

God Remembers (Pt. 2)

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Zechariah / Repentance / Zechariah 1:4-6

Introduction

Please turn in your Bibles to [Zechariah 1](#). Today we will be looking specifically at verses 4-6. As you turn there, let me begin with a word of prayer.

Father, you are the LORD of Hosts. You, God, are Yahweh and there is no other. You are in control of history. You are sovereign over the nations. We come today to serve and worship You. As we turn to Your word, we confess that these are Your commands. These are Your statutes and Your words. May the message being delivered be from You and for You as You continue to save sinners and build up those who are in Christ. We ask that all who leave this place today would leave convicted and transformed because of the Spirit's work through Your word in our hearts and minds. We pray and ask these things for the sake of Christ and in His name we pray. Amen.

Hearing stories of salvation can change a person's life. They are reminders that God still continues to do what He says He will do. God continues to use His word to proclaim Christ to sinners. He continues to save.

Salvation testimonies tell the story of God's grace in a believer's life. It is an opportunity to proclaim Christ to the world so they can SEE and HEAR the difference in the believer's life. God's word, Jesus Christ, the Gospel - these aren't just stories - it is all TRUTH. God transforms lives.

- › If you are a believer in Christ, you should know and retell God's story of grace in your life. It helps you remember God's grace to you. It is an opportunity

remind yourself of the gospel and tell others of Christ. The Lord could even use it to bring others, perhaps many others, to saving faith in Christ.

Many know of the Protestant Reformation and key figures like John Calvin, Martin Luther, or maybe even Ulrich Zwingli. Many don't know the man who came decades before these men whose conversion is credited to "begin the Reformation in England". His name is Thomas Bilney.

Thomas Bilney was a young Cambridge scholar who had a bright future ahead of him as a Catholic Priest. Yet as a young man, he grew depressed questioning if he could ever get right with God. The Roman Catholic Priest's answer was go to mass, pay indulgences, etc. Those answers never brought peace.

Bilney heard there was a new Latin translation of Erasmus's Greek New Testament, so he purchased it to read the eloquence of the Latin. He then read:

1 Timothy 1:15 ESV

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

When Bilney translated that verse, his eyes were opened. He realized how his works could not save him. If Paul was saved as the chief of sinners, then salvation could only be freely given and received by faith alone.

His life was the testimony of how working for your salvation always comes up empty. It was in that moment that instead of relying on his own merits, he trusted in Christ's merit alone for salvation.

There was another man in Cambridge who also was a Catholic priest named Hugh Latimer. Latimer was staunch against Reformation truth. Bilney compared Latimer's passion and zeal to the Apostle Paul, and desired for Latimer to come to true saving faith.

Bilney asked to "privately confess" his soul's troubles to Latimer. Latimer agreed, so Bilney "confessed" his salvation testimony! He explained how he was

trusting in his own works instead of Christ's finished work. Peace came by reading the New Testament for himself and trusting in Christ alone.

Because Bilney shared his testimony, Hugh Latimer also came to saving faith in Christ. Together they went preaching the gospel throughout Cambridge, mostly to the lowest of the low.

Latimer would be one of the greatest preachers of the Reformation in England and a martyr of the famous Queen Bloody Mary. He said of Thomas Bilney's testimony,

To say the truth, by his confession I learned more than before in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the Word of God, and forsook the school-doctors and such fooleries."

› A testimony can make quite an impact can't it?

The Lord used Bilney's salvation and sharing God's grace in his life to spark a Reformation in England.

Stories of repentance are a model for us to repent for ourselves.

Likewise, stories of those who refuse to repent are also a model for us, but as a warning to repent.

We see both these examples in [Zechariah 1:1-6](#) where we began last week looking at components to godly repentance. Let's read verses 1-6:

Zechariah 1:1-6 ESV

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, "The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. Your

fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, 'As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.' ”

We saw in verse 1 The Right Messenger of Repentance. Zechariah is the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, whose names mean, “Yahweh remembers and Yahweh blesses in His time.” That is the theme of this entire book - Yahweh remembers. Therefore, Repent.

These Judean exiles returned to the land but for various reasons stopped rebuilding the temple. Those who made the 900 mile journey and for many who most likely never saw the land could be thinking, “Is this it? Is this really worth it?”

