

Repairing What is Broken

Zechariah 8:1-8

And the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, **2** “Thus says the LORD of hosts: 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, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. **4** Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. **5** And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. **6** Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts? **7** Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, **8** and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

Sermon Notes

Zechariah was written to stir up the people of God to complete the work they had begun and ceased to do. They were called to build a church in the center of Jerusalem. Churches are outposts of the kingdom intended to replicate the kingdom of God as it will be found perfectly in the kingdom which is to come. Zechariah was the mouthpiece of God, challenging the people of God to complete the work they had begun and had not finished.

This is the third and final message in a series we've been calling "The Mission at 2PC Memphis." We have been calling it that because every church of Jesus Christ has a universal mission. No church is freed from that mission that is outlined in various places, especially Acts 2:42-47. Every congregation of Christ is to worship, evangelize, disciple, fellowship, and to do works of mercy. However, every congregation composed of a unique people in a unique place in a unique time will carry out that mission in a distinct way.

As leaders of this congregation, the distinct way we will carry out that mission can be thought of in three words: retell, reimagine, repair. These are all words found in scripture.

- 1) Retelling the gospel: we retell the gospel in everything we do. As Paul is prone to say, I am reminding you again of what I have already told you.
- 2) Reimagining the church and the city: Paul says in Ephesians 3:20 that Jesus "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."
- 3) Repairing what is broken: We find this word in Isaiah 58:12, where the prophet says that when Christ the redeemer comes, he will make his people "repairer[s] of the breach...restorer[s] of streets to dwell in."

This repairing and restoring is also pictured in Zechariah 8. All of the emphases - retelling, reimagining, and repairing - are brought together in this text. The Lord has given us great dignity in being a part of this great mission.

Martin Scorsese's film Hugo is about an orphan boy of the same name who secretly takes care of the enormous clocks in the train station in Paris. Set in the 1930s, Hugo has a touchingly close relationship with his father who is a mechanical genius. Their favorite pastime together was rebuilding a mechanical man. After his father died tragically in a fire, Hugo continued to man the clocks, scrounged for scraps of food to survive.

Hugo befriends a little girl named Isabelle who is also an orphan. Surrounded by the colossal and intricate workings of the train station clock, Hugo becomes philosophical:

Everything has a purpose, even machines. Clocks tell the time. Trains take you to places. They do what they're meant to do Maybe that's why broken machines make me so sad. They can't do what they're meant to do. Maybe it's the same with people. If you lose your purpose, it's like you're broken.

When she hears the word "broken," Isabelle immediately thinks of her sad and bitter godfather, a broken man who has had his dreams crushed by life.

Hugo says, "Maybe we can fix him."

"Is that your purpose," Isabelle asks, "fixing things?"

Hugo: "I don't know. It's what my father did."

Isabelle: "I wonder what my purpose is."

Hugo: "I don't know."

Isabelle: "Maybe if I'd known my parents ... I would know [my purpose]."

They together walk to the inside face of the giant clock. Below them is a stunning, breathtaking view of Paris lit up at night, with the Eiffel Tower in the distance. Hugo continues:

Right after my father died, I would come up here a lot. I'd imagine the whole world was one big machine. Machines never come with any extra parts, you know. They always come with the exact amount they need. So I figured, if the entire world was one big machine ... I couldn't be an extra part. I had to be here for some reason. And that means you have to be here for some reason, too.

I say to you on the authority of God's word that as a member and participant of Second Presbyterian Church are not an extra part. You do not have a redundant purpose. You are essential to the mission that God is calling us to. This is a mission for us corporately and you individually. God has raised you up for such a time as this to be a part of this body. You have an essential part to play in the happiness of God and his joyful, triumphant mission begun in Memphis and someday realized in that kingdom which is to come.

What is more, according to our text, if Christ is your Lord and savior, you have everything you need for accomplishing that purpose. As he says at the end of verse 8: "I will be your God and you will be my people." There is no space for lack in that provision.

He has called us very specifically to be those repairers of a city - this city. There are two things we will look at relative to this text: 1) Why cities are important and 2) What it will look like for a city to resemble the city of God.

