Introduction

When God’s people were lost or headed in the wrong direction, God sent his prophets to call them back and show them the way.

“Return to me and I will return to you.”

Zechariah was:

- A prophet and priest.
- Born in Babylon during the exile. He returned to Judah with Zerubbabel in 538 B.C.
- A contemporary of Haggai. His first message was also in 520 B.C.
- Sent by God to call the people back into a relationship with him.

The call to return is timeless. It needs to be heard in every generation.

I. God hates sin. Verse 2

To our ears that is a very curious place to begin.

Many don’t want to talk about sin at all.

Where there’s no sin, there’s no repentance. And there’s no way back to God.

David felt the weight of his sin in Psalm 32.

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” Psalm 32:3-5

Until we feel the weight of our sin, we won’t see our need for a savior.

II. God is merciful and forgiving. Verse 3

The remedy is simple yet profound.

“Return to me and I will return to you.”

Repent. Turn around.

No one word summarizes the message of the prophets better than this word – Turn.
• Jeremiah uses it 111 times.
• The Psalms 71 times.
• Genesis 68 times.
• Ezekiel 62 times.
• Isaiah 51 times.

But it’s not just an Old Testament message.

• John the Baptist – “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 3:2
• Jesus – “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 4:17
• Peter – “Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 2:38
• Paul – “In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30

Repentance is not just a one-time event for the Christian. We need to continually turn from sin and turn to Christ.

III. Learn from the past. Verse 4

Judah had a history of rebellion and Israel before them.

At the end of II Chronicles, we read this summary statement on the fall of Jerusalem.

15 The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. 17 He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. 18 He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. 19 They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.” II Chronicles 36:15-19

It didn’t have to be that way, but they would not listen.

Will we?

Abraham Lincoln

“We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some
superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

Repentance starts with us – with his church.

IV. Make the most of the time we have. Verses 5-6

Life is short, but God’s word abides forever.
Did not my words overtake your forefathers?
The same word is used in Deuteronomy 28:15 to describe the consequences of disobedience.
Nobody gets away with their sin forever.
Zechariah’s message ends with hope. Then the people repented.
For the believer, this is a call to make the most of the time we have.

Conclusion:
C.T. Studd

“Only one life ‘twill soon be passed.
Only what’s done for Christ will last.
And when I die how happy I shall be.
If the lamp of my life has burnt out for Thee.”

“Return to me and I will return to you.”