

## Zech. 8 God is with Us (Part 1)

Of all the important things in this world for us to know, today's truth is the most essential: God is with us. This was the message of Zechariah as the Jews came out of Babylonian exile into Jerusalem and began to re-establish worship in the temple. V. 3: **"I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem . . ."** V. 8: **"And they shall be my people, and I will be their God . . ."** In all the difficulties of life today, we need the same message. As I preach to the church, God's people, this text will give help us to consider what this means for us. I have 3 truths. We will get to only one of these truths today, which is God's desire to be with his people. I want to go behind this desire and consider the fact that God is a jealous God.

1. He desires to be with you. I get this from vv. 1-2: **"And the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath."** This is one of those places in Scripture which speaks about God's "desire" for his people, what God "wants" or his "will." This is SO mysterious! AND, we are using language to describe such mysteries. God is different than us. He is the creator. We are the creatures. This means there are limitations on our language to explain mystery. This is why we need context; and we need the whole Bible sometimes to make sense of hard things.

In these verses God describes himself as "jealous" and this "jealousy" is "great" and it comes with "wrath." I remember going door to door back in the 90s in Wake Forest and this topic came up when I read a passage that speaks of God as a "jealous" God. And this man showed great emotion and said to me, *"I do not worship a God that gets jealous."* Society does not like the word "jealousy" to describe God. Usually, this means insecure, obsessive, and full of envy. Psychology sees jealousy as an unpredictable emotion based on fickle impulses. So, what we are doing when we think of God in this way is to project OUR understanding of jealousy back onto God. This is a problem. For the Bible says that God's "NAME" IS jealous. This is who He is. Exod. 34:14 says, **"For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."** This means that whatever "jealous" means, it doesn't include our creaturely, sinful, inefficient understanding. So, what does it mean?

Well, the context is a context of sinful rebellious, idolatrous, Israel. Look at vv. 2-3. **"I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion . . ."** What did God mean that he has now "returned" to Zion? Well . . . In order to "return" there must have been some kind of "departure." The key word is "wrath." What brings the wrath of God? It is sin, to fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). Particularly, God had entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. Through Moses, he gave them his laws; He gave them his protection; He gave them his promises. This was a marriage contract between God and his people. And what did Israel do? From their side, they broke this covenant. They worshipped other gods. As "adulterous" wives, they left their husband. And when they did, they worshipped everything in the world, but the true God. They exchanged the glory of God for a lie (Rom. 1:23; Ps. 106:20). And this is the worst of all sins: to not worship the only true and living God.

When we do not worship Him as the “Glorious ONE,” when we worship the things of this world, the “gods” of this world, we fall short (Rom. 3:23) This is what Israel did. So, what did God do when Israel turned away from the “glory” of God to the “glory” of idols. He sent the Babylonians to judge them. We can say that He “turned away” from them. Instead of blessing, they got judgment. And then, at the end of his judgment, what does God do? He “returns” to them. From this we see two principles: 1) God does all things for his own glory; and 2) This results in good for his people. These are the things that “motivate” God (if I can say that). This means that God’s “jealousy” results in God doing all things for his glory and for the good of his people. Keep this two truths in mind as we continue.

Let me tell a story from Num. 25. Before Israel entered the promised land (dessert years), they lived in a place called Shittim. This was the land of Moab, and during their time there, they began to mix with the Moabites and worship their gods. What do you think was God’s response? Remember, this was after the Mosaic Covenant. God had entered a covenant relationship with them. They were “married” to God (we can say). V. 3 says **“So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.”** So, Moses tells his judges to go and kill the men who were worshipping the gods of Moab. (The story is quite gory as many of those killed were hung in the sun for everyone to see.) Also, at the same time God sent a plague that killed twenty-four thousand people. And then, right in the middle of the story, it is discovered that a man is committing adultery (and apparently is not ashamed about it). Then, a man called “Phineas” took a spear in his hand and killed them both at the same time (in the act). And then in v. 10 we read: **“And the Lord said to Moses, Phineas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel . . .”** And then it says, **“in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.”**

In this story, we see a picture of God’s “zeal” for his own glory. And this zeal for his own glory results in judgment. And once the judgment is finished, what happens? Good comes to the people. Look back at vv. 2-3 again. **“I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. 3 Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.”** This means God will be with you! Why? He is a jealous God. And in fact, Jealous is his NAME.