We saw in verse 2 The Right Motive of Repentance. Two prophets - Haggai and Zechariah - call on the nation to repent. If Haggai came telling them what to do, Zechariah came telling them why to do it. If Haggai came to get them going, Zechariah came to keep them going.

Verse 2 declares the motive - God was furious at their fathers. The previous generations did not repent. Now the Lord of Hosts is extending the invitation and calling on THEM to repent. Their work was a reflection of their worship. They stopped building the temple because they stopped believing in who God is and what He has set out to do.

Verse 3 described this Right Message of Repentance. It was more than a return to the land - they needed to return to Yahweh Himself. And that is exactly what repentance is - a turning from sin and a turning to the Savior.

That is what a salvation testimony consists of - that two-sided salvation coin - on the one side is repentance from sin, and on the other side is belief and trust in the Lord for salvation. A turning from sin and a turning to the Savior.

As the word of Yahweh continues in verses 4-6, He provides The Right Model for Repentance by giving an example of what repentance is and what repentance is not. He provides these returning exiles with some flesh on the bone.

If God returns to them and His presence once again dwells with the nation in the temple, what should repentance look like in their lives?

In [Zechariah 1:4-6](#), the Lord teaches 3 lessons of repentance. Three lessons of repentance from sin. The first lesson is found in verse 4:

1. Learn from Their Lack of Submission (4)

Zechariah 1:4 ESV

Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.

The verb tense that the word of the LORD uses brings the intensity from the previous verses. Remember verse 2, “Yahweh was furious with great fury.”

The alarm has been sound. Therefore the intense confrontation by God is this: “NEVER be like your fathers.” “STOP being like the unbelieving, wicked generations that have come before you.”

- › This is so consistent character of our God. He desires them to be saved. His desire for them IS to return. This IS what God wants for them. He does not desire for them to be in perpetual judgment, but He will always act in accordance with who He is. God is faithful in what He does because He is faithful in who He is.

So the Lord warns this generation, “Do not be like them,” in their lack of submission. They refused to repent and submit themselves to God and His word, despite every opportunity that was before them.

The previous generation had The Right Messengers - God’s prophets.

The Right Messengers

Prior to the exile, there were former prophets like Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk that called the nation to repentance.

One of the clearest and most infamous calls to salvation through the prophet Isaiah was:

Isaiah 55:6–7 ESV

“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

These former prophets came and cried out with:

The Right Motive

They didn’t point to themselves. God’s messengers do not proclaim their own message. They come to clearly declare the word of God and to clearly confront sin.

In verse 4 they cried out, “Thus says the LORD of Hosts.”

Their motive was preaching Gods Himself. God is Yahweh over the armies. Whether it is orchestrating human governments and armies to accomplish his purposes, or whether it is heavenly armies, God is the LORD of Hosts. Like Jesus says in:

Matthew 26:53 ESV

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

You should get used to seeing this phrase “LORD of hosts” or “Yahweh of hosts.” This is an important term used of God throughout the Old Testament - 522 times. And just so you grasp its significance, the top three books that describe God as the LORD of Hosts are:

1. Jeremiah = 154 times
2. Isaiah = 124 times in Isaiah
3. Zechariah = 106 times

Zechariah is considerably smaller than the other two books, so you will notice its frequency much more. He is the Sovereign, He is Authoritative, and He is in control.

The prophets spoke on behalf of their commander in chief as The Right Messengers with The Right Motive and:

The Right Message

They cried out in verse 4: ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’

They come to clearly declare the word of God and to clearly confront sin.

There is a long line of prophets calling Israel to repent.

When the 10 northern tribes went into captivity under Assyria, [2 Kings 17](#) records why they went into exile - they sinned against their God. They instead feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations. They did things secretly which were not right against Yahweh their God. They built high places and pillars for themselves, and did evil things that provoked the Yahweh their God. They served idols and did the things that God said not to do according to His word.

- › Sin comes in various forms. It can be sin of omission - when you don’t necessarily intend to do them - or commission - when you do intend to do them.

