



Small Group Tools: FaithWalk

Small group experience for the week following July 2 – 3, 2011
ZECHARIAH 9:9-12

Community

THEME

Zechariah is both a prophet and a priest who not only focuses God's people on rebuilding the temple, but proclaims the message that God is at work and plans to live again with them in Jerusalem. God is going to save them from their enemies and cleanse them from sin, and this oracle gives us a hint as to how this will happen. Not only are we free people in Christ, but we are also prisoners of hope.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We, like Zechariah, are called to be lovingly bold in speaking the truth into our culture, and to be purveyors of hope in what might seem to be a hopeless time. The hope we bear to the world is the good news of the Kingdom of God that brings abundant life and victory over sin and death.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

Speak the hard truth, hold on to hope, and anchor our lives in the sure promises of God.

ICEBREAKER

How many places have you seen the word "hope" used in a name or a title? Brainstorm this together. What do you think the opposite of "hope" is? Why?

PRAY TOGETHER

God, we want to live in the certain hope of the future in which you are already present and at work. We are your prisoners of hope because we cannot escape the dreams that you have placed in our hearts and minds. We want to anchor our lives in the good news of your Kingdom, which carries the promise of abundant and eternal life. We want to live in anticipation of that great day when you return and God's work of restoration is complete. Amen.

Content

ZECHARIAH: THE BOOK AND THE PROPHET

Zechariah is a contemporary of Haggai. Both are among the 42,360 Jews who return to Judah from their Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Both are frequently called prophets of restoration, because their writings focus on the restoration of Israel, specifically Jerusalem and the temple.

Zechariah was a very common name in the ancient world; there are 27 individuals named Zechariah in the Bible. The name literally means "the Lord remembers." Little is known about this particular Zechariah. He is apparently quite young when he returns to Judah. We can surmise that his father died young, because Zechariah is named as the immediate successor of Iddo (Zechariah's grandfather) in the list of heads of the priestly families in Nehemiah 12.

In Matthew 23:34-35, Jesus says, "Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."

Because there is no biblical record of this event, we must assume that this was a piece of oral tradition in Jewish community.

The book that bears Zechariah's name is written to both encourage and convict the returning exiles with a focus on temple reconstruction, though some of Zechariah's prophesies rise above national interest and include all of creation.

The book clearly divides into two sections. Chapters 1-8 include a series of eight visions which seem mostly targeted toward real people doing the real work for temple and national restoration. This first section closes with God's promise of a restored Jerusalem in which peace, security and fertility are abundant, so abundant that the surrounding nations are drawn to it.

Chapters 9-14 are so distinctly different in style and content that many scholars doubt that they could have been written by Zechariah. While the first 8 chapters are largely encouraging, the closing chapters speak of attacks upon Jerusalem by other nations. Leadership is suspect at best, though in the end it will be God's leadership that will bring peace and prosperity to Jerusalem. *Read Zechariah 9:9-12*

DISCUSSION Does verse 9 remind you of some other event in Scripture? Why? Why is the restoration of the temple so important to the people of Israel? Does this seem like a repeated theme throughout Scripture?

NOTES ON THE TEXT

The initial verses of chapter 9 describe the march of Alexander the Great and his army through the area north and east of Palestine. Alexander defeats the Persians in 333 B.C. at the Battle of Issus, and then turns to conquer the leading cities in Phoenicia. Jerusalem can, no doubt, feel the hot breath of Alexander's troops sweeping down the Mediterranean coast. Despite the power of the enemy, Zechariah 9 promises that the Lord will come like a warrior and defeat every enemy of God's people. God will surround the temple and the city of Jerusalem with his strong presence, and no enemy will be strong enough to defeat him.

It is this good news causing the rejoicing that opens our text today. God's people can rejoice because their conquering and victorious King is entering the holy city. Within the context of the passage, this King would seem to be the Lord. What is so unusual about this King is that he will not enter into the city on a war horse (which was customary), but on a young donkey. This symbolizes that the King comes in peace, and in fact this great King will initiate a reign of peace which will cover not only Judah, but the surrounding nations. The dominion of this King will be "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." This probably refers to the Euphrates River. Jerusalem falls within the province that the Persians called "Beyond the River." The expanse of land imagined here assigns a greater territory to God than Persia.

DISCUSSION If you were alive at this time, where would you place your hope? Why? Talk about the image of a donkey instead of a horse. What does this symbolize?

Verses 11 and 12 are a strong proclamation of God's promise to restore and protect the Israelites. This favor will be given because of the "blood of my covenant with you." This refers to the blood sacrifices sealing the covenant relationship between God and his people. The certainty of God's restoration is so profound that God's people are called "prisoners of hope," those who cannot escape the hope that God's promises have placed in their hearts and minds. They are free to return to the city of Jerusalem despite the threat of larger, more powerful armies. But no army is a match for the power of God.

