

Title: The LORD Remembers
Text: Zechariah 1.1-6
Theme: God knows more than you can realize
Series: Zechariah #1
Prop Stmtnt: God knows more than you can possibly realize and He acts upon it.

Read Text:

Imagine that Hillary Clinton is actually charged with a crime by the Justice Department and is forced to step down from seeking the presidency at this point. The Democratic Party puts Joe Biden forth as the nominee, angering all the Bernie Sanders supports who split from the Democratic Party and Sanders runs on the Socialist party ticket. Now, the Republican Party feeling overly confident with their prospects dump Trump off the GOP train and draft Mitt Romney at the convention to be their party's representative, only to have Trump supports split from the GOP and create an Independent Party with Trump as their candidate. Would that be dramatic? Oh yea! Would that be a bit scary? Certainly!

History is riddled with toppled kings and their kingdoms. In the midst of all of the ensuing chaos, while one kingdom and or king is falling and another is replacing it, are the throngs of people who become the collateral damage while power struggles are being played out. When you are the little person who is at the mercy of big, powerful people and events, it is easy to conclude that you are forgotten, and that you do not matter. The truth is, we are forgotten and we really do not matter to the powerful people. But while we are overlooked by the world, we are not overlooked by God. The fact is, God has historically used the overlooked people in this world to be at the epic center of his work.

This morning, I am starting a series in the book of Zechariah. Zechariah is in that shiny page portion of many Bibles, called, the Minor Prophets. One of my goals in this series is to wet your appetite to appreciate these gems, these smaller books that stand at the end of the OT. They are often overlooked, but are glorious. And Zechariah is absolutely fascinating and I believe that you will be encouraged. I seriously think that you will be very encouraged because over and over you are going to be reminded that God that remembers. In fact, the name Zechariah means, "God remembers." If you lived in this Hebrew context and you heard the name, Zechariah, you would think, "God remembers."

So, why do you think that God picked a man whose name was "God remembers" to be the mouthpiece of his message to his people? He picked a man named "God remembers" to be a prophet because the people that he was speaking to were tempted to think that God had forgotten about them. They needed to know that God remembers. They were tempted to think that God had forgotten about them because events on the world stage looked like they were coming unglued. But, they needed to remember God. The fact was, Zechariah's audience was living in many ways like atheists. They needed to remember that God was ruling over all. Let me set the stage. Our book begins with a timestamp. "*In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah.*" (October/November 520)

Assyria was the major empire that destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, but could not completely defeat Judah. Eventually, Assyria would fall to the Babylonian empire which would successfully defeat Judah and Jerusalem. That defeat (around 600 B.C.) resulted in the deportation of thousands of Jews from Judah to Babylon. I cannot impress this on you enough. The deportation of the Jews was like 9/11 times a thousand. They lost everything. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins and the Temple was a pile of smoldering rubble. The catastrophic nature of this event was second only to the destruction of Israel by the Romans in 70 A.D. The deportation of the Jews to Babylon was a huge event. Babylon then fell to the Medes and the Persians. The Persian Empire was led by **Cyrus II “the Great”** who, after conquering the Medes, was eventually able to consolidate and organize his power and become the leader of the largest empire in the world at that time. After gaining that title, Cyrus issued a decree that allowed the Jews in Babylon to return to their homeland in Judah. Cyrus died and his son **Cambyses** took over for about 7 years. While Cambyses was on a military expedition in Egypt, Gautama, claiming to be the brother of Cambyses, who had been murdered, usurped the throne. Cambyses returned from Egypt and when he found this out, he committed suicide, and no one really knows why. At this point, **Darius**, an officer in the Persian army led a coup against Gautama and executed him and took over as King of the Persian Empire. These empires derive their power by crushing, then taxing to death the countries they conquer. This makes you rich and powerful and keeps them poor and weak. However, when there is chaos at the top, then all the minions think they can rebel. So, Darius has to play “whack-a-mole” for a while because while he is fighting to be the king, other countries and rulers try to rebel (like Babylon). So he has to knock all the little rebellions back in place and consolidate his power, which he does. By the way, every Michigan State fan, better know about the Battle of Thermopylae and Leonidus’ 300 Spartans who became legends by their gallant fight against **Xerxes**, successor to Darius and the king that Esther became queen to. Most of these world events are essentially glossed over in the Bible. What is impressive to us is not necessarily significant to God.