I. Why are Cities Important?

Why did God tell his people to move to the city of Jerusalem and build a great church as well as a great city at the same time? This has been a mistake churches have made historically, tending to focus on one or the other but not simultaneously. We are called to build a great church that reflects the church in Heaven and, at the same time, to build a great city. When the

people of God focus only on the city or the culture, they fall off on one side of error. When they focus only on the church within their walls, they fall off on another side of error. Here and throughout the Bible, God calls us to build a great church and a great city at the same time.

Cities are important because there are a lot of people in cities. In 1900, only 14% of the world's population lived in major urban centers. Now, upwards of 75% of the world's population live in cities. We are a major metropolitan city, and God has placed this church in the geographical center of this great city for a reason.

My friend Stephen Um has written a book called *Why Cities Matter*. In it he says that cities are important not only because they have a lot of people in them but also because they are magnets and amplifiers. As the church appreciates their magnetic and amplifying qualities, it can engage strategically in redemptive ways.

A. Magnet

A city is a magnet for three kinds of people, all of which provide opportunities for us to engage strategically for the kingdom of God.

1. Creative: Someone produced a report a number of years ago called "The Geography of Creativity." The question they were asking in this study was if there was any connection between urban centers and creativity. They found that most of the significant culture-altering creative productions had arisen out of London.

We see that here as well. The city of Memphis attracts a lot of creative people, people looking to express their unique creativity. It is a concentration of creativity. Herein lies our strategic opportunity, because creative people create culture, either for good or ill. As we engage, evangelize, and disciple creative people we are engaging culture-creators. We'll make a difference in the long term in institutions and neighborhoods and families. These are the ones who tell the rest of the culture what is important, healthy, and good. We want the gospel to inform that.

2. Poor: Secondly, cities are magnets for poor people, people coming to try and find relief from their cycle of poverty. This is a great opportunity for us because the Bible makes it clear that God's priority is for the poor. He has a great burden and a great heart for those who are poor. There are upwards of one hundred verses relating to poverty in the scriptures: Deut. 15:9; Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 21:3; and James 1:27 just to name a few. Together those verses say things like this:

"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD" (Proverbs 19:17).

"...he who is generous to the needy honors [God]" (Proverbs 14:31).

The poor may appeal to God because of the one who neglects them and God may hold that one guilty (Deuteronomy 15:9).

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

It is our calling to address poverty in all of its forms. My friend Brian Fikkert at the Chalmers Center in Chattanooga, TN defines poverty this way: "It is a broken relationship which comes out in one of four ways."

1) Broken relationship with God: There is a poverty in the Bible that describes that broken relationship between God and man. That is why we evangelize. People are poor in spirit and estranged from God, so we explain to them how Christ can take their sins and give them his righteousness in response.

2) Broken relationship with others: There are also broken relationships. We are engaged in relational ministry to encourage reconciliation and peace-making.

3) Broken relationship with self: To this end, we counsel and provide emotional support. Physicians apply their skills to those who are in a broken relationship with self, not just emotionally but physically as well.

4) Broken relationship with creation: Finally, there is a poverty that is material. In this case, one is not able to provide for oneself.

3) Searchers

Cities also attract searchers. This is the reason, Craig Bloomberg says, that the early church grew exponentially in the first four centuries. As people were leaving their rural areas and moving to cities, they were open to new ideas, because they were finding that the world-views they grew up with had failed them. The church was ready and was proclaiming that they were recreating life the way God intended it to be in our expression called the church.

Here is our opportunity. People are coming to start over in our city as well. We must be ready to give them the best news that no matter what worldview they have had that has previously let them down, Jesus Christ offers a life where they can be put back together and restored to the way he intended life to go for them.

B. Amplifier

A city is not only a magnet but also an amplifier. It can be both an amplifier of what is good as well as of what is bad. We want to own the whole of this city. In our text, God says, "I will save my people from the east country and from the west country." He is that kind of God, one who brings people together to restore and repair cities, making them places that amplify good, not those who shrink away and hide behind walls, lamenting that the earth is "headed to Hell in a hand-basket."

