

Rev. Dan Welch Ash Wednesday 2-17-21 Text: Zechariah 1:1-6

[Slide- Tower of Babel] This is a 1563 painting by the Dutch artist,

Pieter Bruegel. It's called *The Tower of Babel*. The painting depicts the story in Genesis 11 where people say, "Come, let us build a tower and let us make a name for ourselves." (Gen 11:4) What lies at the heart of *The Tower of Babel*? Pride. "Let us make a name for ourselves."

[Slide- Coliseum] Pieter Bruegel based his painting of *The Tower of Babel* upon this 1551 sketch of the Coliseum in Rome. Both the Coliseum and the Tower of Babel are unstable; both are crumbling; both are about to come crashing down.

[Slide- Close-up of Tower of Babel] The painting, however, displays one detail that differs from the Roman Coliseum. Do you see it? The Tower of Babel is dangerously leaning to one side. Take a closer look at the tower's foundation. It's unfinished. It's just a matter of time before the whole thing comes crashing down. That's the painter's point. Anything with pride and pretense for its foundation will collapse. Why is that? A building is only as good as it's foundation.

[Slide- “Your Kingdom Come”] *A building is only as good as it’s foundation.* That’s what Zechariah says. Today we begin a ten-part sermon series on the book of Zechariah called *Your Kingdom Come*. Zechariah **longs** for God’s kingdom to come.

[Slide- Temple Ruins] That’s because it is 520 BC and Jerusalem’s temple is in ruins. The Babylonians destroyed it in 587 BC—some 67 years earlier. It was natural for the people to say, “God’s kingdom will come when we rebuild the temple!” After all, God says to Haggai—Zechariah’s contemporary—“Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house.” It’s time to build!

[Slide- Modern Building] We all know the feeling of looking at broken timbers and smashed bricks. What has been destroyed and torched in your life? A relationship? Your health? Your family? Your future? Your finances? Your job? Your emotional well-being?

God has called all of us to build something. It might not be *Fox News* worthy or get the attention of *Time Magazine*—but it’s important to raise children who trust Jesus, to be an honest and hard-working employee, to

run a business with biblical integrity, to study God's Word on a regular basis, to be a loving grandparent and to keep the Sabbath Day holy. It's time to build!

[Slide- Zech. 1:3] That's not the way Zechariah begins his book, though. Instead, this is what he says in chapter 1 verse 3: "Return to me, says the LORD of armies, and I will return to you." *A building is only as good as it's foundation.* Before we build, we need a solid foundation. First things first. You know how it works: First you do your homework, then you can have free time. First you need to plow the ground, then plant the seeds. Save your money, then buy a car. Exercise, then you can have your cake...and eat it too. Lay the foundation, then build. That's what it's all about.

And if we don't? We'll end up building a tower of Babel. "Let's make a name for ourselves!" If pride and pretense are my foundation, whatever I build will come crashing down. We see it all the time. *A building is only as good as it's foundation.* A solid foundation has two parts.

[Slide- Zech. 1:3 with italics] First, “***Return to me, says the LORD of armies.***” A return to the work of the temple will be in vain unless people return to the LORD. *First things first.* Not every slope is slippery, but to rebuild the temple without returning to the LORD is like building a Tower of Babel. Disaster is around the next corner! Rebuilding is rooted in the soil of returning to the LORD. The people’s fundamental need wasn’t a rebuilt temple; it was a renewed ***heart.***

“Return” could just as easily be translated “repent.” Please understand, return/repent isn’t a suggestion to “be nicer” or “try harder.” “Return” is a call to take God with utter seriousness. “Return” is a call to take sin with utter seriousness. “Return” is a command to confess, come clean, be honest.

It’s easy to ignore the call to return/repent. Too often, we don’t pray for it. We don’t listen for it. Too often, we don’t do it. But we can’t build a life of mercy and faithfulness apart from heeding the call to repent. If we don’t repent, we end up building the Tower of Babel. It will be a great testimony to us. It will be a great insult to God.

[Slide- Zech. 1:4] Listen to Zechariah. “Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets cried out, Thus says the LORD of hosts, Repent from your evil ways and from your evil deeds. But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.” (Zech 1:4) The danger is to be like the fathers and mothers who, in the days of Jeremiah, relied on the temple and refused to repent. Jer 7:4, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.” The temple needs to be rebuilt—no doubt! But the temple will become a teetering Tower of Babel, unless it’s accompanied by repentance and returning to the LORD.

[Slide- “Return/Repent”] **“They returned/repented.”** (Zech 1:6) The flame of faith is relit! A new day is on the horizon! How did it happen?

[Slide- Ash Cross] Through confession. Confession. The word conjures up many images—backroom interrogations, Chinese water torture, CIA waterboarding. In the Bible confession isn’t telling God what he doesn’t know. God knows everything already. Confession isn’t complaining about my sorry situation in life. Confession isn’t blaming and pointing fingers at others. That’s what confession isn’t.

Here's what confession is. David says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The prodigal son says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son." The tax collector says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Here's my confession. It's easy for me to fast-forward through confession. Say the words. Sound the syllables. Complete the sentences. Then get on with things. Let's all slow down. Confess our sin. Return/Repent. If you need a Bible verse to start with for that, Romans 3:23 is just one of many: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." *A building is only as good as it's foundation.*

[Slide- Zech: 1:3] Zechariah's foundation has two parts. "Return to me, says the LORD of armies [that's the first part], **and I will return to you**" [that's the second part, the Gospel part] (Zech 1:3). How does God return to us? Pieter Bruegel didn't only paint the Tower of Babel. He also painted this.

[Slide- Painting] It's called *Calvary*. Do you see Jesus?

[Slide- Close-up of Jesus with cross] Jesus is easy to miss. Jesus is always easy to miss. That's why we need Zechariah. Zechariah 9:9, Jesus is our King who comes to us, righteous and humble. Zechariah 9:11, the blood of the covenant sets us free. Zechariah 11:8, people detest Jesus. Zechariah 11:12, people sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Zechariah 13:7, "Strike the sheep so the flock will be scattered." Zechariah 12:10, "They will look upon me whom they have pierced." God returns to us with steadfast love, cleansing mercy and full and complete pardon for all our sin. We must see Jesus. And why is that?

[Slide- "My hope is built..."] *A building is only as good as it's foundation.* Edward Mote knows. In 1834 he composed a hymn. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. No merit of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." Here's a foundation to build upon. Jesus' blood and righteousness. All other ground is sinking sand. Amen.