What is so fascinating about all of this is to see how differently God views history from us. We look at who is ruling the world and everything related to the rise and fall of political parties, movements, kings, countries and empires while God looks at what is happening to his people. And that is the point! History is His story. His story is about the kingdom that he is establishing for Christ. While we are looking (and fretting) over what is happening in this world, God always stays focused on what is happening to his people. God Remembers! From God’s perspective, what matters in history is how events affect his people. And related to that, God’s involvement with his people is affected by how they/we are responding to him. God’s Word references kings and kingdoms as almost being incidental to the story.

So, here is a recap. Due to their rebellion against God, the Northern Kingdom (known as Israel) was destroyed by the Assyrians and her people were scattered all over the Assyrian Empire. The Southern Kingdom lasted about 120 years longer before it was defeated by the Babylonians at which time thousands upon thousands of Jews were deported to the city of Babylon and the surrounding area. The Persian king, Cyrus II issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Judah (which is now known once again as

Israel). Thousands of Jews go back, some of them were very old, who had lived for 70 years in Babylon. Their expectations were very high. Reality was very different. The Jews are back in their land, but the land did not welcome them with open arms. Other people had moved in. Whose land was it now? There was no Jewish king, only governors, and they exploited their position. The Temple and the city had been neglected. The amount of work needed to be done was overwhelming. The number of people deported was significantly larger than the number who returned. The Temple was a pile of rubble and the walls around the city were destroyed. How do you find time to rebuild the Temple when you are trying to find and rebuild your house, fight with the squatters who had taken over earn a living and put food on the table ?

Initially, there was a surge of emotional energy from this band of Jews who had returned and that resulted in the debris of the Temple being cleared away and the foundation being reset. But, after that, problems arose and the situation became bleak. There was no Temple. There were no walls. There was no king. They were at the mercy of forces that were beyond their control. Things at the capital in Susa had been chaotic, and here in Jerusalem there were all sorts of factions and divisions in the mix that made it almost impossible to get anything done. In other words, there were a lot of evil people who had infiltrated positions of leadership and did not cultivate a climate that feared God and obeyed his law. And just when it appeared that the Persian Empire might implode and free the Jews from all outside oppression, Darius gains power exerts the might of Persia all over that part of the world. The Temple was not rebuilt and the Jews were under the control of a foreign power. This was not supposed to be in the script. The Jews were now in danger of repeating the exact same mistakes that their forefathers had done which resulted in the deportation. This was what the people had expected when they returned from Babylon, but what could they do? So, here is the big idea of this text. ***You returned to the land, now return to me.*** The fact that you returned to the land is because God remembered you. Now, you need to remember God. But when life turns out to be something different than what we expected, we are tempted to put our spin on it.

“I didn’t think it would be this way.” That could be your autobiography, right? We could engrave that on your tombstone. Moms, when you found out that you were pregnant or learned that your adoption was going through, what did you envision? Perhaps you envisioned hours of contented bliss holding your sleeping child in your arms. Is that reality? Reality is, feeding, burping, cleaning, screaming, feeding, burping, cleaning, screaming, repeat, ad infinitum. Your child is so dependent, that you have absolutely no freedom. Your life is not your own. You spend the first few years fighting for a moment of freedom then spend the next several years fighting over their freedom, only to discover that they become so free, they don’t need you anymore, and then finally, you need them and you are now impinging on their freedom. “I didn’t think it would be this way.”

You didn’t think that your parents would divorce, did you? You didn’t think that your sister would do that to you. You didn’t think that you would get that diagnosis. You didn’t think that your friend would stab you in the back, that your boyfriend would cheat on you, that you would not get accepted by that college.... I didn’t think it would be this way. Here is the hard truth. Life usually does not go your way. Sorry. I really mean that. I

am really sorry. Life usually does not go your way. So, what do you do when life does not give you what you want? You can find someone who will tell you what you want to hear or you can turn to God who will tell you what you need to hear. But, what you need to hear is probably not what you want to hear. Do you have reason to be angry with God? Do you think you have a bone to pick with God? Are you frustrated with God? Here is the word of the Lord for you. Repent! God does not answer to you and in this series, you will see that the world is SO much bigger than you and God's plan is SO much bigger than you. Look anew at God's plan, see your part, carry out your part, be content with your part, but know this. The best is yet to come. It is not here yet. It's coming.

I. Turn to God; he speaks. (1)

"The word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah." One of the men in the city of Jerusalem was chosen by God to be his mouthpiece to give direction, instruction and encouragement to the people. God spoke to his people because God remembered his people. He picked a man, whose name means, "God remembers" because God remembers. World events may appear to be out of control. Your personal situation may appear to be overwhelming. God remembers. God has spoken and God always speaks the truth. God speaks because he wants you to know what to think and what to do. God speaks because he does not want you to be in the dark. If you ignore God's word, you will be in the dark. So, turn to God. Listen to his word. He has spoken. Now, if you are going to listen to God that means that you have to be quiet. You need to be still before him. No excuses. No attitude. No other voices. Humble yourself and listen.