- › Sin can be out in the open for everyone to see or in the depths of the mind where only God can see.
- › Sin twists what God says is good to be evil and what is evil to be good, calling darkness what is light and what is light darkness.
- › Sin contaminates by mixing truth with error - it deceives and blinds. It is not a creation, but a corruption of what God calls “good”.
- › Sin misses the mark of God’s holiness and therefore is capital crime that deserves death.
- › At first sin may appear pleasurable, but you learn that it never satisfies.
- › Sin is ultimately disobedience against God and His word in unbelief - whether you forget God, fail God, or forsake God.
- › Sin dethrones God to enthrone yourself in the place of God.
- › Sin is when anything else eclipses God in your life’s love and devotion.

Like in [2 Kings 17](#) and [Zechariah 1](#), the call to Israel is to RETURN or REPENT from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. The prophets had the right message of repentance because it was a complete repentance from sin. This doesn’t mean that Israel or any sinner will be perfect in this life, but that there is a TURNING from “evil ways and evil deeds”.

The sinner’s “ways” refers to the course of their life. The sinner’s “deeds” refers to their specific acts in their life. What God is saying is, “Turn from the your evil course of life and the evil works you commit.” It is a change in direction toward sin and a putting of death to sin.

- › If you think, “This is just a little sin” or “It’s ok to just get mad this once, lust this one time, or indulge on something because ‘you deserve it,’” I assure you, it will lead to destruction in your life.

Whenever you engage in sin, it is a slippery slope. You may think you are on track, but will learn that you are way off course.

One of our brothers here shared with me, “On a ship if you sail from Los Angeles to Hawaii and your course is off by just two degrees, you will end up in the Philippines instead.”

Sin is just like that. Even if you are slightly off, if you keep following that direction you will end up in a place where you never intended to be.

I’ve been reminded of this in my own house recently trying to hang up various decorations on our walls.

Maybe it’s just me, but it seems no matter how much I measure, no matter how many times I do the math, or even put a laser leveler on the wall, SOMEHOW it is always off.

Even if I am off by a centimeter, my family let’s me know, “Hey, that’s CROOKED.”

That is sin. Even if you are off just by a little, it is still crooked.

Even a great reformer like Thomas Bilney, although he was right in so many areas, was “off” in one particular area: he upheld the authority of the pope. That compromise in the mind turned out to be a reflection of a compromise that was rooted in his heart.

When he was eventually captured by the Catholic authority, he was called to recant his protestant confession and even call Martin Luther a “wicked and detestable heretic.” Bilney was convinced by his friends to compromise and oblige so that he would live. He did penance at a Catholic Church, was put in prison and released.

It was during this time that Bilney spiraled. He didn’t eat and was spiritually depressed because He didn’t truly submit to Christ. When push came to shove, he didn’t truly practice what he preached. He felt the weight of his guilt for denying Christ.

Repentance demands a thorough, 180 degree turn away from sin and to the Savior. Repentance does not reject the Savior to return to sin, but rejects sin to return to the Savior.

Despite the repetitive rejection of their God, the Lord graciously extended the gift of repentance to Israel through prophet after prophet. And the Lord tells us how they responded in verse 4:

Zechariah 1:4 ESV

But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.

The nation did not receive nor obey God or His word. They wanted their cake and to eat it too.

To not “hear” is used in the Old Testament to refer to receptivity and obedience.

To not “pay attention” is not to listen attentively or seek the Lord.

They did not submit to God.

The Legacy Standard Bible translates in:

2 Kings 17:14 LSB

However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in Yahweh their God.

When you refuse to repent you refuse God Himself. Rather than submitting to God, you stiffen your neck against Him, meaning, you are stubborn in your sin. It is an overflow of an unbelieving prideful heart that rejects God and His word.

James reminds Christians about this type of pride and God’s response:

James 4:6–7 ESV

Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Repentance is when you make yourself low and submit yourself to God's authority. Otherwise you consider yourself above the need for God and reject His authority.

We learn the first lesson of repentance that they Lacked in Submission to their God. And their continual rejection of God led to a second lesson found in verse 5:

2. Learn from Their Legacy of Sin (5)

What happens when you don't repent of your sin? What happens when you allow sin to fester?

Zechariah 1:5 ESV

Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?