We worship a cosmic Christ, one who has said that he is bringing people to his city from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people. Every square inch of this globe is mine, he says. He is equipping us by his word and Spirit to take that good news triumphantly into our city. Bill Crispin says, "The city is the place where there are more people. . . [and since] God loves people. . . [we can be assured that] He loves the city" (89). We see one instance of this love in Nineveh. Nineveh was a city that was not naturally lovable. It was a major city in Assyria, and Assyria was the bane of Israel and Judah's existence. God then called Jonah to be a missionary to them. Jonah went (eventually) there thinking that God was finally going to destroy them in forty days. Instead, God saved them and they repented. God removed his threat of judgment. Jonah went out east of the city to pout, and God caused a plant to grow up over him to provide shade. Then God sent a worm to destroy the plant. Jonah was so angry he was cursing. Then God asked him a simple question: "are you angry that the plant is gone?" Jonah responded enthusiastically in the affirmative. God replied like this:

"You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

In essence, God was saying, "why should I not love this city, because I created all of those people? As evil as they are and as wicked as they have become, I have still made them in my image. I created their animals. I created the dirt their city is built on. I enable them to create the places that they inhabit. Why should I not be concerned for them?" (Jonah 4:10-11).

God says the same to us: "Why should I not love Memphis?" How can we not love our city if God does? Cities matter because they matter to God.

II. How Do We Build a City of God?

What does a city built to honor God look like? It looks like the kingdom of God. It looks like the characteristics of the kingdom that God has outlined in his word. They are mentioned in our text and also in Romans 14:17 where Paul says, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

The kingdom of God is not about rules. The kingdom of God is not about do's and don'ts. The kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace, and joy.

A. Righteousness

The word righteousness is the same word that is translated justice. The same word translated justice and righteousness interchangeably. You see it throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For instance, in Zechariah 7:8-9 where it says, "And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments...' He could have also said "render righteousness" or "render justice." What does this consist of? Zechariah, speaking on behalf of God, continues, "...show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."

This is the consistent way the word righteousness/justice is used in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well. Though it's a Greek word in this case, Jesus commands in Matthew 6:1-4 that when we do our righteousness/justice, we must do it in a secret way so as to be seen by God. He goes on later in the chapter to define what doing righteousness/justice is. It is, among other things, chiefly to minister to the needy, the poor.

I don't use the word "social" or "theological" to condition the word justice because the Bible doesn't. The Bible only speaks of justice and righteousness. God says his kingdom is demonstrated by righteousness, and those who are citizens of the kingdom will reflect such. The cultures they make an impact on, therefore, become more just and righteous.

Those things come together in James 1:27 when he says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." We tend to think only of the latter half of the verse - keeping ourselves unstained - as righteousness, but both keeping ourselves unstained and caring for orphans and widows are equally justice and righteousness.

What does it look like in the city? We find a clue here in Zechariah 8 where we see old men and women, young men and women, and children living close to one another in harmony and safety. Edward Blazer says that cities "are the absence of space." Cities are determined by proximity, density, closeness. Therefore, a righteous city is one in which the spaces that separate us unjustly are closed by the gospel. When we build a city that is characterized by righteousness, it is the elimination of those spaces put between us. We are called with the gospel to eliminate those spaces which the devil creates in his kingdom. It is the devil's strategy to separate and segregate. It is the devil's strategy to make poor, depressed, sick, and

dysfunctional.

The gospel of the kingdom is just the opposite. That means, then, to be people who "do" righteousness is to be those who move into those spaces. That is what Jesus did. He didn't send us a check from Heaven. He didn't send a third-party. He didn't send someone to minister by proxy. He moved into our neighborhood. He got his hands dirty. He certainly put himself in danger. He addressed our poverty of spirit as well as our material poverty. He promises to heal us completely. We are imitating the work of Jesus when we move into those spaces with a righteousness that bridges gaps.

B. Peace

The kingdom of God is also peaceful. The kingdom of God restores peace. That's what our passages means when it says people are living and playing in the streets. They are not in war-torn, dangerous streets. They are in peaceful streets. Old men and women who can't defend themselves and children playing are in the streets. We have the privilege of bringing that kind of peace in every place where we find brokenness. We want to bring the gospel of peace to broken relationships with self, God, others, and creation. We want to bring the gospel of peace to neighborhoods where children cannot currently play in the streets and old men and women cannot currently sit on their porches.