II. Turn to God; he speaks the truth. (2)

He tells us what we need to hear. Zechariah reminded them that, *"The LORD was very angry with your fathers."* That should have been obvious, right? After all, they were living in the midst of all of the rubble that God had said over and over and over that would happen if they did not repent and they did not repent and it all happened. But, we are so tempted to think that we are the exception to the rule. You are not the exception to the rule. God is serious about sin and God is serious about his Word. The fact that life is not what you expected is no reason to turn away from God. In fact, it is reason to turn to God. Life is messy, chaotic, unpredictable, and grievous because of sin. Sin has cursed this world and the curse of sin makes many aspects of life hard to bear. We live in the shadowlands as C.S. Lewis said. We live in the land where the shadow of death hangs over everything. Josh and Gretchen Pyper, as many of you know, are expecting their first child were told that their child has a terminal kidney disease and that they should expect the infant to die either in the womb or shortly after delivery. What is their response? The young father sent out this note and said, "The verses that have come to my mind over and over are Proverbs 3.5-6 *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."* We covet your prayers and we are eager to receive comfort from our church family. Most importantly, we trust God! We know He will grow our faith through this and we rejoice over the little time we have with Charlotte."

How can you trust God when something like this happens? God said to Adam and Eve that if they sinned that death would come upon everything. The reason why things are so sideways in this world is because God kept his Word. How did Adam and Eve sin? They failed to trust in what God had said. So, how should we respond to the fact that things are sideways in this world? Should we keep repeating the problem? NO!

First of all, notice that LORD is in all caps. This is the translators' way of informing you that the name Yahweh or Jehovah was used in the original text. Yahweh is the covenant name that God uses in relationship to his people. God established a covenant with his people. He promised to be their God and they promised to be his people, and they broke their promise. They were unfaithful to God. They cheated on God with all sorts of other gods. The reason why God was angry was because God takes his relationships seriously. God is reminding his people that he does not wink at sin and he does not wink at their sin. He was angry with their fathers. The anger of God is not like road rage, where, all of a sudden something sets God off and he has a tantrum. Some of you have parents like that. Their anger is like nitroglycerin. If you drop it, it can explode and do incredible damage. You live in a state of uncertainty because one little thing sends mom or dad into orbit and stuff starts flying. That is NOT like the anger of God. God's anger is not primarily emotional and volatile. God's anger is his settled disposition of grievous hostility against rebellion. It is the result of his white-hot righteousness being offended by our offensive sin. He does not blow up in order to blow off steam. No. God was angry with your fathers. For hundreds of years, God sent prophet after prophet to warn them of the impending disaster if they did not repent. He sent in kings and armies to be a foretaste of what would happen to them if they failed to follow God. And finally, when they repeatedly refused to acknowledge him, he gave them over to the Babylonians. Now, he has brought them back to their land and they are questioning whether or not they should follow him?! The fact that God was angry with your fathers means that if you follow the same path they did, he will be angry with you, too.

We have this incredibly arrogant and ridiculous idea that God is accountable to us and that God has to justify to us why he has done certain things. What I'm saying is decidedly different than what most of Christianity is saying today. But, here is the truth. God does not answer to you. You answer to God. If you are going to have a right view of yourself, then you have to start with a right view of God. The prophet Zechariah is told by God what to say. The first thing he speaks about (2) is God's anger against sin. Now, in the next verse (3), we hear of God's mercy. But, you will never understand God's mercy until you understand God's settled hostility and disposition against sin. What NT book does this sound like? This sounds like Romans. Romans is all about the gospel. But, in order to understand how good the good news is, you have to first understand and accept how bad and serious the bad news is. Most of Christianity, in the name of mercy and kindness, wants to water down the serious truth about our sin. But, when you do not understand the danger that you are in, you will never appreciate the depth of God's mercy and grace to rescue you from it. When I was around 8 or 9, my family went to Gatlinburg, TN for a week. One morning we went on a hike up a mountain. At the top of the mountain, I was messing around and was not paying attention and was actually on the edge of a 2,000 foot drop, when I slipped. Praise God, my dad was right there and

grabbed me. And I was like, “What? What’s the matter?” Well, when he had me look over the edge, then I realized what the matter was. Then I realized what I was saved from. Some of you have never trusted in Christ because you do not realize nor accept the reality of your sin. You think that your morality and decency gives you value to God and you have no idea of the stench your self-righteousness is. Or you think that since you are not like some of the big religious hypocrites you know that God is giving you a standing ovation in heaven and winking at your problem of lust and greed. The story of the OT Jews who repeatedly ignored God’s word and did their own thing, is your story and my story. God is right to be angry with us and what is more, God is right to be angry with us as much as he is angry with anyone else. We need mercy. What is amazing is that he poured out mercy for us through Christ.

