

Title: You've got one job!
Text: Zechariah 13
Theme: When God's people look like God's people
Series: Zechariah #14
Prop Stmt: God's people will look like God's people because God keeps his promises.

Read Text:

What is the job of the best man at a wedding? Primarily it is to keep the bride's ring for the ceremony and then to say something nice at the reception. A couple of weeks ago I was in a wedding rehearsal and I said to the best man, "you've got one job. Don't forget the ring!" Of course I'm telling you this story because the next day, he did just that. He got to the church and realized that he left the bride's ring on a table at home and home was about 30 minutes away. Fortunately, someone was able to go back and get it and got back here just in time.

There is a sense in which we could look at the OT story of the nation of Israel and say, "you've got one job!" Your job as a nation is to be a blessing to the other nations of the world. Like Abraham was called out of darkness and pagan idolatry in Ur, the nation he fathered through Isaac and then Jacob was called out of the darkness of slavery in Egypt in order to be a holy people, a treasured possession, a light to the world, a portrait of God's grace and a picture of God's plan for the rest of the world. Israel was intended to be an example to the world of what God can do in the lives of people who love him, trust him and worship him. Israel was chosen in part because they were at the bottom of the pile. If God could love them and use them, he could use anyone. Their election by God was intended to be a message of amazement to the world. As the representatives of God to this world, Israel was to be a conduit of light, life, truth and redemption to the world.

But, when you read the OT, you read of Israel's failure. Except for some brief times, she is not a blessing to the world; but a blemish. Instead of being a light to the Gentiles, she adds to the darkness. In the midst of her rebellion God raises up prophets who warn Israel of the consequences of her sin, but she ignores them, rejects them and at times kills them. The prophets wrestle with two themes that appear to be irreconcilable: Israel's failure and God's faithfulness. How can God keep his promises to Israel, when Israel is so relentless in her rebellion?

The prophets wrestle with that issue. At the same time, they write about the day to come when God sends a Messiah to Israel who will lead her to fulfill her glorious role. They speak of these promises of God as being fulfilled one day. Somehow, this Messiah, this servant, this shepherd, this king is going to rescue his people from their own sin and from their enemies. We are left to conclude that Israel's ability to be a blessing to the world and fulfill her role is directly tied to the advent of the Messiah. But no one knows how all of this is going to happen. How can God be faithful when Israel is such a failure? How can God keep these promises to Israel when she is so relentlessly unfaithful? One of the themes of the Bible is this: God's faithfulness is greater than Israel's failure. In fact, God uses and overrules Israel's failure as a way of fulfilling his promises. But, in the moment,

that is almost impossible to see and these prophets, like Zechariah lived in the moment. When these prophets wrote and taught, they did so in view of their immediate situation. God used their problem and its consequences to point to an even greater problem and its consequences, just as God pointed them to a solution that pointed to a greater solution. In other words, there was more going on in their lives than they realized.

I. **There is more going on than you realize.**

The same thing is true about you. There is more going on your life than you realize. Like these prophets, you are confronted with problems, and your problems seem daunting. Well, the truth is, they are. In fact, I've got some bad news for you. It is worse than what you thought. The problems that you face are designed to help you come to grips with the ultimate problems that you face, so that it will drive you to God. God used the prophets not only to speak to the problems but to point people to the solution. And, just as the problems are bigger than you thought, your solution and hope is infinitely greater and more expansive than you realize. The ultimate problem for Zechariah and Israel, was not the enemies that surrounded them, but the enemy of their own hearts; their faithlessness and idolatry. How can you ever face other enemies, when you cannot even address the failures in your own life? That was true for them and that is true for us. Israel, just like you needs a Savior who can rescue you from your own sin and self-centeredness and stubbornness AND rescue you from your enemies. But we only tend to see the enemies.

Zechariah is a prophet, living back in Jerusalem after the 70-year exile in Babylon. He witnessed the crushing of the Babylonians by the Medes and Persians. From his perspective, he is on the edge of history. He is living the fulfillment of God's promises and realizes that there is more but he doesn't know how much more or how it is going to come together. So, here is Zechariah, 500 years before Christ, trying to figure this out. Does that sound familiar?