DISCUSSION In what way are we prisoners of hope today? How is this related to the freedom we have in Christ?

This passage very quickly became associated with messianic hopes, which is why Matthew and John refer to this passage in connection with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus is shown to be the fulfillment of these prophetic words. Interestingly, Jerusalem and the temple fall to the Romans just 40 years after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The promised peace is not a physical one, but a spiritual one, in the end. And in a very real sense, the complete

fulfillment of the promised peace that the Messiah brings is not yet achieved, and won't be until Jesus returns and God's work of restoration is finished, as described in Revelation 21-22.

DISCUSSION How is physical peace different from spiritual peace? Are there similarities? How will the second coming of Jesus complete all of this? Give some examples.

GOING DEEPER: NOW

While the armies of Alexander may not threaten us, we can all identify enemies who are pressing in upon us. We all struggle to hold onto hope. In fact, it seems as if fear is far more prominent than hope in many people's lives, which makes our current situation similar to the one that Zechariah faces. The call of this message is two-fold. We're called to be as lovingly bold as Zechariah when we speak the truth. That won't go down any better in our culture than it does in Zechariah's day. In addition, we're called to be purveyors of hope in a hopeless time. We have the privilege of anchoring people in the good news of the Kingdom of God, which carries the promise of abundant life and ultimate victory over sin and death.

DISCUSSION Name some of the enemies that press in on us. What hopes are you holding on to?

Application

ACT ON "THE BIG THREE"

This week, take specific steps to act on these three things: speaking the hard truth, holding on to hope, and anchoring your life in the sure promises of God.

We live in a culture in which few people can be described as "prisoners of hope." We anchor our hope and our lives on things far more fragile than the sure promises of God, and our expectations are more rooted in our self-centered concerns than in God's plans and purposes. Zechariah not only speaks the hard truth when it's needed (which apparently gets him killed), but he also shares a message of hope with people who desperately need it.

Next week, report back to the group about how your "big threes" are changing you.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, you know how much we need you. We stumble and fall, and you pick us up. In our loneliness and pain, you find us and comfort us. In our lostness, you seek us and find us. Our hearts are overflowing with thanks and praise for your goodness, for rescuing us from sin and death through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Send us into this week with your promises and your power to do through us what we cannot do ourselves. Amen.



Devotional Tools: **DailyWalk**

Daily devotionals for the week following July 2 – 3, 2011

Monday, July 4, 2011: Overview

Daily reading: Zechariah 8:1-5

The book of Zechariah encourages and convicts returning exiles. It focuses on temple reconstruction, but sometimes rises above national interest to include all creation. Chapters 1-8 are encouraging: visions targeted toward real people doing the real work for restoration, and God's promise of a restored Jerusalem in which peace, security and fertility are so abundant that surrounding nations are drawn to it. Chapters 9-14 are distinctly different, and many scholars doubt they were written by Zechariah. These closing chapters speak of attacks on Jerusalem. Leadership is suspect, though in the end it will be God's leadership bringing peace and prosperity to Jerusalem. Isn't it great to read a positive prophecy? Ask God to connect you deeply to the story of Zechariah and the people of Israel.

Tuesday, July 5, 2011: The Prophet

Daily reading: Zechariah 8:6-8

Zechariah is a contemporary of Haggai. Both are among the 42,360 Jews who return to Judah from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Both are frequently called prophets of restoration because their writings focus on the restoration of Israel, specifically Jerusalem and the temple. Zechariah, which means "the Lord remembers," is a common name in the ancient world; there are 27 Zechariahs in the Bible. Little is known about this Zechariah. It appears that he is young when he returns to Judah. His father probably died young because Zechariah is named as the immediate successor of his grandfather, Iddo, in the list of heads of the priestly families in Nehemiah 12. Zechariah's focus as a prophet is the rebuilding of the temple and a rebirth of the people of Israel. Is there someone who has a prophetic voice for you today? Ask God for ears to listen to the voices of truth around you.

Wednesday, July 6, 2011: Tyre

Daily reading: Zechariah 9:3-4

The city of Tyre is great in Zechariah's time, but he declares that it will no longer be the powerful city it once was. Chapter 9 describes the march of Alexander the Great's army through the area north and east of Palestine. Alexander defeats the Persians in 333 B.C. at the Battle of Issus, and then turns to conquer the leading cities in Phoenicia. Jerusalem can feel the hot breath of Alexander's troops sweeping down the Mediterranean coast. Despite the enemy's power, Zechariah 9 promises that the Lord will come like a warrior and defeat every enemy of God's people. God will surround the temple and the city of Jerusalem with his strong presence, and no enemy will defeat him. Do you hear the hoofbeats of an approaching enemy? Ask God to help you discern what may be threatening to you.

