

## Zech. 8 God Is with Us (part 2)

Our text speaks to the truth that God is with his people. And nothing could be more important than this truth. Today, I have 3 truths from our text: 1) God desires to be with his people, 2) God does whatever it takes to be with his people, and 3) God showers his people with blessings.

1. God desires to be us. We spoke about this truth last week, particularly God's desire to be with his people through the lens of jealousy (8:1-3). God is a jealous God. In fact, his NAME is JEALOUS. Now, this isn't the kind of jealousy we think about in the world. God is not envious. He is not fickle, changing his ways when something better comes along. He is not manipulative from sinful motives. As we saw last week, his jealousy flows from a desire for his own glory. For there is no greater glory, no greater good in the universe than God himself. In fact, to fall short of God's glory is the ultimate fall. And because of sin, all of us fall short (Rom. 3:23). This truth is pictured as a husband who is jealous for the faithfulness, affection, and devotion of his wife. We understand this truth. It is very natural and not sinful for a husband to desire these things from his wife, especially as they are "married," brought together through a special covenant. This is why we say, "*for better or worse, till death do us part*" in our wedding ceremonies.

From a personal standpoint I desire to be with my wife. And, I am "jealous" for her to return this desire and devotion ONLY to me. Now, in this sinful world, marriages do breakup. There is unfaithfulness, great sins and many circumstances cause this covenant to be broken. (And there is mercy and grace to be found.) But, with God, there will be no broken covenant. And as we've seen, Israel broke their side of the covenant. They went after other gods. They committed idolatry and worshipped the things of this world instead of their true "husband." And, God judges his people for this break of covenant. He, says to them, "Ok, go ahead have your ways with your gods. I will turn you over to them. And I will let those "gods" give you what they will." And God uses the Assyrians and the Babylonians to eventually destroy Jerusalem, its temple, and the walls. He sends them into captivity. But, because he is a "jealous" God, he does not leave them in their idolatry. He brings them back. He grants them repentance. And once again, the blessings of God flow down to his people. This is what the Book of Zechariah is about! And, as we will see, there is no difference with us. We have fallen short of God's glory! We have broken God's covenant. We have gone after the "gods" of this world. We have worshipped God's gifts and not the one who gave them. But, God will not break his covenant with his people, which brings us to truth #2.

2. God does whatever it takes to be with us? Brothers and sisters, God does not leave people in their sin, even though they fall short of his glory. God keeps his side of the covenant. And, as we will see, He doesn't just keep his side. He gives us the grace to fulfill ours. He pursues his "wife" (us) and ensures her faithfulness. There is nothing more amazing than this truth today. If this were not so, you/we would perish! This text is filled with this truth. Look at v. 3: "**Thus says the Lord, I have returned and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city.**" Verse 7 "**I will save my people . . .**" And v. 8: "**they shall be my**

people, and **I will** be their God . . .” Verse 11: “**But now I will not deal** with the remnant of this people as in the former days . . .” Verse 12 “**I will** cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things . . .” Verse 13: “**So, I will** save you . . .” Verse 15 “**So again have I purposed** in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah . . .” . Do you see this? God pursues us! And as we saw last week, this is for his glory and our good! Let me say briefly here that God does not have to keep up his side. He does not have to save anyone. He does not have to secure the faithfulness of a sinful people. It is pure mercy. This is why we can always say as Jonah says, “**Salvation belongs to the Lord.**” (Jonah 2:9).

Now, turn with me to Ezekiel 16 as an illustration of this truth. In these words, Ezekiel gives the history of Israel as the “bride” of God. In vv. 1-7 we see God’s mercy as he recalls his first pursuit as a people. Listen carefully to these words. “**Again the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born. “And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.”** Do you see here what God does for his people? What a picture of sin and death. And God comes to them and says, “live.” I am sure the Apostle Paul recalls this picture when he says to the Colossians: “**And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses . . .**” (Col. 2:13).

Now, back to Ezek. 16. The story continues as he speaks of this marriage relationship. In v. 8: “**When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD.**” Here, we see

that God powerfully makes his bride come to life. And then, he enters a covenant relationship and he gives her all the most beautiful gifts. But, then in v. 15, we see God's people break this covenant relationship with them. **"But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore" (15-17).** This picture continues all the way down to v. 59-63. And then, in his mercy as a faithful husband, he says, **"For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD."**

This is a picture the Gospel, the "good news" that God will do what it takes to save his people. These words from both Ezekiel and Zechariah look forward to fulfillment, not in their day, but in the day of the Messiah. In those days before the New Covenant, God used prophets and priests and kings to bring his word, his blessings, his salvation to his people through his covenant with them. Today, how does God keep his side of the covenant? How does he dwell with his people? How does he bless his people today? Every time we take the Lord's Supper and repeat the words of Jesus, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink, remember me,"** we remember the fulfillment of God's eternal covenant with his people. As Heb. 1:1 says, **"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . ."**

