Looking Forward to It
Zechariah Oerview
(preached Pine Grove 2/7/15; Sunday PM)

Introduction

Every summer, we head to the Garden City beach with our family.

We have been going there for over 10 years now, and we always have a great time with every time…

Do you know when my children start talking about summer vacation?

The day after Christmas….

From Labor Day until Christmas Eve, the anticipation of Christmas fills their minds…

From the day after Christmas until the Friday before we leave for the beach, summer vacation fills their mind…

It is a strange part of our human nature to look forward to events that are often days, weeks, months or even years away..

Yet we all do it at some point in our lives..

Sometimes, it may just be a day trip to the lake or a trip to mall, but regardless of how small it is, looking forward to an event is a part of life..

Now, the question often comes…

Is it okay to look to the future with anticipation?

Doesn't that take away from the here and now when we do that?

How are we to think about this things?

Well, I would say this….

Living in anticipation of a coming event is fine as long as you don't neglect the present all together…

Look, I am looking forward to a summer vacation myself…

I don't see that as a harmful thing at all, and let me tell you why…

If you look at the Bible, it is filled with predictions of the future…

And I don't think God would put them there unless he knows how we are made….

In fact, God put them there because he knows how we are made..

He understands our need to have something to look forward to…

Now, when you think about it….

Why do we look forward to some events?

Most of the time, it is because that future event will be enjoyable or it will be an event that brings comfort to us…

I look forward to going fishing because it is something I enjoy doing…

The same can be said for any number of things that people look forward to..

Now, let me balance that with this…

Even though it may be fine to look forward to future events, you can't do it at the expense of the present…

For instance, a father may look forward to being able to take his family to Disneyland in a few months…

But he can't simply stop going to work those few months and wait on that trip…

No, he needs to work so that his family has the money to go..

The same is true if you look at the Bible….

Though it may be filled with great promises of what is to come, the Bible also encourages us to work o the present as well…

A person can read the Bible and look forward to heaven, but unless they get saved in the present, the future anticipation of heaven is worthless…

Now, I say all that as an introduction to the book of Zechariah…

Zechariah was a prophet who filled Israel's ears with hopes of the future…

And pictures of what God and planned for them….

Zechariah was the travel agent who gives people the brochures filled with beautiful pictures of how nice that vacation to the Bahamas will be..

If you remember form last week, Haggai was a prophet of God sent to Israel when they returned to the land after being exiled for 70 years…

If you remember our big map of the Middle East…

Israel was conquered and eventually destroyed and carried away form their land in 586 BC by the Babylonians..

Here's a couple maps to show you how that occurred as the Babylonians came and overran the country and took the people back to Babylon…

Where they stayed for 70 years…

When the Babylonians fell to the Persians, the Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews to their homeland if they liked..

And many Jews left the area and headed west back to ISrael…

They went back in stages, and the first group arrived in 536 BC and began to rebuild their lives in Israel…

And we learned last week that much of the rebuilding of their lives was at first focused on rebuilding the Lord's temple as well…

However, after starting work on the temple, work came to a halt as the people go discouraged in their progress…

And got discouraged at how much work needed to be done on the entire land as a whole…

So, they neglected working on rebuilding the temple and instead started attending to their own affairs…

And that went on for 16 years until 520 BC when God called Haggai to go to the people and tell them to get back to work on the temple…

His reason was simple…

The reason you can' the nation back on its feet and the reason you can't your own lives back up and running is that you have put God last on your list of priorities…

And Haggai reminded us last week that God needs to be first in all things if we ever expect to find blessings in this life..

And unlike many of the other prophets, the people listened to Haggai's preaching and they got back to work on the temple in August or September of 520 BC…

Well, Zechariah is going to follow Haggai in his preaching…

From what we estimate, Zechariah was a young man…

Probably much younger than Haggai and he was sent to the same group of people 2 months later with the same message..

His primary mission was to preach God's Word to the people to encourage them to continue to work o the temple…

And so what you really have in Zechariah and Haggai is a 1-2 punch of preachers…

Haggai is the practical man who helps the people today get to work today….

By telling them of the benefits for following the Lord today…

Zechariah is the younger preacher who helps the people see the value of their work tomorrow and years to come…

He was sent by God to give the people a picture of what all their work was accomplishing…

Look, this is important in people's lives to have these two voices…

For instance, I sometimes need encouragement to just do what I need to do today….