Thursday, July 7, 2011: Messiah

Daily reading: Zechariah 9:9

The prophet speaks of a future King presenting himself to Jerusalem while riding on a humble donkey. This foreshadows events about 500 years later. In Luke 19:35-37, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, presenting himself as the Messiah, the King. This good news

brings the rejoicing that opens our text. God's people can rejoice because their victorious King is entering the holy city. This King will not ride the customary war horse, but a young donkey, symbolizing that this King comes in peace. This great King will initiate a reign of peace covering not only Judah, but the surrounding nations. This King's dominion will be "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." Where do you need this King of peace to enter your life? Ask God to make you open to his arrival.

Friday, July 8, 2011: Crucifixion

Daily reading: Zechariah 12:10

This text refers to a time when Jerusalem will lament the one who is "pierced" as one mourns the loss of a firstborn son. Christians have understood this as a reference to the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, pierced when he was crucified by the Romans 2,000 years ago. We also anticipate the day when Christ will return, and heaven and earth come together in the redemption of all things. The Talmud, which offers Judaism-related commentary about Old Testament passages, makes a very Christian-like assessment of the prophecy found in the book of Zechariah: "What is the cause of the mourning (Zechariah 12:10)? It is well according to him who explains that the cause is the slaying of Messiah, the son of Joseph, as it is written, 'And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son.'" (*-Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a.*) Isn't God's story incredible; how the time of Zechariah is directly connected to the Savior's death? Ask God to lead you deeper into this story.

Saturday, July 9, 2011: Power

Daily reading: Zechariah 9:11-12

This is a proclamation of God's promise to restore and protect the Israelites because of the "blood of my covenant with you," referring to the blood sacrifices sealing the covenant relationship between God and his people. The certainty of God's restoration is so profound that God's people are called "prisoners of hope," unable to escape the hope that God's promises have placed in their hearts and minds. They are free to return to the city of Jerusalem despite the threat of more powerful armies. But no army is a match for God's power. Where do you need the power of God in your life? Ask God to give you the strength and courage to live this day to the fullest.

Sunday, July 7, 2011: Hope

Daily reading: Zechariah 14:1-5

While Alexander's armies don't threaten us, we can identify enemies pressing in. We all struggle to hold onto hope. Fear is far more prominent than hope in many lives, making our current situation similar to the one Zechariah faces. The call of this message is two-fold. First, to be as lovingly bold in speaking the truth as Zechariah. That won't go down any better in our culture than it did then. Second, to spread hope in a hopeless time. We have the privilege of anchoring people in the good news of the Kingdom of God, which carries the promise of abundant life and ultimate victory over sin and death. Where do you need hope? Where will you go to find it? Ask God to reveal where true hope can be found for you.

Devotional Tools: SeniorWalk

Small group experience for the week following July 2 – 3, 2011

ZECHARIAH 9:9-12



When life gets hard and we look out at the future, we can choose either hope or despair and hopelessness. Often these choices are colored by our perceptions and emotions.

The exiled Jews experience both hope and despair as they live in Babylonian captivity. Several decades pass before the Persian Emperor Cyrus offers the Jews a chance to return to Jerusalem to live, and to rebuild their great temple. Only a few take this opportunity. Others have settled in and assimilated with Persian culture. But hope is fired up for the small group that chooses to journey south. Traveling in this group are priests and prophets and the memory of God's promises.

But their triumphant homecoming is not exactly what they expect. Hope turns to hopelessness as they survey the devastation of their city. Zechariah steps up, taking on the role of "encourager." He answers God's call as a prophet and reminds the Jews of God's promises. Chapter 9 says, "return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope ... I will restore twice as much to you."

And they build, and God does restore. God is still restoring.

How does your faith and trust in God keep your hope alive? How can you bring hope to someone else? Have you known despair? Do you know of someone who is in despair now?

What words of encouragement or Scripture can you recall?

When I get discouraged, I often think of my mother, who was such a warrior for hope. She reiterated that her source of hope was God, and that she intended to be in his camp, no matter what.

When we see news clips of the devastation of storms and floods, we are amazed at the stories of hope that people share. When we see world news of destruction, we are again amazed at the stories of survival. God has created in us a resilience for coping. We, the children of God, are grateful.

Lord, fill us with your Spirit of hope. Bring forth memories of your promises and your steadfastness in our lives. Make us prisoners of hope to be examples for others around us. Amen.