

Title: Justice is not for all.
Text: Zechariah 5
Theme: Compromise with sin is disastrous
Series: Zechariah #6
Prop Stmtnt: There is no truce with sin

When evil appears to win it is difficult to not give up in despair or give in to bitterness. This past week, a Syrian Christian named Maalula witnessed her husband executed and was then told by the Jihadists, “*Your Jesus did not save him from us.*” For every Peter who is saved by an angel, there are plenty of James’s who are not. In those moments it looks as if justice is not for all.

Read Text:

When I was in high school, the junior high basketball team at my school desperately needed new jerseys. There was also a dad, whose son desperately wanted to make the team, but wasn’t good enough. So, the dad went to the coach and said, “*If my kid makes the team, I will buy the team new uniforms.*” Is that tempting for a coach? Sure is. In this case, too tempting. The kid made the team and that team had great uniforms. The only problem was, when you looked at the team, no one could figure out how that one kid made the team, including some of the kids who didn’t. The message was loud and clear. The rules do not apply equally to all. Justice is not for all.

That is so accepted, that it seems as if it is a rule. The rule is that the rules do not apply equally to all. In our pledge of allegiance we speak of how the flag represents a nation and a government where there is liberty and justice for all, but there is not liberty and justice for all. There is no liberty and justice for all the unborn. We all know the stories of how people in power tend to use that power to get more power. We assume that the rules do not apply equally to all. We roll our eyes and shake our heads and accept this rule as a part of our reality. It is frustrating and deflating until we are the ones who are on the inside looking for a favor.

Let’s say that one day you were pulled over for speeding. Wouldn’t you be relieved to see that the officer who got out of the car was your brother-in-law? Why would you be relieved? You would be relieved because you know that there is no way that he is going to give you a ticket. But why not? You expect him to give tickets to other people who speed, why wouldn’t he give one to you? Because, the rules do not apply equally to all. Justice is not for all. It’s frustrating when you are the little guy and the rules are applied to you, but it’s accepted when you are the one with connections. That is why this 6th vision that Zechariah has is one of the most unsettling visions. God does not play favorites. The message is unnerving...

I. **God does not overlook sin.** (1-4)

Let’s look at some of the details and you will see how this all fits together. Zechariah has another vision. This is his 6th vision and in this vision he sees a flying scroll. The scroll is

unfurled so it probably looks more like a flag or a banner that is flown by a plane over a large crowd displaying a message. But, there are a couple of features about this scroll that provide some insight for its message. For example: Note the size of the scroll.

The scroll is 20 cubits by 10 cubits (v.2). A cubit is 18 inches, which means that this scroll measures 30 feet by 15 feet. It is not only twice as long as it is wide, but that is the exact measurement of the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Coincidental? I do not think so. Notice that according to the end of v.3, that this scroll has writing on both sides. The stone tablets that Moses brought down with him from Mt. Sinai also had writing on both sides. And the writing on the one side was a judgment from God upon every person in the land of Israel who stole (violating the 8th commandment) and the writing on the other side was a judgment from God upon every person in the land of Israel who swore falsely by the name of God (violating the 3rd commandment). The 3rd commandment would be the central commandment on the one side of the stone tablet and the 8th commandment would be the central commandment on the other side. It appears to me that these two commandments are chosen not only because these sins were being committed and overlooked, but also because they represented the 10 commandments, which represented the entire law of God. The stone tablet containing the 10 commandments was kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, which was eventually replaced by the Temple. The Temple (Solomon's Temple) was destroyed by the Babylonians and now the Jews are back in the land and attempting to rebuild it.

So, this vision is obviously deeply connected to the immediate task of rebuilding the Temple. But, the challenge of rebuilding the Temple is more than motivation, fund-raising, organization, and recruiting. The message of this vision, if taken seriously, is terrifying. God does not overlook sin. Since the scroll is so big, the letters (font) would be large. The message is haunting. Every person who has stolen from his neighbor and who lies about it before God is in trouble because God knows what you have done. He knows every single lie and he knows every single attempt to cover it up and he is sending a curse that will follow you into your home and it will not leave until it has destroyed everything. It is only a matter of time.

