

Two Things FBC Can't Live Without
Zechariah 11:1-17

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LAUNCH17 Day

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Introduction to Text: Our Scripture today comes from one of the books of the Bible that we call an Old Testament Minor Prophet. The prophets of the Old Testament are divided into Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. I don't particularly like these terms, because it could insinuate that the Minor Prophets are less important than that of the Major Prophets. Nothing could be further from the truth. These books get their designation simply as a result of their size.

Today, we are studying a passage from the Book of Zechariah.

The last three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all prophesied after the exile was complete. The other prophets warned of the exile unless there was repentance. In 722 B.C. the northern tribes of Israel were occupied and many were sent into exile. In 587 B.C. the southern tribes were occupied and many were sent into exile. Eventually, the Medes and Persians became the dominating world power and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the return of the Jews to the land of Israel under Cyrus' reign. Cyrus' reign gives way to Darius' reign. Haggai and Zechariah (the prophet of our study today) are prophets in the day of the rebuilding of the temple. In their own way, each is responsible for motivating the people toward moving forward with the completion of the temple.

In a different style than Haggai, Zechariah exhorts the people to rebuild the temple. Whereas Haggai encourages with direct instruction to rebuild, Zechariah's exhortation is more indirect. In fact, without Ezra's assessment in Ezra 5:1 we would not be able to make the connection that God used Zechariah to encourage the progress of the temple. Zechariah's concern is more with the coming of Messiah. The logic is that Israel needed to prepare for the coming of Messiah with repentance and a return to worship. A tangible way of restoring worship would be to rebuild the temple.

Now, one other introductory word is in order for the book of Zechariah. This is not an easy book. That is probably one of the reasons that it has been ignored. The book is dominated with what we call apocalyptic language. But difficult or not, this is the text that God has led me to today. So, let's dig in and the Lord will reward us with a great application to guide us as a church.

Text: Open your gates, Lebanon,
and fire will consume your cedars.
²Wail, cypress, for the cedar has fallen;
the glorious trees are destroyed!
Wail, oaks of Bashan,
for the stately forest has fallen!
³Listen to the wail of the shepherds,
for their glory is destroyed.
Listen to the roar of young lions,
for the thickets of the Jordan are destroyed.

⁴Yahweh my God says this: “Shepherd the flock intended for slaughter. ⁵Those who buy them slaughter them but are not punished. Those who sell them say: Praise the LORD because I have become rich! Even their own shepherds have no compassion for them. ⁶Indeed, I will no longer have compassion on the inhabitants of the land”—this is the LORD’s declaration. “Instead, I will turn everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will devastate the land, and I will not deliver it from them.”

⁷So I shepherded the flock intended for slaughter, the afflicted of the flock. I took two staffs, calling one Favor and the other Union, and I shepherded the flock. ⁸In one month I got rid of three shepherds. I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. ⁹Then I said, “I will no longer shepherd you. Let what is dying die, and let what is going astray go astray; let the rest devour each other’s flesh.” ¹⁰Next I took my staff called Favor and cut it in two, annulling the covenant I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹It was annulled on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew that it was the word of the LORD. ¹²Then I said to them, “If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” So they weighed my wages, 30 pieces of silver.

¹³“Throw it to the potter,” the LORD said to me—this magnificent price I was valued by them. So I took the 30 pieces of silver and threw it into the house of the LORD, to the potter. ¹⁴Then I cut in two my second staff, Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵The LORD also said to me: “Take the equipment of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶I am about to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are going astray, and he will not seek the lost or heal the broken. He will not sustain the healthy, but he will devour the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves.

17 Woe to the worthless shepherd
who deserts the flock!
May a sword strike his arm
and his right eye!
May his arm wither away
and his right eye go completely blind!”

What is going on in this Bible passage?

So, I know what you are thinking. “What in the world is going on in this Bible passage?” I have already told you that this is not an easy book. Let’s go beyond that. The first sentence from one commentator on this chapter is, “Zechariah 11 may be the most difficult and controversial chapter of the entire book.” So, we get a difficult book and the most difficult chapter in that difficult book. Another commentator goes even beyond that and says, “Zechariah 11:4-17 stands as the most enigmatic passage in the whole Bible.”¹Aren’t you glad you came? You are going to feel smarter when you leave. (And, you are going to get some brisket.)

- Some things we don’t know for sure
Scholars debate whether the prophet is speaking literally or figuratively. They debate the meaning of the trees and the shepherds. They debate the historical reference to the age of these events. Do they refer to the first advent of Christ or the second advent of Christ, or in some way, both? There are other things debated in this text, but if you would allow me, I want

¹ George L. Klein, *The New American Commentary*, 311. Klein quotes S. R. Driver for the second statement.

to move beyond these questions that we might wrestle with to get to the point of application regardless of our answers to the multitude of questions.