Thinking of the birth of Jesus, Matthew recalls the words of Isaiah saying, **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel."** What does Immanuel mean? It means "God with us." Do you remember the old man Simeon. He was in the temple (this same temple from Zechariah's day). And by faith, he was looking for God's promise to console Israel. And when he saw Jesus, the Holy Spirit revealed to him who He was. And he takes him in his arms and says, **"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" ( Luke 2:29-32).** Today, Jesus is the true Israel. In every way that Israel was disobedient and broke God's covenant, Jesus did not. He was sinless. He upheld the law of God in every way in his heart and in his actions. And when he laid down his life on the cross as "lamb for slaughter," his sacrifice was acceptable to God. Today, Jesus is the true temple. In his

incarnation, the Son of God took on flesh. And when he laid down his life and said, “***It is finished,***” the veil to the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom. And after 3 days in the grave, he rose from the dead. And then he ascended to the true holy of holies, opening the doors of heaven for his people. This is the Gospel. If you are a Christian today, you are a recipient of salvation, salvation that ONLY come through what God has done in the sending of the Son. Your sins are forgiven. The wrath of God has been taken away. Christ became a curse for you, in your place. And God, ONLY God has done this through the person and work of the Son. This is the message of Zechariah!

3. God showers us with blessings. Today, in Christ, because God is with us, All the blessings of God come down to his people. If you remember from two weeks ago, I said that cps. 7-8 go together. Certain men come from the town of Bethel come to ask Zechariah if they should keep the fasts to remember the destruction of the temple now that they are going back to the land to rebuild. In 8:18-19 we get his answer: “**And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.”**” In this answer we see a change from fasting to feasts. Instead of exile, we see freedom and a return to their homes. Instead of a destroyed temple, we have a new one. Instead of judgment, we have blessing!

I think of the Voyage of the Dawn Treader in the Chronicles of Narnia. In this story, the children from Narnia and the King and his servants have been at sea for a long time. They have gone through storms and many dangers. They have to ration their food. And then they come to an island where they find a table FULL of all kinds of foods. And the “angel,” (star lady) says to them “*This is Aslan’s table. Everyone is welcome. Please eat. Enjoy what Aslan has for you.*”

What we have in the Book of Zechariah with the people of Israel returning to the Land and rebuilding of the temple is a picture of the days to come as ALL God’s blessings come down to the world through the Messiah. Look at vv. 20-23: “**Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’**”

Brothers and sisters, this passage is not about “fasting,” but “feasting.” This passage is about All the blessings of God upon his people. In their context, vv. 4-5 we see old men and old women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem, watching the children play. V. 12, there shall be a “sowing of peace.” Once again the fruit will fall from the trees, rain will come in abundance. Verses 14-15, Instead of judgment and wrath, there will be goodness and peace. Brothers and sisters, all these things are a picture of what God is doing NOW in the person and work of the Son. ALL the

blessings of God are coming down to this world through person and work of Jesus Christ. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul remembers when he writes to the Ephesians. Listen to his words: In 2:13-22: **“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”**

A few applications in closing:

1. We are the light of the world. In Christ, who is the true Israel, we are the ones building God’s temple (the Church). Jesus says of himself: **“I am the light of the world”** (John 8:12). And then he says to us: **“You are the light of world”** (Matt. 5:14). And his command to us is what? ***Go and make disciples***. (Matt. 28:18-20). As Christians, we have received ALL God’s Blessings in Christ. We have been given the Holy Spirit. We live differently than the world. We are “salt” in this world. And, we give this world the Words of Christ that they also may be saved. As God worked to bless the Jews so that the nations would come and “take hold of their robes, saying “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you,” so we have this “treasure in jars of clay” (2 Cor. 4:7). Therefore, we must tell others of this good news.

2. God’s blessings lead to good works. As God returned to his people of Zechariah’s day to do the good work of rebuilding the temple, so today God works in us that we do good works. Phil. 2:13 says, **“It is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** Eph. 2:7, Paul says God has shown his immeasurable riches and grace to his people. Why? VV. 8-9 say: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

3. Two commands.

i. Look at v. 9: **“Let your hands be strong.”** In their day, he was saying, “keep building the temple” in spite of the dangers and the obstacles around you. I will be with you. Today, be strong in the Lord and the power of his might (Eph. 6:10). Press on through life’s troubles!

ii. Look at v. 15: “Fear not.” Do not fear what this world brings your way. The Lord has overcome the world. And we know the end. His kingdom has been inaugurated and He will bring it to an end one day.

Today, God desires to be with his people. And in Christ, he has done whatever it takes to make this happen. And he blesses us with everything we need for life and godliness in this world.