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah are all dealing with the same time period. These are post-exilic books. They were written about the nation of Israel after the exile in Babylon. What is most discouraging about this time is the fact that the Jews were repeating so many of the same sins now that was the cause of the exile in the first place. The prophets wanted to pull their hair out. It was maddening. It was as if they had not learned a thing. Here's what was happening. When the Jews were sent into exile into Babylon, not every Jew was taken. Some were left behind and they took ownership over the land and any of the houses that were not destroyed. Now, when the other Jews returned, there is a conflict. For hundreds and hundreds of years each tract of land belonged to a particular family. When that family came back, they expected to get their land back. For some, their land had been taken by "squatters" and they were trying to get it back. For others, their land was unethically taken over by other Jews who used friends in the legal system to steal their land from them. The economy was so bad and some people were so desperate that they were taken advantage of to the point where there were

some powerful Jews who were basically running things. They had the money. They had the land. They had the connections. They put and kept their people in power.

Rebuilding the temple is pointless if you're living in rebellion to God like. Did Solomon's temple protect them? So, on the one hand, the Jews are feeling abandoned and neglected because other empires are ruling the world and the Jews appear to be nothing more than a doormat on which other nations wipe their feet. At the same time, inside their own country, their own people were ensnaring and enslaving their own people. So, essentially there was no difference between the empires who were taxing the people to death and the local authorities who were wielding their power to crush their own. If you were the little guy, it could look like you had no hope. After all, how do you challenge the system? (e.g. 3 places – there is always someone on either side of you.)

Holocaust – Germans – Jews (how did Germany see it?) You can always find someone you think is “worse” than you; who becomes your excuse for sin. It is not just nations; it is people. It is families, sibling, neighbors, and even other believers. When does it end? Even if the other person received “justice” would you be satisfied? This vision is sobering. God's law exposes everyone. God knows. He sees everything and this giant billboard has a very bold message that is publicly displayed, in which God says, “I know what you have done and I am coming after you.” I am cursing you and my curse will follow you into your house. That house that you stole or built with monies stolen from others? My curse is following you in there and it will consume your house. The timber and the stones are all coming down (v.4). God is no respecter of persons. The fact that you were a Jew and the fact that you suffered at the hands of your enemies does not give you a pass to do the very same thing. God does not overlook sin. He cannot. Therefore, it does not matter how bombproof you build your house or your life. It does not matter if you change your identity and cover up your past. There is no structure or system that can keep God out.

II. **God will deal with sin.** (5-11)

Then Zechariah either has another vision, or this is the second part of the vision of the scroll of judgment. Either way, the point is clear. God cannot overlook sin and he is in fact going to deal with it. He cannot overlook it, which means that he must deal with it. This vision is that of a measuring basket that was used in the market to measure out grain. This basket was literally called an ephah because it held 22 liters or about 3/5 of a bushel and an ephah was 3/5 of a bushel. But, this particular basket had a lid that was extremely heavy because inside the basket was the iniquity and wickedness of the land. This evil of the land was personified as a woman, who was most likely a statue that represented idolatry. In this vision, Zechariah looks into the basket, but quickly the angel shoves the evil back down and puts the lid back in place. In this vision, this evil is treated like toxic waste. Anything that it touches it will destroy and it cannot be allowed to escape. This evil has to be removed from the land.

Then Zechariah sees something else. Two women come who are described as having wings, like those of storks and the wind was in their wings. They were able to fly and

between them, they were able to carry the basket and the woman in it away. Zechariah asked where they were going and he was told that they were taking the basket to the land of Shinar where a house (temple) would be built for it and when that was done, it will be set on its base there.

Prophecy is fascinating and I remind you that God gives us enough information to let us know that he has everything all figured out, but not enough where we have everything all figured out. Prophecy is given so that we will trust God moment by moment. With that in mind, I do not pretend to know exactly everything about this vision. There are some very interesting aspects that lead me in a particular direction. I throw them out to you for your consideration.

I find it interesting that the evil is depicted as a woman in the basket, and yet it is women who are charged with removing this evil from the land. The two women have wings. These wings, like that of a stork are large and powerful. Are these two women angels? Angels are commonly depicted in art as having wings and are often portrayed as being women, but Gabriel and Michael are male and they are not depicted in the Bible as having wings. The cherubim and seraphim in Isaiah 6 do have wings. So, are these angels or not? If they are, this is the only place in Scripture where an angel is depicted as a woman. On the other hand, in the OT, storks were unclean animals, so perhaps that is why these creatures are depicted as carrying this basket away. The phrase “between earth and heaven” is a Hebrew expression that often refers to the entire earth, which leads me to think that this vision, while dealing with Jerusalem and Israel has cosmic implications. This is further supported by the fact that these women carry the basket to the land of Shinar. The land of Shinar is the exact same phrase used in Genesis 11.2 to describe the location of the tower of Babel. Beyond that, Zechariah is not given an interpretation of this vision.