- Some things we can know
In some way or other, Zechariah is first of all speaking to the post-exilic times in which he lived and in which his original hearers lived. Remember that one of clear rules of Biblical interpretation is that we must seek first of all to understand what the text originally meant. I remind you that the primary historical reason for Zechariah's prophecy is to spur the returnees from the exile to rebuild the Temple. Zechariah saw this as preparatory for anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Zechariah preached with urgency that the people must get their hearts right for the coming of the Messiah. He believed that part of getting their hearts right was to restore corporate, national worship in the Temple. The returnees had been slow to do that.

At the heart of Zechariah's warning was that little had changed because of the Exile. Instead of turning to God in full repentance, Israel had returned to their pre-exile sin. God had brought on the Exile in order to elicit a return to Him. If the return to Him did not occur, what could they expect for the future?

In other ways, Zechariah's prophecy points toward the coming Messiah. He warned carefully about rejecting that Messiah.

What does this text have to do with me and my church?

But, you still ask, "What does this text have to do with me and my church?"

In any generation the people of God, in order to go where God wants to take them, must have two things.

I am drawn to two words in this at times complicated passage for us to understand. We find the words in verse 7. When Zechariah, God's prophet in a time where many people simply did not care what God and His Word said, contemplated how he would that people, he was drawn to these two words: favor and unity. In fact, in a dramatic way, he took two staves, and named them "Favor" and "Union."

In any generation, whether it be 500 years before the coming of Messiah, or 2017, what do the people of God need in order to go where God wants to take them?

- The Favor of God
The Hebrew word translated "favor" expresses God's "grace" or "kindness." Psalm 90:17 provides good commentary for the thought being expressed. Psalm 90:17 says,

Let the favor of the Lord our God be on us; establish for us the work of our hands—
establish the work of our hands.

If you were with us last time, we looked at this idea of seeking God's prosperity. That prayerful idea comes from 3 John 2. I indicated how the so-called prosperity preachers had perhaps ruined that idea for us and made us hesitant to ask for God's favor. But, we cannot live without God's favor. Every blessed thing that will happen to us will be the result of God's favor. As I said last week, we seek God's favor not because we deserve it, but because we are doomed without it.

- The Unity of the People of God
Zechariah held up and named the other staff, “Unity.” Along with favor, unity is the thing we cannot live without. When we come down to verse 14 and the annulment between Israel and Judah, we understand exactly the kind of unity among God’s people that Zechariah has in mind.

Favor and unity—we cannot live without these blessings.

The Book of Acts serves as a good example. Acts gives us the story of the birth and growth of the early church—the first disciples, the first people after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The book tells us of the unprecedented favor of the Lord and unity of the people.

In Acts 1:8, it is recorded that Jesus said to them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In Acts 1:12, we read, “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olive Grove, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away. When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. . . All these were continually united in prayer.”

Acts 2:1 reveals that they were all together in one place, and suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit of God. The story continues of the favor of God upon them.

In acts 2:42-47, we read of their unity. We read the same thing in Acts 4:32. We read of the same unity in Acts 6 when they appoint deacons. We read of the same unity in Acts 13 when they appoint missionaries. And there is more, but I trust you get the idea.

I am not sure that the early church knew how to hold a strategic planning meeting, but they sure did know how to have a spirit-filled prayer meeting. They knew that in order for God to do with them what He wanted to do, they must have the favor of God and the unity of the people of God.

So What?

- Entreat God for favor and unity.

I mean come with me and beg God for His favor and for the unity of the people. Can you see it? Our success is not ultimately tied to our strength, our skill, our intellect, our personality, and certainly not our resources. In fact, God says that our victory will not be based on any of that, but on Him.

Charles Spurgeon said, “It is extraordinary power from God, not talent, that wins the day. It is extraordinary spiritual unction not extraordinary mental power, that we need. Mental power may fill a chapel, but spiritual power fills the church with soul anguish. Mental power may gather a large congregation, but only spiritual power will save souls. What we need is spiritual power.”

- Encourage all that builds favor and unity.

- Evangelism is one great example.
- Eliminate all that threatens favor and unity.

One Last Thing!

Don't reject the message. Many in Zechariah's day did. I pray that we do not.

Most importantly, don't reject the message of the Messiah. Don't reject that the greatest favor that can ever wash over someone is the grace that saves.