to come if the Lord does not return? It is important to ask ourselves this question collectively. Are you secure in Jesus Christ. But it isn't just about us, what about the others?

Come, people of the Risen King,
Who delight to bring Him praise;
Come all and tune your hearts to sing
To the Morning Star of grace.
From the shifting shadows of the earth
We will lift our eyes to Him,
Where steady arms of mercy reach
To gather children in.

Rejoice, Rejoice!
Let every tongue rejoice!
One heart, one voice;
O Church of Christ, rejoice!