

“RE” Sermon Series

RETURN to the Lord – Part 1

September 6, 2020
Rev. Dr. Tony Soldano

Objective of The Sermon Series

There are certain milestones in the calendar that mark a time for change and reassessment; the season of Fall is one of those times. Perhaps, there has never been a more critical time to re-calibrate our spiritual walk with Christ and assess our daily lives. The year 2020 has been difficult and stressful, to say the least, and Christians are still experiencing the fallout of COVID.

Christians are struggling to live out their faith. People feel lost, displaced, and disoriented. Christians have become distracted with powerful emotions such as fear, frustration and they do not believe they are prepared for what has happened and what will come in the future. Many are living on edge and are hoping that life will just naturally be put back in order. They just want to return back to normal. Routine, rhythm, and their regular pace has all been disrupted and questions about faith, church and God have risen. Priorities are being re-shifted and, in some cases, a new reality is settling in.

Consider what people are facing and how society has changed so rapidly beyond COVID:

- We are not only living in a postmodern era but also in a post-Christian and anti-Christian era
- There is a war that is raging and the church, the family and Christians are in clear and present danger
- We are “under siege” with ideas and concepts of dualism and Gnosticism which are all anti-God and anti-Biblical
- We are living in a world where the major basis of life is about what people “feel” and “think” and people are encouraged to act upon these things
- We have moved from the “sacred” to a “self-based” life
- We are no longer governed by truth, common sense and common values but rather relativism
- Indifference has been magnified - things have been realigned and reset
- The Biblical worldview is being challenged – Christians are struggling with the truth that Christianity actually speaks to everything in their life, and, rather, “sound bite” Christianity and putting God/faitn into compartments is gaining traction – the umbrella of absolute truth has lost its luster.

God’s prescription and answer has never changed. He encourages us to return to Him. Throughout the series we will focus on the following key areas to restoring our faith walk, life, and fellowship with Holy Spirit:

“Re” means “again”

RE-turn to God – a deep and personal relationship with Christ and not religion

RE-store – replacing the things that have been lost

RE-pent – everything starts with changing our thinking and our direction in life

RE-calibrate – asses, set, adjust

We need to be REVIVED!

A Call to Return to the Lord

Zechariah 1:1-6

¹ In November of the second year of King Darius's reign, the Lord gave this message to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo: ² "I, the Lord, was very angry with your ancestors. ³ Therefore, say to the people, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.' ⁴ Don't be like your ancestors who would not listen or pay attention when the earlier prophets said to them, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Turn from your evil ways, and stop all your evil practices.' ⁵ "Where are your ancestors now? They and the prophets are long dead. ⁶ But everything I said through my servants the prophets happened to your ancestors, just as I said. As a result, they repented and said, 'We have received what we deserved from the Lord of Heaven's Armies. He has done what he said he would do.'"

Questions

- 1) Who told you, you were ok?
- 2) What does Paul mean when he says that we should test ourselves to see if we are really in the faith?

Background of the Passage

- In the introduction (1:1-6), Zechariah answers a basic, crucial question: *How can we experience God's blessing?*
- This was written to people who knew God and were in the process of rebuilding His temple
- They were a remnant of 50,000 Jews who had made the difficult commitment to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C. In 536 B.C. they had begun reconstruction of the devastated temple
- However, adversity and challenges began to rise against the people of God, and they became busy with their own lives. They lost focus on the work of rebuilding the temple.
 - But God raised up the prophet Haggai to ask the question, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" (Haggai 1:4). The people responded to Haggai's message and began to work again on the temple
 - It's easier to drift away from God than to think or realize
 - Just two months into the project the people of God needed to hear the Word of the Lord and to be encouraged to focus on their priority, which was God (Zechariah 1:1)
 - The prophet Zechariah brought such an encouraging word that the people needed in that time and season. It would motivate and inspire the people of God to return to the work which God has called them to do. He reminded them of the God of covenant and the promises that He would keep with His people.
- Consider the definitions of the names of the following people—this is the main theme of the entire book:
 - Zechariah means, "whom the Lord remembers"
 - Berechiah means, "the Lord blesses"
 - Iddo means, "at the appointed time"
 - God raised up Zechariah to proclaim ***that God remembers His chosen people and that He will bless them in His appointed time.***

- That message applies to God's people - especially if you are discouraged.
 - Zechariah encourages the people to obey and to be faithful despite their adverse situation. He reminds the people of the goodness of God and that God keeps the promises He makes. Discouragement can be such a vicious enemy in the midst of hostile enemies and in an environment that is not conducive to serving God. However, we must press through toward the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus and fulfil our purpose in Him.