This book is fascinating isn't it? And we need this. We live in very unsettling times. Like Zechariah, we are trying to look into the future, even the immediate future, in order to try to figure out what is going to happen. We hardly recognize our world, even our own country anymore. It is like someone went into the store and changed the price tags and the labels on everything. Things that used to be evil are now celebrated, and things that used to be good are now hated. Our heads and hearts are bewildered. We witness events that could set the stage for a one-world economy and government and wonder, is it here? Is it coming? There are plenty of reasons to be concerned and I do not need to list them all. You feel it. And yet, at the same time, these are fascinating times. Yes, they are unsettling but we need not be fearful and here is why. Take these two themes: God's faithfulness and Israel's failure. In the end, God's faithfulness is bigger than Israel's failure. Israel's failure is real and at times catastrophic, but in the end God overrules Israel's failure and even turns it into a tool for amazing good.

So, with that in mind, there are some things that I want to point out from this text that are fascinating on one level, humbling, encouraging and ultimately calming. For those of you who are not yet followers of Christ, I think you will see some pretty compelling reasons as to why you should seriously consider surrendering your life to Christ. Let me tell you a story that helps set this up.

Alexander Blair is going to be sentenced this Wednesday by U.S. District Court Judge Daniel Crabtree. Blair admitted loaning money to a friend in order to pay for the storage of a 1,000-pound bomb that was going to be detonated at Ft. Riley Army Base, west of Topeka, Kansas. Blair knew what the man planned to do with the bomb. He knew the specifics of the plan and gave money to help carry this out. The plan was foiled, and Blair's role in it was discovered. He admitted guilt and on Wednesday is going to stand before Judge Crabtree for sentencing. In a letter to the judge, Blair said, *"I am just a human being that made a big mistake. Nobody is perfect, and we all make mistakes at some point in our lives. This was mine."*

We read this and just shake our heads in disbelief at the utter denseness of this man. He has no clue at the seriousness of his crime. He acts as if he can take a mulligan on this one. He wants the judge to just cut him some slack and let him off with some community service. And yet, that is us. We have no idea of how serious our sin is before God. We presume that God will cut us some slack and let us off the hook. But our rebellion is serious and God simply cannot pretend that it is ok and just overlook it.

This text includes prophecies about major world-impacting events. They are big events because the seriousness of the rebellion of the human race is such a colossal issue and the redemption of God's people is also such a big deal. Therefore...

Zechariah has received some incredible visions from God (first part of the book) that make him aware that there is so much more going on than what most of us can see. There is much greater significance to your life and your decisions, your future and your eternity than you can possibly imagine. Most people do not want to know. They do not want to be bothered. They don't want to know the story because they do not want to be accountable to the One who wrote it. But, there is more going on than you know.

In these final chapters of Zechariah, God is using Zechariah's present situation as an illustration of a greater time to come. I think that the events of chapter 12 refer to the prelude of the final battle of the time on earth known as the Tribulation. Now, let me speak to that for a minute. Due to Israel's rejection of Christ, God raises up a new people to be a blessing to the world, which is his church. The New Covenant people of God are the means by which God is now making himself known to the nations. But the world hates God, and in her rebellion against God, she hates God's people and attacks them. In fact, the world is going to be unified as a government and economy in order to stand as one in rebellion to God. This is both a cause and a result of the time on earth known as the Tribulation. Now, whether or not there is a rapture of the believers before the Tribulation period, this much is clear; those people who come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation period will be hunted and many of them will be martyrs.

The world is finally unified in a one-world government and economy by her hatred of God and having executed as many Christians as possible, will then attempt to wipe out Israel, once and for all. Their efforts are not ultimately successful, but they are close. In what appears to be her final hour of existence, what is left of Israel finally turns to Christ.

Israel's trust in Christ sets the stage for what we call, the Millennial (1,000 year) reign of Christ because she finally accepts and loves the Messiah. This is the time when the promises that God made to Israel about her being a light to the Gentiles and a blessing to the world are finally realized. Israel's global position of glory is set on display. But this happens only because her heart is in it. We will see this from verses 2-6. Israel will be serious about following God. But, before this glorious event takes place, there are two things that are going to happen: 1) Her Shepherd is going to be killed 2) She is going to be scattered and persecuted.

