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Lent Midweek #5
Zechariah 8:20-23
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First Secure Your Own Oxygen Mask

First, secure your own oxygen mask. If you have traveled on a commercial airline, you have heard these words before the flight took off. You secure your own oxygen mask first because if you don't, if you secure others' mask first you will probably not be in a position to help those around you. You might pass out, and then helpless seatmates will not survive. First, secure your own oxygen mask.

Tonight, Zechariah wants us to secure our own oxygen mask. He wants us to do this because all around us people are in need of spiritual breath. They are gasping for spiritual breath. They are in need of peace. They need hope. What they really need is Jesus Christ. And tonight in our reading, Zechariah gives us his great commission.

But before Zechariah gives us a great commission to go to those dying without the Savior, Jesus Christ, he gives us our own 'oxygen mask'. Consider some of the verses leading up to our reading.

Zechariah 8:3a. "Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." The point here is that God doesn't dwell up in the heavens watching us from a distance. He is down here, with us!

Zechariah 8:4-5. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets." Here we encounter peace and joy and sharing and harmony. Who gets the credit for bringing it about? The Lord!

Consider Zechariah 8:7-8. “Thus says the LORD of hosts: behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.” The point is that God brings us home. He saves us no matter how far from His home we think we are. Nothing is too hard for Him.

Zechariah 8:12. “For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew.” God tells us that He will restore this world and make everything new. He gives us a sure and certain future to look forward to.

And finally Zechariah 8:19. “Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.” God removes sadness and mourning and gives joy and celebration!

This is an impressive list of blessings from the Lord. It is given to us in Jesus Christ. It is all made possible by His perfect life, death, and resurrection for us that brings us forgiveness and eternal life. First, secure your own oxygen mask.

If we don't, the results will be devastating. The gospel will become blasé to us. It's power will become neutralized in our lives because we downplay it. We will lose sight of the fact that an innocent man died for us and was judged for us so that we don't have to experience this! An executed man came back to life three days later so we can rise from the grave!

When we ignore the gospel, when we fail to secure our own spiritual oxygen mask we forget its joy. It becomes no big deal to us. And then we shouldn't be surprised when people don't say: “Tell me more about that.”

First, secure your own oxygen mask. Once we are spiritually revived, then we can go to others so they can take in God's gifts in Jesus Christ. Like Philip, we have been found by the Savior. So we can hurry to find others, just like he did. Like the woman at the well, we have heard the Savior. So we hurry to find others. Like Peter and John, we can't but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Let's move on to what Zechariah says tonight about helping others secure their own spiritual oxygen mask.

Zechariah 8:20-22. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.' Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD." Evangelism is universal. Jesus is for everyone. The Savior is for Americans and foreigners. Jesus is for people from every tribe and people and race.

Zechariah 8:23. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

Here we learn that evangelism is personal. A survey of 8,000 people who became believers indicated that 5% walked into a church and stayed; 7% came because of the pastor; 3% came because the church had a program they like; 1% came through door-to-door visitation; 4% came through Sunday School; 80% came through invitations from friends or relatives.

Here we also learn that evangelism is vocal. "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Romans 10:17 tells us: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

As we speak kindly to children, we demonstrate the Holy Spirit's power before others. As we refuse to participate in gossip, we bring honor to Jesus Christ. As we admit wrong and ask for forgiveness we testify to the truth of the gospel we proclaim.

To the teenager wrestling with the shame of her past, we can say: "Jesus conquered this." To the neighbor burdened by the weight of sin: "Jesus died to redeem this." To the mourning parents and friends: "Jesus wept because death is this dark, yet He stepped into the darkness and demonstrated victory over even this."

Sadly, the opposite is also true. If we're unkind to those around us, if we dismiss the needs of others and speak harshly to our family members, if we're more often at the ballpark than church on Sunday, if we ignore our sin and fail to repent, we communicate to our neighbors that Jesus isn't all that important.

Tonight, Zechariah tells us to first secure our own oxygen mask. Then we can and will help others secure their own spiritual oxygen mask found in the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ.