

Return to Me 1-25-02

A Call to Return to the Lord

Zech 1:1-6 (NIV)¹ In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:

² "The LORD was very angry with your forefathers.³ Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty.⁴ Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.⁵ Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever?⁶ But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'"

As we began this school year at Cornerstone, last fall, I kind of wondered if I was in the right place? Seems like we did a downhill slide spiritually from the year before and even further back than that. I didn't know what was wrong but I was really praying God would fix it and help us return. I remember a time when kids at Cornerstone would fast and pray during lunch. Wow! The action is not the big wow; it is the heart behind those actions. Thank God His Spirit is faithful to tell us to put the brakes on and steer us back on course. Spiritual Emphasis Week really seemed to help with that. I don't know about you, but now I feel kind of like we are idling or maybe going about 5mph. Back on the right road – whew! But kind of like a tourist in Oak Creek Canyon – not focussed on moving forward, just looking at the views.

That is kind of where Israel was during this prophecy. They had been in captivity because of the sins of their forefathers. The prophets warned them God was going let them have it if they didn't quit misrepresenting Him. The kings were the worst – just living for power and pride – worshipping whatever god was popular. You know, Nikki, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and gods like that. But way back when God called Abraham to make him the father of this nation – it was so there would be a place for his name. They were supposed to be an example to the world of what God was really like. Instead they joined the world in its self indulgent worship of sex focussed gods – seeking personal satisfaction and wealth. Now that is just the opposite of what God is all about. He is the God who is compassionate and caring, generous and full of grace and mercy. He is overflowing with love. Still, He is always just. He hates evil and will not let it go unchecked.

God warned them when they got started as a nation if they misrepresented Him, He would have to send other nations to conquer them so they'd quit being a bad example. Then no one would connect their bad sample with the God that they were supposed to represent. In other words, they'd get what they deserved, some justice. Still, He promised that if they would come back to Him, He would restore their captivity. Say what? Instead of being captives of the enemy, they would be captives of God.

You say, "I don't want to be nobody's captive." Sorry, the Bible says you're either a slave to sin, or you're a slave to God! And guess which it is if you think you're a slave to nobody? Somebody has you tricked. You're not free. You've got to do that stuff your sinful nature demands you do, even when you don't want to.

Now when Zechariah experienced the Spirit of God upon him he spoke the words of God to the people in this passage we read. They had already come back to the Promised Land from their land of captivity. In fact, they had been there 15 plus years. They got off to a good start, but somebody lied about what they were doing and got the initial effort side tracked. Personally I don't think they minded so much. Everyone donated to the construction, and was working hard at it, when they really wanted to get their houses built and fields planted. A lot of time it comes down to what we want versus what God wants, and God isn't going to make you do what He wants. He'll let you go your own way, so that later you will learn, doing it His way would have been better for you in the long run.

So hear they are back in the land, back on track in a way, but they aren't really going forward with the things of God. Engine's humming but the car isn't moving. Here comes Haggai and Zechariah and the Spirit of God is upon them and they prophesy, "Put it in gear guys! Time to get it moving! Get back to God, and it won't feel like He's so far away. Don't be like your grandparents who wouldn't listen or pay attention to God. Tune in and get this thing moving!"

This is a picture for us today. Really simply put, the Temple is you and me and every believer. We are supposed to individually, and together as a group, be a place for God's name to dwell. That means an example of God's love, His grace and His goodness. Cornerstone is supposed to be a place that people look at and get an idea that God is alive and well. They are supposed to see His love and peace here. It is to some extent but we have a lot of speed we can get out of this barely moving vehicle. What did he say their grandpas and grandmas wouldn't do? They wouldn't listen or pay attention. It's such an important thing, to listen. We have a hard time doing that. If we could get each of you to take time to listen to God everyday, to open the Word up and let Him speak to your heart, and share your heart with Him, then we did the biggest part of our job. If you'll just let Him love you, you're going to love Him back. If you'll give Him your attention, this thing will start picking up speed.

I'm asking my class every week, "Did you take time to listen to God this morning?" I'm not going to be satisfied till every hand goes up. My job isn't done till every hand goes up.

I think most of the Christians in my generation realize we didn't get serious enough with God early in our lives. We are hoping your generation is going to be more serious – more anointed – more in tune with God so there can really be some godly changes in this world. We need to let God stir our hearts and get this thing moving.

¹ *In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:*

2 "The LORD was very angry with your forefathers.³ Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty.

Why was God angry with their forefathers? Too much compromise! A poor example to the world of who God is, is another reason. I wonder if God isn't angry with my generation for our failure along these same lines. Christians fighting over things that aren't that important instead of obeying His command to love one another, and prefer each other. God says, I was angry with them, so you better come back to me – don't do what they did and suffer for your own sins the way they did – come back – return to the closest place you've ever been. Where is the closest you've been to the Lord? You should be there today and on your way to getting closer. Are you? If not, why not?

Return to me AND I will return to you. Has your spiritual life been a little dry? Return to Him and He WILL return to you.

4 Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.

Don't be like my generation or my father's generation who got serious too late and compromised with the world too much. We wouldn't listen to God or pay attention to Him. Will you? Some of you need to make that initial turn from evil ways, see them as God sees them- as rebellion against his love. The Holy Spirit pleads with you to turn from your wicked ways and practices and accept God's ways, because of His huge love for you. Will you take time each day to hear God's heart, to pay attention to the leading of His Spirit in your life and really make a difference?

5 Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever?⁶ But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'"

They had lost everything and gone into captivity as slaves of a conquering nation. That was the consequence. Cornerstone is testimony of who Jesus is? Are you adding to that testimony? Is this a place that deserves the name of Christ? I think we are headed in the right direction but lets get moving. It starts in your heart and mine. Let's get closer to Jesus than we've ever been and get closer the next day and the next. It may mean a new beginning; it may mean a surrender of the thing that is keeping you from making that step. Make it! For your sake, for Cornerstone's sake, for the testimony that goes out of this place, make it! "Closer today than ever before." Will you say that? Will you pray that?

"Return to me, and I will return to you," is a promise of God Almighty.

"Closer everyday by His grace." There was a song in my generation that went, "I love you more today than yesterday, but only half as much as tomorrow." That should be true of our relationship with Jesus. It can be if we are willing.