You saw this prophecy in chapter 12 that speaks of the day (v.10) when they will look on me, on him who they have pierced and will mourn. I believe this is referring to the same event that John speaks about in Revelation 1.7 when says regarding Christ, "*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.*"

Zechariah says, that "on that day" which refers to all of the events that are taking place in relation to this, that there is going to be a means by which Israel can be forgiven for her sins. A fountain is going to open up. I think that this is a metaphor that informs us of the fact that God provides a way for his people to be cleansed from their sin.

II. **Salvation is of the Lord.** (1)

This is one of the beautiful themes of the Bible. God makes a way for us to be forgiven. Those who mourn over their sin will be comforted. Those who recognize their rebellion and confess it to God will find that God has provided a way for them to be cleansed. I think that this will be one of the greatest moments in all of history. Israel, has for thousands of years lived in rebellion to God, even to the point of rejecting and crucifying Christ. She who rejected Christ, will trust in the Antichrist to save her from her enemies, but he will turn on her and she will be all alone. She will have no friends and no help as the world turns on her and moves to destroy her. But, in the final hour, her true Savior, Christ will come for her. And she will mourn because the only one who could save her is the one she rejected. She will mourn because she will think that there is no hope. But then someone will say, "Look!" There is a fountain! It is open for you! This is the text that inspired William Cowper to write:

"There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunge beneath that flood, loose all their guilty stains."

A. **God provides the fountain** (and)

God has to provide the means for us to be forgiven because we cannot rescue ourselves. And the fountain that God provides always does the job!

B. God provides the cleansing

On that day, Israel will discover what we already know. Christ died for your sins. Christ paid the penalty for your sins. Christ absorbed the wrath of God in your place and paid for your debt. There is nothing left for you to pay. That truth is the most glorious truth there is, but it is the most humbling truth there is and that is why most people and most religions, even large portions of Christianity, trip over this very point. There is nothing that you can do to earn God's favor. There is nothing that you can achieve that helps you gain any standing before God. You have to admit that you are completely bankrupt, spiritually. You have to admit that you have no family history, no skills, no resources, no gifts, no arguments, no plan B, but nothing! Most people will not admit that! Most of Israel will not admit that, but the day will come when whoever is left will really have no other choice. Unless they turn to Christ, they are dead. But, what is obvious for them, is true for you. Unless you turn to Christ, you have no hope before God. But, they will. By this time, it will only be a remnant, but they will finally get it.

III. God's people will finally get it. (2-6)

And this time, Israel will experience the new birth that Ezekiel wrote about. Their hearts will change. How many times have you read the book of Judges and have grieved over Israel returning again and again to idols. It is like a girl who keeps going back to a boy who abuses her. That is idolatry. The idols promise that they will love us and give us what we want and then they turn on us and beat us and try to destroy us. Inexplicably people are continually drawn to them. Those idols can be possessions, a relationship, a career, a house, an image, a body style, an appearance, respect, a child, approval from others, an athletic, academic, or professional accomplishment. But no idol can rescue you.

One day, Israel will have a new heart and will not return to idols. If there arises anyone who tries to secretly worship an idol, or who, like so many is a false prophet, that person will be rejected by his own family because they will realize the seriousness of this. These verses describe a complete change of heart. Even parents will not tolerate false worship by their children.

It will be similar to what happened to Germany at the end of W.W.II. For years, her soldiers were her pride and joy. Men who served in the S.S., or in high ranking positions were the talk of their towns, but when she lost the war and when her atrocities began to be exposed, many of those same men, pretended to be someone else. They got rid of their uniforms, and their papers and tried to fabricate stories about their time in the war so that no one would accuse them of working at the concentration camps. Here Zechariah is describing how the false prophets of Israel will fabricate stories to attempt to cover up their past. Some believe, and I agree, that this is describing life in Israel during the

Millennium. But, this major turning to Christ will not come easily and will not come until the Tribulation has left what is left of Israel with no other choice.