And then sometimes, I need encouragement to remind myself of the big picture….

You need the same thing in your life…

You need people who help you get done what needs to be done today…

How you need to live tomorrow for God's glory…

Who push you to exceed in the task at hand…

But you also need people who help you see the big picture…

People who encourage you and remind you that life is not a sprint but a marathon…

And that you have come a long way in your walk with God and that God is going to bless you for your obedience to Him….

Well, the people in Jerusalem needed the same two voices in their life….

They needed Haggai who was sent by God to tell them to get to work today to help them with the routine of the day to day grind…

But they also needed Zechariah who was sent by God to remind them that their labor in the Lord was not in vain..

That God was going to reward them in the near future, but more importantly, God had a great future in store for the entire nation..

Zechariah was also important because God was about to go silent on Israel…

Zechariah was the next to last prophet to be sent to Israel…

Only Malachi would follow Zechariah and after Malachi, no more prophets would be sent to Israel for a period of 400 years…

The nation that had been used to hearing from God ever since their founding with Abraham was about to have their communication with God cut off…

No prophet would come after Malachi until John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness pointing the coming of Jesus..

Israel needed to be assured that God had not abandoned them…

The words and promises of God that would come through Zechariah would serve as a security blanket to Israel in the dark days of silence that were coming…

So, let's get a quick overview of this book tonight…

Here is a real simplified look at what consider a very complicated book…

In chapter 1-6, we are going to see…

I. Pictures of Israel's Future (1-6)

Then we wil see….

II. Problems of Israel's Day (7-8)

Then finally,

III. Predictions of Israel's Messiah (9-14)

Pictures, problems and predictions…

Let's begin our look at the prophet Zechariah in chapter 1, verse 1…

I. Pictures of Israel's Future (1-6)

1 In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying, 2 "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. 3 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Return to Me," declares the Lord of hosts, "that I may return to you," says the Lord of hosts. 4 "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds."' But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the Lord. 5 "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? 6 But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, 'As the Lord of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.'"'"

There are a couple things to notice in these opening verses that really set the tone for the rest of the book..

#1- This is one of only two books that uses a pagan king to date the writing of it…

You will notice that in verse 1, Zechariah dates his writing during the reign of Darius, who was the king of the Persian empire…

That is very important because the prophets always dated their writing by the date of a Jewish king…

We do this ourselves though we don't think about…

We will say things like that happened back when Reagan was president….

Rulers of a nation are a great way to date things..

However, the Jews no longer had a king…

For the first time since Saul was chosen by God to be their first king, the Jews had no king of their own..

Instead, they were living under Gentile rulers…

The times of the Gentiles ruling over Israel had begun and Zechariah reminded everyone who read his prophecy that Israel was under the judgment of being ruled by a Gentile king…

The second thing to notice in these opening verses is this…

Zechariah pretty much tells the generation who is back in the land rebuffing the temple to not be like their parents..

Look at verse 4….

Do not be like your fathers….

That is a stinging rebuke to anyone's ears, but that is what the Lord wanted that generation to know…

And here is the simple truth…

If their fathers and grandfathers had obeyed the Lord, their generation wouldn't be laying bricks to rebuild the temple…

If their fathers and grandfathers had obeyed the Lord, Israel would not have been cast of the land in judgment and the temple would not be in rubble…

And then you get the great lesson of Zechariah and the great lesson of the OT and the great lesson of the entire Bible at the end of verse 4….

"Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.."

The primary instruction from Zechariah to that generation of Jews rebuilding the temple was this…

Live a life of repentance…

Your fathers didn't do that…

But you need to be a people who obey the Lord and turns from sin…

And that is the message that God has always preached to people…

When God goes silent with Israel for 400 years, and he then sends John the Baptist to break the silence…

What is the message of John the Baptist…

Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand..

What is the message that Jesus preaches?

Repent and believer the good news?

What is the message of Peter and the disciples as they preach in the early church?

Repent and be saved.

What is the message that biblical preachers offer today?

Repent and turn to Christ to be saved…

That was the message of Zechariah as well…

Don't be like your parents and their parents…

Live lives of constant repentance and obedience to God…

And then from the middle of verse 7 to the end of chapter 6, Zechariah details some visions that the Lord gave him one night…

While he sleeps one night, God comes to Zechariah and gives him a message to deliver to Israel…

And he does it through a series of pictures that God puts in the mind of Zechariah…

Now, a word of caution needs to be added here…

Many people will look at this and expect or even preach that you should expect visions from God today…

You need to underhand a couple of important truths about the Bible…

First, the era of the OT is different than the era of the church..