So, what does it mean that God is a jealous as God? 1) He is jealous for his glory; 2) He is jealous for the worship of his people. (His glory, our good.) By worshiping him, we do what is ultimately good! And this worship results in our good. Some might say, *“this is selfish . . . God is just thinking of himself.”* But, this is not true. For, there is no greater good than God. He is “good.” Therefore, there is nothing higher or greater or more important than to worship that which is good. To worship anyone or anything less than God is to fall short of glory. This means that when we worship God and God alone, this results in that which is good for us. This is why God will do what is necessary to save his people.

As Isaiah thinks of the great sins of Israel, and that none could possibly save them because of their great rebellion, God says: **“I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me”** (Is. 63:5). Look with me to Is. 59:16 where we read something similar: **“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him”** (Is. 59:16).

I love these verses! They speak of our inability to save ourselves. There is no person in the world, no angel in the heavens, NO ONE short of God himself, that can accomplish the glory of God for the good of his people. Why? For ALL have sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). But, God is JEALOUS for his glory! And in his mercy, stemming from his love because of his “zeal,” his “desire” for his own glory, God HIMSELF does what is required. OH, the mystery of the incarnation of the Son!

Now look at v. 17: **“He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.”** To whom does this verse refer? Who does it look forward to? Jesus! Is. 9:6-7: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”**

So, back to our truth. God desires to be with us. And behind, and wrapped up in this desire is “jealousy.” God will do what is necessary to accomplish his glory, which includes the worship of his people. And since no sinful man, no son (or daughter) born from Adam can bring about such worship, God sends his only begotten Son. And what does he do? Well, He is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. And he is born . . . like the rest of us are born, from a woman, his mother. But, he is unlike any other man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And, He did not receive the sin nature that came down from Adam (what a mystery wrapped in wisdom). He was sinless. He lived a sinless life. And at the right time, he laid down his life on the cross. How unexpected and glorious is this truth! God poured out his wrath on his Son to the point of death.

Here we see the zeal of God for his glory in the greatest of ways! God, whose name is JEALOUS, God “returns” to his people in the person and work of his Son. As I noted above, because of sin, and particularly the sin of his people, God must judge sin in order for salvation to come. And since our sin is against God, his own wrath against must be appeased; it must placated; it must averted. This is the cross! This is the outcome of God whose name is JEALOUS. This is the cross, the greatest place of judgment, which results in our salvation. It results in true worship, which causes the greatest good for his people. God desires to be with us.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Is. 53:10: **“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”** This is really the message of the Bible. One of our catechism questions says: **“Why does the Lord uphold, preserve, and govern all things in Heaven and Earth? Answer: God does all for his own glory, & for his peoples good.”** This is why Jesus came. God desires to be with his and to do good to his people. And this desire flows from his zeal, his “jealousy” for his own glory. This is why Jesus came.

Just hours before he went to the cross, he prayed for his people: **“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one . . .”** (John 17:21 ff.).

Let me end with a few applications:

1. Because all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, the cross of Christ is the only way to salvation. As Phineas was zealous for God’s glory in our story from Num. 25, so Christ laid down his life to the glory of God. As Peter says in Acts 4:12: **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**

2. Salvation belongs to God. As we will see this more next week, throughout cp. 8 in Zechariah, we see that God is the one who “returns” to his people. God keeps his part of the covenant. As a good husband, God will be faithful to his wife. He will make sure she remains faithful. Eph. 2:1-5 says: **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”**

3. We also must have a motive of divine jealousy as we make disciples in this world. Have you ever thought of this? I think of Jesus overturning the tables in the temple. As he came into his own temple, he saw the money changers and those selling their goods; he saw them turning the temple away from a place of prayer and worship to place of profanity. But, jealousy, “zeal” for God’s glory compelled him. The Apostle Paul has the same desire as he says to the Corinthians: **“I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ”** (2 Cor. 11:1-2). So, when we leave this place and enter the world of making disciples, one of our motives must be a jealousy for the glory of God.

4. Your purpose in this life is to do all things to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31 says: “**So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**”