

Rev. Dan Welch Wed. in Lent 4 3-17-21 Text: Zechariah 8:20-23

**“First Secure Your Own Oxygen Mask”**

[Oxygen Masks Slide] “First secure your own oxygen mask.” This

directive is familiar to anyone who travels on commercial airplanes. In the event of an emergency, like “a sudden loss of cabin pressure”, we’re told that an oxygen mask for each person will drop from the overhead control panel. In such an anxious moment, parents might instinctively try to get air to their children. Adult children, for their part, might focus on preserving the life of elderly parents seated next to them.

That kind of kindness might be instinctive, but it isn’t wise. If we pass out from the lack of oxygen, our helpless seatmates won’t survive. “First secure your own oxygen mask.”

For just over a year now we’ve been living in that kind of environment. The plane of living in the world as we know it has been in turbulent airspace! One year ago, when nationwide stay at home orders were issued it was as if the oxygen masks had dropped! We were all gasping for air trying to make sense of it all and even just trying to survive.

One year later we're still wearing masks, literally, a different kind of masks, but still masks. So many people have dealt with social isolation, loneliness, depression, layoffs, and more. One year later it definitely feels like the crisis is abating, but a valuable lesson that we can learn from this crisis and what Zechariah in our text today also has to teach us is this: "First secure your own oxygen mask."

[*Your Kingdom Come Slide*] We're in a series called *Your Kingdom Come*. God longs for his kingdom to come to us, then through us. To us. Then through us. That's the movement of Zechariah 8. To us—large amounts of spiritual, Gospel-saturated oxygen. Then through us—calm in the midst of chaos; peace in the midst of all the panic; truth in the midst of great turbulence.

Here they come. Oxygen masks are dropping from Zechariah 8. Massive blasts of Gospel-saturated power. What should we do? First secure your own oxygen mask.

[Slide] **God dwells with his people.** “I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.” (Zech 8:3) God isn’t only up there. God is also down here! God isn’t in the abstract. God is in the concrete—Jesus.

[Slide] **People live in peace.** “Old men and old women shall again 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.” (Zech 8:4–5) What a wonderful picture of harmony and happiness, sharing and peace! Social distancing will end and God will do it!

[Slide] **Exiles come home.** “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. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.” (Zech 8:7–8) God brings exiles home and makes them his through his faithfulness and righteousness. Not our faithfulness and righteousness. His.

[Slide] **Creation is renewed.** “The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew.” (Zech

8:12) The day is coming when God will make all things new. Vines and produce and dew from heaven!

[Slide] **Fasts yield to feasts.** “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.” (Zech 8:19) God changes mourning into music; sackcloth into singing; deep sighs into hearts full of endless Hallelujahs.

[Jesus on Cross Slide] What oxygen! God’s presence, God’s protection, God’s salvation, God’s renewal and God’s celebration. These come to us freely and abundantly through Jesus. “First secure your own oxygen mask.” And if we don’t?

Then this all becomes ho-hum, cliché, same-old, same-old. Then we downplay the Gospel’s most alarming details. *An innocent Man died so we don’t have to? A murdered Man whose heart started beating again? We have God’s presence, protection, salvation, renewal and celebration?*

When we don’t breathe in the oxygen of this Gospel we forget it’s **freshness**, it’s utter and unexplainable **joy**. What’s meant to be vibrant

comes across as blasé—no big deal. We all need to be jolted again to life, so God’s kingdom comes to us. Then through us.

[Masks Slide] “First secure your own oxygen mask.” Once we’re spiritually revived, then we’re generous towards others. Then we reach out to people living in extreme isolation. Then we pray for families who are still hurting. Then we go out of our way to love people in the name of Jesus.

Breathe in the spiritual oxygen of the Gospel! Come alive in Jesus Christ! God’s kingdom to us. Then through us to exhibit Christ’s compassion to all people! Zechariah 8 shows us how the Gospel comes through us.

[Slide] **The Gospel is universal.** “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 peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to **entreat** the favor of

the LORD.” (Zech 8:20–22) “Red and yellow, brown, black and white; they are precious in His sight.”

Just as the people of Bethel came “to entreat the face of the LORD” in Zechariah 7:2, so now nations are described in the same way. They come in waves—first in line are Gentile leaders, then city dwellers and finally many people and strong nations. A small trickle becomes an overwhelming flood! The prophet envisions God’s redeeming mercy for people from every tribe and people and language and nation.

[Slide] **The Gospel is personal.** The Gospel is the answer to my pain and my shame; my fear and my anxiety; not just in a general sing-song-y way, but with italics: “Jesus loves *me*, this *I know*.” The Gospel is personal. “In those days ten people from the nations of every tongue will **seize** of the robe of a Judahite.” (Zech 8:23) Ten people seizing the garment of one Judean. The Gospel is *personal*. The verb “seize,” frequently appears in contexts where action is fervent and impassioned. We want unbelievers to seize us and ask us what we have that they don’t.

A recent survey of 8,000 people who became believers indicates that 5% walked into a church and stayed; 7% came because of the pastor; 3% came because the church had a program they liked; 1% came through door-to-door visitation; 4% came through Sunday School; 80% came through invitations from friends or relative. Who can you reach out to? Who can you help? The Gospel is universal. The Gospel is personal. It's one-on-one.

**[Slide] The Gospel is vocal.** “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” (Zech 8:23) This is how Zechariah 8 begins. God dwells with his people. The confession “God is with you,” connects with Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy (Is 7:14).

Romans 10:17, “Faith comes by hearing.” When you speak kindly to your children on the playground, you demonstrate the Holy Spirit’s power for other moms. When you refuse to participate in office gossip, you bring honor to Jesus on your job. Even in your response to your own sin—admitting wrong and asking for forgiveness—you testify to the truth of the Gospel you confess.

[“Facepalms” Slide] To children still adjusting to getting back to school and dealing with all the changes, we can say: “Jesus conquered *this*.” To the coworker burdened by frightening financial fears we say: “Jesus died to redeem *this*.” To those afraid of dying from Coronavirus we say: “Jesus stepped fully into death and demonstrated ultimate victory even over *this*.”

Sadly, the opposite is also true. If we’re unkind to those around us, if we speak harshly to our family members, if we freak out, we tell the world that Jesus is just a cliché. Jesus is just an afterthought. Jesus is no big deal. *God forbid!*

[Cross with Sunlight Slide] The Gospel isn’t black letters on white paper. The Gospel is vibrant and neon and in living color! The Gospel provokes wonder and amazement. The Gospel can be applied from a thousand angles, and invites people to have confidence and hope. The Gospel breathes life into dead hearts! Do you see the need? Do you hear the cries? Our plane—our world—is in turbulent airspace! “First secure your own oxygen mask.” Amen.