Your fathers, where are they?

Where did unrepentant sin leave the previous generations? As God promised, it led to judgment. They experienced guilt, shame, and death ([Ezra 9:7](#)).

The promised cursing of [Deuteronomy 28-30](#) came into full effect. There was departure, death, and destruction. The wages of sin is death.

Now in [Zechariah 1](#), this generation that has returned to the land has the opportunity to repent and rebuild the temple. But if they don't, they too would experience God's judgment.

Sin blinds the sinner, and if it is left unrepentant travels that broad road that leads to destruction. This was evident by the generations of Israelites that came before them, punished in exile.

Even for those who were faithful, they also died.

Yahweh asks here in verse 5:

| And the prophets, do they live forever?

Even God's chosen messengers may have faithfully lived and proclaimed God's word, but even they will not live forever in this life.

Moses is a great example of that. There is a lot to commend Moses in his faithfulness. But even HE sinned and was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

God's messengers still sin in this life, therefore they too die.

This is the legacy of sin - it leads to death.

There is something that does last, however. There is something that stands forever. The apostle Peter in [1 Peter 1:24-25](#) quotes the prophet Isaiah saying.

1 Peter 1:24-25 ESV

for

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

- › I don't know about you, but sometimes I get a bad rap for studying and teaching the Bible. I'm not sure exactly what the alternative is - to me there is no alternative.
- › Why? Because the believer is BORN AGAIN through the living and enduring word of God.

Israel rejected God's word and it led to death. Now the word of Yahweh speaks again in verse 6 and provides this third lesson for repentance:

3. Learn From The LORD'S Statutes (6)

Zechariah 1:6 ESV

But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, 'As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.' ”

In contrast to man's fallenness and frailty, God's word is never failing.

When God says, “My words,” God is the Author and His word is the divine source of life.

When God says, “My statutes,” God is the Authority and His laws are the defined standard of life.

His words and statutes are those, “which He COMMANDED His SERVANTS, the prophets.”

Yahweh keeps appealing to these two groups - the fathers and the prophets.

The prophets (including Zechariah) were MESSENGERS that were fit for the message - but any authority they had only came from God. The prophets were simply slaves of God speaking forth the words of God.

That is exactly what God's messengers are supposed to do. God's messenger speaks God's message in his mouth and with his life.

God's messenger speaks God's message in his mouth and with his life.

That's just as true for pastors today as it was for prophets then. Now if you have a pastor claiming to be a prophet then you should run and find another church. But your pastor SHOULD proclaim God's word in his mouth and with his life. He must clearly declare the truth of God's word and clearly confront sin with God's word.

The Lord's words and statutes overtook Israel's fathers.

This term for “overtook” has the idea of hunting and finding.

At least for most hunters, when they hunt it’s not just to have a nice time away in a blind or a tree stand. They hunt (and hope) to find their target. And it doesn’t come by banging pots and pans and shouting. A hunter quietly captures its prey.

This is the same word used to describe the Egyptians in [Exodus 14:9](#) when they sought to “overtake” the Israelites before they crossed the Red Sea. They were hunting and finding from behind.

Ultimately for Judah, God’s word found their sin out. This is a fulfillment of [Deuteronomy 28:15, 45](#):

Deuteronomy 28:15 ESV

“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Deuteronomy 28:45 ESV

“All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.

God will do what He says He will do. And if you continue in your sin, [Numbers 32:23](#) says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

- › Whether you have a “respectable” sin, grotesque sin, secret sin, public sin - be sure that your sin will find you out.

The exile was evident proof that God does not tolerate sin. God will do what He says He will do. God’s word overtook them and was fulfilled.

Those who survived Exile and remember these judgments responded this way in:

Zechariah 1:6 ESV

So they repented and said, ‘As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.’ ”

Remember that repent means “To return”. This word for “repent” in verse 6 is the same word for “return” in the previous verses. It serves as a wordplay.

Those who repent of their sin confess their sin. And that’s what we see here in verse 6. This is a confession. We don’t have time this morning, but if you want to see another detailed prayer of confession made a year prior to this confession, read [Daniel 9:1-19](#).