This much is clear: God will deal with sin. He will remove sin from his people. He cannot have a people who are worshiping other gods and pretending to worship him all at the same time. Make up your mind whom you will serve. Combined with the first part of chapter 5 we see these two related truths: God exposes sin in order to deal with sin. I will come back to that in a minute because that is the truth that you need to take home with you today.

But, let me address a few related things. The land of Shinar and the tower of Babel represent our world’s best attempts at forming a one-world government, one-world economy, one-world power and one-world people. The world can only create unity on the basis of having an enemy that is larger than one another. We have all sorts of examples in movies of how an alien invasion forces the countries of the world to lay aside their differences in order to come together and fight their enemy. After we win, we all hold hands and get tingly feelings about this unity. But then the movie ends. If it kept going we would all go back to fighting one another. My understanding of the book of Revelation is that the day is coming when the world is going to make another serious attempt at coming together, like the tower of Babel, in order to pronounce itself free from God. God is the enemy that will motivate the nations of the world to fight against. If you

are a follower of Christ and you are alive on the earth during this time, you will be in a precarious position. How can you be a team-player with the world, when the world has officially aligned itself against God? You can't! You have to make up your mind, whom you will serve. This is no game.

I believe that this woman in this basket who is taken to the land of Shinar is related in some way to John's vision in Revelation 17 to what he calls the great prostitute of Babylon. This woman represents a power, organization, a structure, a city (v.18) perhaps a religion that is used and then destroyed by the antichrist who, for a brief period rules as the world ruler, but who is then destroyed by Christ.

So, what is the message in this for us? The message for us is the same message that it was for the Jews that Zechariah was preaching to. It is easy to focus on the evil that is in this world and consider yourself as being not of it. However, it is not easy to focus on the evil that is in your own life and admit that, and own that. But, what is the difference between exploiting the people around you for your purposes on a small scale and exploiting the people around you on a large scale? For example, go back to the Holocaust. How could 6,500 officers go along with so much evil? (Oskar Groning – 93 years old – former officer on trial for war crimes) They did it because in small moments of time, they chose to look the other way and pretended that they were not responsible. What is so hard to come to grips with is that I am participating in rebellion against God when I, in small moments of time, choose to look the other way when something wrong is taking place, or I choose to take advantage someone, or I choose, in the moment, what is convenient over what is right. Who do you believe is “worse” than you that gives you a reason to withhold love and affection from them? Are there lies that you have been willing to believe about others or yourself that you have used as excuses for your hostility or condescension over another?

This vision of Zechariah raises more questions than it answers. It makes us aware that more is going on than we realize. It is clear that God does not miss a thing and will hold every person accountable. It is also clear that God cannot tolerate evil and that he must deal with it. Zechariah knows this, but what he does not know, is what we now know. A little over 500 years later, God sent Christ to this land. The Temple that was eventually built by Zerubbabel was replaced by a massive Temple built by Herod. As we found out from Matthew's gospel, Jesus was not impressed with the size of the Temple. He was infinitely more concerned about what went on inside of your soul, than anything else. He knew that in your natural condition you've rebelled against God and have gone your own way and have tried to be your king. God graciously exposes your sin in order to deal with it. You cannot deal with your sin. Your sin will follow you, crush you and condemn you. Like an SS officer, you can pretend to get a new identity and try not to talk about it, but your past is real. Your sin is real. What do you do about it? Even if you are never found out in this life, you will be exposed before God. You will stand before God with no one to hide behind. If justice were for all, then how would you ever make amends for your sin? Justice is not for all. Christ did not receive justice. The greatest injustice is that Christ received your justice. Christ received the punishment that you deserved, so that you could receive a pardon that you did not deserve. No, justice is not for all. For those

who trust in Christ, they get grace. For those who do not, they get justice, and the justice of God is full of awe. It is awful and awesome to behold. What will protect you on that day? There is only one hope and that hope is Christ.