Main Points

- 1) Return - God's blessings
 - 2) Return - God is serious about sin
 - 3) Return - Is a two-way street
 - 4) Return – Do not let history repeat itself
1. Returning to the Lord is the key to experiencing His blessing
 - a. *The Hebrew word "return" is the word for "turning" or "repentance."*
 - i. Our faith walk is always marked with repentance and a returning to the Lord. This is not a one-time event; it is a continuous thing throughout our faith walk. The children of Israel were encouraged to return to the Lord even though they had to return to the land and were in the midst of a building project. As Gods people, we must always be reminded of a priority and focus on the Lord.
 2. Returning to the Lord is necessary – God is serious about sin (1:2)
 - a. It might seem strange that Zechariah talks about hope and encouragement and yet ends up talking about sinners and the mistakes that the forefathers had made. We live in a day where sin is hardly even talked about and iniquity is completely forgotten. However, Christ paid a severe price for our salvation.
 - b. The Hebrew expression is very strong. Three grammatical devices emphasize the intensity of God's anger. First, the verb, "to be angry," is placed first in the sentence for emphasis. Second, the Hebrew uses what is called the cognate accusative, "He was angry with anger," which means, "God was *really* ticked off!" Third, the Hebrew word itself means to be full of wrath (see 2Kings 5:11; Esther 1:12).
 - c. We live in a time that emphasizes God's love to the neglect of His Holy wrath against sin and *against sinners*.
 - i. Returning to God means turning from my sin, which is repentance. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 12:14 that without holiness no one will see the Lord, we must develop a lifestyle of repentance and returning on to the Lord. The modern-day Christian must get serious about the things that offend God.
 3. Returning to the Lord is a two-way street – grace (1:3)
 - a. He invites us to return to Him. Three times in this single verse, Zechariah refers to God as the Lord of Hosts to underscore His sovereign authority. None of us would dare to saunter into the presence of a powerful world ruler without an invitation or appointment.
 - b. The Apostle James encourages us to draw near to God and that He will draw near unto us, in other words, God always responds to our actions.
 - c. Scripture is clear that even though repentance is our responsibility, we cannot do it in our own strength. It is the gift of God, and we must depend on Him to grant it (Acts 5:31; 11:18).
 - d. God's emphasis is always to return to Him first and foremost. It is a personal relationship; and from the relationship obedience to His Word, laws, and statutes will flow. To focus on pure obedience without Christ would result in legalism instead of relationship.

4. Returning to the Lord – Do not let history repeat itself—we should learn our lesson (1:4-6). The prophet brings up three warnings from their history:
 - a. The warning about disobedience (1:4)
 - b. The warning about delay (1:5)
 - c. The warning about divine discipline (1:6)
 - d. By “fathers” (1:2, 4, 5, 6) Zechariah means their ancestors. Oftentimes, God's people repeat the failures and sins of the past and the mistakes within their lineage. People live in patterns and repeat the same mistakes.
 - e. We must not be people that refuse to learn from the past and mistakes of others, it is our responsibility to listen, to obey, and apply the truth of God.
 - f. As Christians, we should not be spiritual procrastinators, we should never delay in obeying God, we must fulfill our duties within the season and opportunities that God provides for us (2Corinthians 6:2)
 - g. **Signs that you are disconnected from God:**
 - i. **Refusal to change**
 - A refusal to change always kills anointing and relationships
 - Celebrate the new things that God is doing and do not cling to the old - embrace the new.
 - ii. **A critical spirit**
 - Self-justification for a person’s emotional position - you think you have a right and become entitled
 - Faultfinding with the things of God, with the ministry, and with leadership. You begin to nitpick at everything, and nothing seems right to you.
 - iii. **Jealousy**
 - Jealousy of what others have, sometimes even the blessing of God upon their lives—this could include titles, prosperity, etc.
 - iv. **Anger and frustration**
 - Anger can bring a lack of focus - people get angry at the smallest things and they do not deal with the root of their anger. Christians can even become angry at God in these times.
 - v. **De-value of relationship(s)**
 - People pull away from relationships and can even begin to question and doubt them. People begin to think that they can live without relationship—make sure you are connected to someone who can speak into your life.

Conclusion

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹ And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now, our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry (**letting loose**) and drunkenness (**intoxication**), not in lewdness (**unbridled lust, filthiness**) and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

The answer has never changed. We must return to the Lord and put on Christ. This will ensure that we live a fruitful life that glorifies the Lord and ensures that we are not enslaved by the lust of this world.

RETURN – Additional Scriptures

To restore, to refresh to repair, to turn back or away, to repent, to relinquish

Isaiah 55:6-7

⁶ Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him **return unto the LORD**, and he will have mercy on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon.

Deuteronomy 4:28-31

²⁸ "And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. ²⁹ "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ "When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice ³¹ 'for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them. (NKJ)

Nehemiah 1:5-11

⁵ And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, ⁶ "please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. ⁷ "We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. ⁸ "Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ 'but if you **return to Me**, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' ¹⁰ "Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. ¹¹ "O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer. (NKJ)

Jeremiah 3:12-15

¹² Go, proclaim this message toward the north: "'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever.

¹³ Only acknowledge your guilt-- you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,'" declares the LORD.

¹⁴ "Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband. I will choose you-- one from a town and two from a clan-- and bring you to Zion.

¹⁵ Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (NIV)

Ezekiel 18:29-32

²⁹ "Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? ³⁰ "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "**Repent, and turn** from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. ³¹ "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?

³² "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

Hosea 14:1-2

¹ O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; ² Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. (NKJ)

Zechariah 1:3-4

³ "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Return to Me," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.'" But they did not hear nor heed Me," says the LORD. (NKJ)

James 4:7-10

⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (NKJ)

Prophetic words

Malachi 3:1-7

¹ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

² But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: ***(fire purifies that which has not been prepared for the Lord)***

³ And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

⁴ Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

⁵ And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

⁶ For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

⁷ Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. **Return unto me**, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

Haggai 2:3-9

³ Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

⁴ Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:

⁵ According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.

⁶ For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

⁷ And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

⁹ The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.