The Greek word for confess is ὁμολογέω, which are two Greek words that mean, “say the same word.” Confession is when you say the same thing that God says about your sin. You agree with God about who you are and what you have done in light of who God is and He has done.

That is the confession of repentance we have here in verse 6. It:

1. Confesses who God is
2. Confesses who they were and what they had done
3. Confesses what God has done

Confesses Who God Is

Those who genuinely repent recognize completely who God is. In this case, repentant Jews confessed their God again as Yahweh of Hosts. This is recognizing that God is the Lord, the Almighty. It also:

Confesses Who They Were & What They Had Done

They recognized their ways and deeds, which were described in verse 4 as EVIL. Those who truly remembered God’s word agree with God about He says regarding their sin. This is not a part confession. This is a whole confession and repentance recognizing the depth of their sinfulness.

Their repentance also:

Confesses What God Has Done

God judged them for their sin. He purposed to deal with them, and He dealt with them according to their ways and deeds.

The word for “purpose” is an onomatopoeia in the original Hebrew - the word sounds like what it means. It is the word **דָּמַדַּם** - it can mean to murmur or buzz.

Just as the hunter is quiet and off in the distance waiting for his prey, so too God’s word and purposes have been well established and in waiting.

It may not always be obvious, but God’s eternal purposes have been planned long ago. And what God planned at a distance He is sure to accomplish throughout history. As we saw last time together, theology drives history and history facilitates theology.

In [Jeremiah 51:12](#) and [Lamentations 2:17](#), God has both planned and done what He set out to do in the exile. The prophet Jeremiah writes in:

Lamentations 2:17 ESV

The LORD has done what he purposed;
he has carried out his word,
which he commanded long ago;

You will see this as we go through Zechariah - The Lord is precise. His word is exact. And He exactly dealt with His people according to their ways and deeds. The punishment fit the crime. Just as they sinned, God’s judgment came against their sin.

This would all change for this generation of Israel if they RETURNED. And more than a return to the land as they already had done - a return to the LORD. It was more than a return to works, but a return to worship.

- › This is true for you who are still in your sin. For those who have held on to those pet sins that you tuck away and come back to when you crave it or need some comfort.
- › The spiraling of your life, the cycle of spiritual depression - all of that changes when you truly repent.

As the Apostle John writes,

1 John 1:9 ESV

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Learn from [Zechariah 1:4-6](#) the lessons of repentance - Learn from Their Lack of Submission, Their Legacy of Sin, and The Lord's Statutes. Humble yourself before the presence of the Lord and submit yourself to God.

Confess who you are and what you have done - you are a sinner deserving of God's wrath against YOU for YOUR sin.

Confess who God is and what He has done - Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. He died on the cross as your substitute and sacrifice for sin. God's wrath for your sin is satisfied in Him. He rose from the dead three days later that you may have eternal life. He ascended to heaven and intercedes for those in Him. He is soon returning to rule and reign.

Turn from your sin. Turn to the Savior.

Conclusion

But you may say, "I've sinned too greatly! I've sinned too much! Like Israel I've sinned again and again - how can God still forgive me?"

Those same accusations could have been thrown at the reformer Thomas Bilney!

This is a man who claimed Christ, did great things for preaching Christ and God's word, led many to saving faith, sparked the English Reformation - yet, when it came down to it, DENIED Christ - just like the apostle Peter.

But God's grace is greater. Bilney truly turned back to Christ. He repented of his sin. And he committed himself that if he ever needed to choose between his life and Christ - that he would die for the sake of Christ.

He said when he preached:

The doctrine which I once abjured, denied, IS the truth. Let my example be a lesson to all who hear me.

By God's providence Bilney would again need to make that choice. He was arrested again for preaching Christ. And he was urged again to recant. But this time he would not recant.

On August 19, 1531 Bilney was burned at the stake. As he died, he was heard repeating the Latin word, "credo", reminding himself to his death, "I believe. I believe. I believe."

You may think, "I am the worst of sinners. Can God really save me?"

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves your full acceptance - even for the worst of sinners - Christ Jesus came into the world to save YOU, sinner."

Learn these lessons. Submit to God and His word. Repent of your sin. Trust in Christ. And tell that salvation story to all who will hear.

Let's pray.