IV. **It will come at a great cost.** (7-9a)

These verses are a song/poem. It is quite likely that Zechariah, like many of the prophets put some of their sermons to song so the people could remember them more easily. This song, 500 years before Christ is astounding. It is written as a song that God sings and it essentially summarizes the message.

A. At the cost of the Shepherd's life (7)

God is depicted as calling to a sword to wake up and to kill the Shepherd. The Shepherd is the man who stands next to the LORD of hosts. I take this to be a reference to Christ who comes to the earth as the God-man. You see, in order for Israel to mourn for the one they pierced, they have to first pierce someone one. Here, God is singing a lament that anticipates that event. He knows the cost. The Shepherd will have to die. The Shepherd will have to give up his life. And when he is killed, the sheep will be scattered. The sheep are scattered as an act of judgment (7b) for having struck the Shepherd.

But wait! Why? Why is the Shepherd struck and the sheep scattered? The Shepherd is struck because the sheep refuse him. They do not think that they need him. They do not want him. They refuse to admit their problem. They refuse to see the seriousness of their need and the consequence of that is enormous.

B. At the cost of much of Israel. (8-9a)

The scattered sheep are decimated. God is lamenting the fact that two-thirds of his people are killed and the third that remain are subjected to intense suffering. Has that not been the primary narrative of the Jews for the last 2,000 years? Why have they suffered so much and why will they continue to suffer? They have rejected their Messiah. They are too proud to admit the truth about him and too proud to admit that they need him. And we who love God and therefore, love Israel, grieve over their history and what is left to happen to them. Over and over we have seen how their story is our story. Their stubbornness and self-righteousness and utter lack of humility blocks them from receiving the grace that they desperately need.

- 1) Until you admit your failure, your need, your sin, your rebellion, you will never really trust Christ. – Blessed are the poor in spirit.
- 2) Stubbornness and self-righteousness are condemned by God more intensely than immorality because the self-righteous person seeks to replace God with himself.
- 3) God is gracious to ordain pressure to force you to admit defeat because unless you admit defeat, and that you cannot save yourself, you will never trust in Christ. And in order for you to be redeemed, you must trust in Christ.

So, how is Israel ever going to be redeemed? She is going to be taken to the edge of extinction, before she finally admits that she needs Jesus. All she has to do is turn to Christ. All she has to do is trust in him, but she refuses, so far. But, when she does, when she finally does...

V. **It will be glorious.** (9b)

I loved playing with my kids. We would turn the house into a nerf-gun war zone and spend hours playing. Like you I would infinitely rather play with my kids than discipline them. But, I had to discipline them. I did not enjoy it, but I had to do it. There were times when I had to go toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose, eye-to-eye and say, you are not going to win. You must admit that you were wrong. We are not doing anything until you admit that you were wrong. And what would happen? The head would go down,, the jaw would set, the arms would cross, the lips would purse, the body would go rigid and the head would shake. But, I knew that for the sake of their soul, I could not give in. This child had to admit their wrong. There was no defense, just pure stubbornness. At times I would say, sit in this chair until you admit you were wrong. Or sit in the basement, or sit on your bed, until you admit you were wrong. And if we had to wait for hours, we would wait. And if the confession was half-hearted, back they would go. But, when they finally admitted their wrong, the forgiveness was instant, the joy was big, the hugs were huge and life went on.

God said, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." (Romans 10.21) God is waiting with open arms for his people to repent. But, after all this time, will he forgive? Absolutely! The mercies of God are even more amazing than his judgments.

There was a couple who attended here for many years. The man was, to put it politely, a grouch. Here he was a grouch, at home he was worse. He made life miserable for his family, particularly for his wife. Eventually, dementia took over his mind, and for the last few years he has been a miserable man who cannot have an intelligent conversation with anyone. He is at the point where his sentences make no sense. A couple of weeks ago, he had a conversation with his wife. His voice and his mind were clear. It was rather amazing. He told his wife that during the night he had a dream in which the Lord told him that he had been abusive to his wife and to his children and confronted him with his sin. He told her that he repented and that he trusted Christ and asked her to forgive him and needed to call the kids and ask them for forgiveness as well. As you can imagine, she was absolutely thunderstruck and was wondering if she was the one who had lost her mind. Of course, she forgave him and then called the church to let us know.