Just a few years after I arrived in Augusta, through my mentor Sandy Willson, I became aware of something that Second Presbyterian had produced called "The Shalom Report." It was a study of all the distressed communities in the area that asked what it would look like to seek the peace of the city, as Jeremiah commanded the people to do when they were exiled and held as slaves in Babylon. He exhorted them, even in that uncomfortable place, to seek the peace of that city. The report defines nine characteristics. I got a copy of the report and took it to our leadership, and we started pursuing those nine areas in Augusta.

The report went on to say,

As the local church gathers, prays, and seeks to serve its community, it becomes aware of all the needs in the community. As time and opportunity allow, the people of God develop of theology, or worldview, which teaches them God's perspective in each of those areas of need. They then begin to develop strategies for ministry. Then they recruit, train, and mobilize competent leaders and begin building working models in each area of need.

We are pursuing that vision of pursuing shalom in observable, objective ways into strategic, depressed areas of this city.

C. Joy

Finally, we pursue joy. We look ahead to that coming kingdom, reach into it and bring from it the joy that is going to be there all the time into this world. The kingdom of God is about joy in the Holy Spirit. Joy is deeper than happiness but it certainly includes it.

We cannot commend the kingdom of God if we're always dour and gloomy. We will not commend the kingdom of God if we're watching news 24/7. We will not commend the kingdom of God if someone is always getting us upset over Twitter. I can tell you as a historian that there is nothing we are facing today that this world had not already experienced many times over and in many worse ways. Our politics are not unique in this era of American history than what they have been the previous 200+ years. It's not encouraging that we haven't learned anything, but it shouldn't utterly depress you.

Jesus is still king! And Jesus is joyful. Jesus is the one who says, "I've already begun throwing a party here in Heaven at which I am waiting for you to join me." He characterizes the coming

of kingdom in party language. Do your neighbors and co-workers know you to be one who is triumphantly joyful or one who is continually gloomy and dour?

A friend of mine in Augusta who worked as a lawyer in the inner city used to say that for people in the inner city who are locked in their poverty, it is as if they are under boxes and we are poking holes in it so that they can see out. I would modify it this way: they are living in boxes and we are poking holes in it so that the joy of the kingdom may reach them!

I can certainly empathize with those of you who are not naturally happy people. I can't remember many mornings when I have woken up happy. As Christians, however, we have something that allows us to be joyful and even happy - we have hope! We may not feel happy or joyful but we know that what Jesus has pronounced is happening in us and in this world. Therefore, even if it is counterintuitive, we can whistle, skip, and laugh. These are the kinds of people who make a difference in our world, C.S. Lewis says.

Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither. (Mere Christianity, 134)

The bottom line of the Bible is this: Jesus wins. This is our greatest reason to be joyful. We are able, at times by God's mercy, to see this vision of Zechariah 8 realized in this world.

Sometime after we had begun pursuing the Shalom project in Augusta, I realized that we needed to be active in our streets because within just a few blocks of our church, there were high rates of crime, drugs, etc. At times, our city had an eerie silence about it where you could hear a car pass, but you did not often hear voices, especially not those of children.

One day, as I was eating at a restaurant downtown, I thought I heard children's voices. Now I knew that some of our church members had begun a college preparatory school for under-privileged children and that others had moved into homes downtown with their families, but I couldn't begin to imagine that I would be able to hear the voices of children. As I headed back to the church, I noticed that old men and women were leaning out of their windows of the third floor of a building next to our church's property, and they were smiling as they looked at a particular piece of land on our church property.

It was an abandoned lot that we did not yet have a purpose for, so we planted grass on it. These men and women were looking at this grassy field where I finally saw the children whose voices I had heard, and they were playing. The teachers at the college preparatory school had walked their children down the streets where most would never dream of walking and had brought them to that stretch of land to play. There was joy!

I learned later of an African-American woman who lived on one of those dangerous streets had been too afraid to come out of her house for many years and had been praying all the while for this kind of thing to happen. She was not redundant. She was an important part of God's plan for bringing shalom to Augusta.

This is what we not only dream of but what we will by God's enabling power and grace see come to pass as we *retell* the gospel, *reimagine* the church and the city, and *repair* what is broken.