The people in the OT offered sacrifices, we don't.

The people in the OT looked forward to a Savior from sin, we look back to one…

There are differences in the ages, and that is very important and if you don't recognize that fact, you lose what the Bible teaches…

And you begin to expect God to do things today that He did in OT.

That certainly applies in the area of visions..

The people in the OT didn't have the finished Word of God.

The prophets needed to have God's Word in order to preach it…

And at times he used visions or his voice to communicate his word to the prophets who then gave it to the people…

However today, you hold in your hand the completed Word of God…

What God has said and all that God needs to say is contained in the Bible in your lap…

There are no need for visions today; God used them at one time to communicate his truth…

But when the Bible was completed, the visions ended…

In fact, that is what the writer of the book of Hebrews teaches…

Hebrews 1:1…

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,
2 [a]in these last days has spoken to us [b]in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the [c]world.

I only mention this because I heard a preacher talk about a vision that God gave him this week…

And often times, these preachers sight OT prophets who had visions and say things like…

If God gave Zechariah a vision, he can give me one…

I always tell people, Zechariah also had to take a sheep and kill him on the family altar every week…

You want to start doing that again?

Anyway to get back to these visions of Zech 1-6, God gave the prophet these visions and I am not going to take us through each of them..

But here is a slide that details all the visions followed by a quick explanation of each…

Zech 1:7-17 - Vision of men under myrtle tress.
Meaning - God will bless Israel.

Zech 1:18-21 - Vision of four horns and four workers.
Meaning - God will judge Israel's enemies.

Zech 2:1-13 - The measuring line man.
Meaning - God will rebuild Jerusalem.

Zech 3:1-10 - Cleansing of the high priest.
Meaning - God will purify his leaders and people.

Zech 4:1-14 - Lampstand and olive trees.
Meaning - God will rebuild the temple.

Zech 5:1-4 - A flying scroll.
Meaning - God will deal with sin and idolatry.

Zech 5:5-11 - The basket woman.
Meaning - God will destroy false religion.

Zech 6:1-15 - Four chariots.
Meaning - God will establish peace in Israel.

I would encourage you to go back and look at these when you have a chance..

The point of all the visions is this…

God is not done with his nation.

He promised Abraham that he would make the nation that came from Him to be a nation of blessing to all the world…

And God keeps his word…

So, Israel is not done as a nation even though, they have experienced and will continue to experience the judgment of God…

Another thing to keep in mind is another very important principle of understanding the OT is this…

When God gives a prophecy to His people…

Often times there is a near and a far fulfillment in mind…

Let me give you an example of this…

Let's say you take cold medicine for the common cold..

The aspirin part of the medicine gives some immediate relief for the aches and pains,…

But the decongestant works on the congestion that is causing the problems as well…

It is true that you will feel better in a few hours, and it is also true that you will feel better in a couple of days…

That is very important to keep in mind when you read some of the verses in Zechariah and some of the other prophets…

God gave them truth that applied to them in their current situation but he also gave them truth that pointed to a greater day that would be in the distant future as well…

As you look at these visions, some point to the blessing that will come to Israel as they continue their work of rebuilding the temple….

But some look to a day when Israel's enemies will be completely destroyed and true peace will come to the nation and even to the whole world…

Think of it this way…

When you obey God today, God promises to bless you…

Does that mean that the only blessing for obedience comes today or does that mean that the blessing for obedience will come later?

Well, I would say that it means both…

You are blessed today for doing right, but you will also be blessed in the far future for doing right today…

That is the same principle of these visions and prophecies of the prophets…

There is both short term meaning and long term meaning…

There is both short term fulfillment and long term fulfillment in mind…

When God tells Israel that the temple he will rebuild the temple…

In the short term, God did rebuild the temple, but there is also a future temple in mind that will be greater than that one…

Well, that's a lot to think about, but that is the function of these predictions that God gave to Zechariah in the opening chapters..

He was to preach them to the people to bring comfort to them as they rebuilt but also to point to the hope of a bright and very distant future…

Remember, Zechariah is the travel agent….