Therefore (and this is a VERY BIG therefore), the question is not, why isn’t my life what I want it to be. The question is, why didn’t God let all of us fall off the mountain? Why did he bother to rescue anyone? The truth is, I have absolutely no ground to demand from God that he change my circumstances and give me the life that I think I deserve. And yet, God is not stingy with his grace. In fact, God is telling his people that it doesn’t have to be this way. There is a better way to live.

III. Turn to the God; he will turn to you. (3)

I used the phrase; “turn to” in the previous two sub-points because of the word, “therefore” that begins v.3. 3 times in verses 3-4 God says, “Return.” They returned to the land, but they have not returned to God. The word “return” means repent. Repent means to change your mind, change your affections and change your direction. I must understand the truth about my sin and I must accept that truth with my heart. Then, I must confront my will and change the direction of my life. A person who cries over his sin but does not change his ways has not repented. But God gives us the greatest incentive ever to repent of our sin and that is, he will turn to us. He will not hide from us. He will not put us on probation. He will not play hardball. If we repent, he will turn to us.

Look at v.3. What else is repeated, other than the word, “return”? Three times we see the verb “says” and once the word, “declares.” Then three times there is the name that God chooses to reveal himself as, “the LORD of hosts.” This is important. LORD of hosts is a military designation. Yahweh is not just the God of the Jews in their land, he is not just the God who reigns over the earth and directs kings, kingdoms and empires, he is the commander of the angelic hosts. He is the commander of all of the armies (hosts) of heaven because he is the grand Sovereign of the universe. In one short verse, we are told by the grand Sovereign ruler of the entire universe to return (repent) because the One who is over all things will return to you. You have no reason NOT to trust him and every reason to. (By the way, Zechariah uses this title, 53 times.)

IV. Turn to God; he keeps his Word. (4-6)

Now comes the appeal to learn from the past. Once again in verse 4 we have another repeat of “Return” and “thus says the LORD of hosts.” God is saying, “Do not be like your fathers!” Learn from their failures. So...

A. What did your fathers do? (4)

They did not pay attention to my word. God gave his people his law. When they obeyed his law, he blessed them. When they disobeyed his law, he brought conflict and pressure to bear upon them in order to cause them to turn to him. Part of the pressure that he brought to bear upon them was other kings who would invade them (as we saw last Sunday). But, instead of turning back to God, the Israelites and Jews would often think that the other kings and generals must be powerful because their gods were more powerful and they would adopt those pagan gods and rituals as their own. They trusted in idols to give them the life that they wanted because idols promise you what you want. Idols promise what they cannot deliver. Idols can be gods of wood and stone, but they are more than that. An idol is anything that I trust in to give my life meaning, purpose, happiness and significance. An idol is what I lean upon in order to get what I want out of life. They promise you acceptance, happiness, security, even envy and jealousy from others, but they cannot deliver. And idol is something that I will sin in order to get it, and will sin if I don't get it. God vs. idols; that is a major theme of the OT (and life).

B. What happened to them? (5)

Where are they? God is asking a question and he expects an answer. He wants his people to think. What happened to your fathers? The answer is they suffered the results of not paying attention to God's Word. Trusting idols to give you what you want will never work. Here is the truth about idols. We think we are using them to get what we want, but in reality they are using us. We think that they will give us the life that we want, when in reality they suck the life out of us. Using God to get what you want will not work. God is not an idol who presents himself to be manipulated into going along with your plan. God is God! Learn this! God is what you want because God is what you need.

C. What happened to my word? (6)

It overtook your fathers and they had to admit that God was right.

It is one thing to know the facts of history. It is quite another to be able to interpret them correctly. Every day the Jews saw the unfinished building site of the Temple. Every day they were tempted to think that God had forgotten them. The truth was, they had forgotten God. It is no secret that you live with griefs, heartaches, and sorrow. Those are part of your story and like the Jews you are tempted to interpret them through your own lens of “the life I was supposed to get.” And you are vulnerable to bitterness when you blame God for not giving you the life that you were supposed to get. But God never promised to go along with your dreams because you dream too small. He has not forgotten you. The fact is, you are part of something so much bigger than you could imagine. That is why we trust him. He can imagine it. He planned it and is fulfilling it.