Work hard today so that you can enjoy beautiful beaches tomorrow…

Well, we move from this pictures of Israel's future…

To the problems of Israel's day in chapters 7-8….

II. Problems of Israel's Day (7-8)

In this chapters, Zechariah answers a question from the people about their current day…

And instead of spending a lot of time on this..

Let me sum up their problem…

The people had been fasting due to the sorrow over not having a temple…

But now that the temple was being rebuilt, they have a question for the man of God…

"Do they need to continue fasting?"

Now, let's think about this for a second…

IF you are busy rebuilding the temple, you need food to do the strenuous work it required to keep you going…

It would make sense that you need to eat, but this is what happens when people get so caught up in outward shows of religion…

They will keep the ceremony even though it takes away form their work for the Lord…

Let me give you an example…

The Pharisees had so many rules for their Sabbath day that they wouldn't even help a person out of trouble for fear that they worked on the Sabbath…

Jesus rebuked that practice…

Telling them that they were keeping the Sabbath but ignoring the more important matters of the Law…

The same was true of the people here…

There were fasting but they should have been eating and working longer on the temple…

The work needed to be done….

The ritual of fasting wasn't as important as getting the temple built…

And that is what Zechariah tells the people in chapters 7-8…

The Lord desires obedience and love for Him from the heart, not the keeping of empty rituals and and made traditions…

The instruction was to obey God and finish the temple, not slow down because you are fating in order to look good to others…

There is one final section to consider….

III. Predictions of Israel's Messiah (9-14)

The book of Zechariah ends with some incredible promises to Israel…

And the long story short is this…

Israel you will have a bright future for one very important reason…

God's promised Messiah will come to you…

In chapters 9-14 are some of the greatest prophecies about the coming Christ…

Now, Zechariah starts with a picture of who Christ will be, and it is no coincidence that he first describes the coming Messiah as humble….

You will all recognize this verse in Zech 9:9….

9
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is [g]just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the [h]foal of a donkey.

A Messiah and King riding a donkey is the picture of humility, and it is a picture of Israel's coming King and SAvior…

And that is really the main reason that Israel rejected Jesus, - he was too humble…

He wasn't kingly enough…

They wanted a grand royal King…

And when you are known as people who filed with pride, you do prideful things and you like to associate with prideful people…

The prideful Jews didn't want a humble King, so they rejected him even though Zechariah told them years earlier that their Messiah would come to them in this way…

That leads to Zechariah chapter 11, where we read about how Jesus was rejected in His first coming to ISrael..

Zechariah talks about the fact that Jesus came to Israel as the True Shepherd…

But they did not want him as their shepherd and instead chose to follow false shepherd instead…

All of this rejection of the Messiah will lead to chapter 12, where Jerusalem will be destroyed and the nation scattered around the world…

And that is exactly what happened in history….

Israel rejected their king, and God delivered judgment upon them….

The city was destroyed in 70 AD, and the nation was scattered around the world…

That brings us to chapter 13-14, which speak of relief for Israel after years of suffering…

Though they rejected Messiah at his first coming, God will graciously send Jesus back to Israel again i noted future….

And God will cause their hearts to receive him with joy and believe upon Him for salvation this time…

When they do that, they will rejoice as a nation and receive the blessings of being back in a right relationship with their God..

Conclusion

Now, the question is…

Why did Israel in the 500s BC need to hear about an event that wouldn't happen for at least another 2500 years?

Why did God give Zechariah a picture of a day to deliver to Israel in 520 BC that is still future to us?

Well, he did it for the same purpose that HE gives us a picture of future….

It is something to look forward to…

It is a reason to press on in their current struggle and in our current struggle…

IT is motivation to live right today knowing that greater days are ahead…

Let me say it this way…

There are a lot of reasons not to be an unbeliever, but one of the most depressing reasons not to be an unbeliever is that you have no hope of a bright future…

Though you may live looking forward to the next sin you may commit…

The truth is that your future is numbered and the only bright part of it is found in this world…

Once this world is over…

Your future is nothing but darkness and hopelessness…

The worse position in the world is to be a person without hope of a bright future…

But if your reject Christ, you reject the only option of hope in this world….

That's why we love Christ right…

Sure, life isn't always the best as a believer…

In fact, it may be very tough at time…

But there is always the hope of a better day if you truly know the Lord…

And hope is a good thing, and the greatest news for the believer is that their hopes will be filled one day in being with Christ…

Let us pray.