

Hope Church December 28th 2025

Zechariah 2:1-13

In the middle of it all

One of my favorite places on earth is the **KRUGER NATIONAL PARK**:

- At my previous church, a colleague's dad led the anti-poaching unit, so we had access to a *remote unfenced camp* deep in the park called **SWATIKA**.
- It was the kind of place where the wild wasn't out there somewhere. It was all around you.
- Elephants and lions and buffalo would wander right through camp.
- No electricity. No running water. No cellphone reception. **Completely cut off from the rest of the world**.
- When BRENDA and STEVE visited us in South Africa, I took them there.

- Every morning, we climbed onto the open safari vehicle (OSV) and drove about an hour just to find a little rise where we could get **enough signal to phone home** and check in with our families.
- We'd stop. Climb down. Make our calls. Take a quick bathroom break – African style – nearest bush or pretty flowers.
- One morning, I'd just finished taking a leak behind the vehicle. We climbed back in and turned around to head back...

- Two male lions and three lionesses calmly walked out from the exact spot where I had been standing moments before.

As incredible as those moments were, having no cellphone reception was difficult.

SOUTH AFRICA is **not a safe place**, and not knowing what was happening at home or being unable to reach anyone was hard.

We don't wake up next to lions in the USA, but we do wake up with this low-grade fear of being disconnected. There's even a word for it: **NOMOPHOBIA – no mobile phone phobia**.

NOMOPHOBIA is the anxiety we feel when we have *no signal or low battery or no data*.

We're afraid we'll miss something important or lose the conveniences our phones give us.

Studies show that roughly half of Americans **feel anxious or worried or upset** when they don't have their phones with them.

We've just celebrated Christmas, the invitation to live every day with the **promise of God's presence**. And yet *very few Christians* live with a daily awareness of God with them. Even though many say they've experienced it before.

- One Christian survey says around two-thirds of Christians say they've **felt God's presence at some point in their lives.**
- But a recent BARNA-RELATED STUDY suggests that **only 1 to 2 out of every 10** Christians live with an awareness of God's presence in their daily life.

We fear losing a phone signal more than losing our awareness of the presence of God.

But Christmas is over. Tomorrow most of us go back to our normal lives.

- Going back to the same job you dread.
- Dealing with the **same relationship issues.**
- Continuing to *struggle with the same addictions and sin and brokenness* as before Christmas.

When the lights and music and food are done. When the **post-Christmas blues set in.** It's easy to struggle with the promise of the manger:

- Is God with me?
- Is God with me when I make a mess of things and hurt the people that I love?

- Is God with me when my circumstances feel like too much to bear and I'm completely overwhelmed?

We are reading from the book of **ZECHARIAH** today.

- Because of their sin and idol worship, God allowed BABYLON to defeat Judah and take the people **into exile in 586 BC**.
- After about **70 years in Babylon**, King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home to Jerusalem.
- Most of the Jewish people were excited about their freedom and **making a fresh start with God**. Excited to *worship God in the temple* again.
- But when they arrived in Jerusalem, their hope was quickly shattered. Jerusalem was nothing like they remembered. Was nothing like the stories their parents told.
 - ⇒ The city's walls were in ruins. They had no protection.
 - ⇒ The **temple was destroyed**. No temple. No God. God abandoned his people.
 - ⇒ Strangers lived in the city and were threatening the people returning from exile.
 - ⇒ They had no money. Their crops failed. **Every day was a struggle** to survive.

Verses 1-5:

Then I looked up, and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, “Where are you going?” He answered me, “To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and

how long it is." While the angel who was speaking to me was leaving, another angel came to meet him and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.'

Zechariah 2:1-5 NIV

- This was the 2nd vision of Zechariah.
- A measuring line may represent judgment or restoration. Zechariah uses it as a **promise of restoration**.
- The Hebrew word **perāzōt** describes Jerusalem as a city without walls. A city without any walls was *vulnerable to any attack*. Zechariah *defines this crisis* as a promise of blessing and expansion.
- The **wall of fire** echoes the pillar of fire in Exodus. God will protect and purify His people with His presence.
- The Hebrew word **kābōd** means glory. The *brilliance of God's presence*.
- Zechariah reminds God's people that their hope does not rest in their own planning or power or capabilities but in the **God who is planning their future**.

God's people won't be defined by their walls or defenses. They will be defined by

God's presence.

Their protection won't be determined by politics or military power or urban planning. The protection of God's people is determined by the God who surrounds them. The God who lives within them.

Verses 6-9:

"Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north," declares the Lord, "for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven," declares the Lord. "Come, Zion! Escape, you who live in Daughter Babylon!" For this is what the Lord Almighty says: "After the Glorious One has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye—I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me.

Zechariah 2:6-9 NIV

- The '*Land of the North*' is not a Game of Thrones reference but it's the region under Babylon's control.
- Some Jews chose to **stay behind in Babylon**. After about 70 years many of them had been born in Babylon. Had *built comfortable lives*. KNEW NOTHING ELSE THAN

BABYLON. Babylon felt **familiar and safe** for them.

- Zechariah WARNED the Jews that remained in Babylon, that they are choosing comfort over God and will **share Babylon's fate when judgment comes.**
- The *urgent cry* of "COME! COME!" emphasizes how badly God wants them to *leave Babylon's seduction* and **return to Jerusalem**. To return to Him.

Leave the place that feels safe but is slowly killing your soul. Come to where I am.

Verses 10-13:

"Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling."

Zechariah 2:10-13 NIV

- The Hebrew word **tsākan** means *to dwell*. God's people can **LIVE IN HOPE** because He is living with them. Not dropping in occasionally. Permanent residence!
- God's living-with-His-people promise reaches its climax with the birth of Jesus. Will be completed when He comes again.

- Zechariah promises that “many nations will join themselves to the Lord” and become ‘**ammī**. *Become my people*. A Hebrew word that shows **ownership and affection and love**.
- Non-Jewish people are included in this.

Zechariah reminds us that what matters most is not who we are or where we find ourselves, but who we are with.

When the post-Christmas blues hit and you start to wonder if God is really with you, Zechariah 2 reminds you that he is. Zechariah reminds you that **God calls you to leave Babylon. To join Him. To trust His plans.** And to **welcome His presence.**

JOIN / TRUST / WELCOME

JOIN HIM.

- Zechariah 2 invites you to leave our own ‘Babylon’. Babylon today **can be anything that quietly pulls your heart away from God** and keeps you stuck.
- God INVITES us to step into His open and unwalled city. To where God will protect us. Where God will be with us.

- God's INVITATION is **meant for everyone**. Whoever you are. Whatever you have done. No matter what your reputation is.
- Zechariah 2 is challenging asks us with an important question: What in your life do you need to give up to move closer to Him? To become unstuck?

⇒ **Comfort and convenience:** CHOOSING what is easy instead of **what is faithful**.

When a *comfortable lifestyle* matters more than obeying Jesus.

⇒ **Work or success or achievement:** When your career or your ministry becomes your identity. When promotions and productivity matter more than **integrity** and **rest** and **balance** and **obedience**.

⇒ **Relationships:** When a spouse or a friend or even a child becomes *more important than following Jesus*. When their wants and needs outrank His will.

⇒ **Shame and regret:** When CONDEMNATION is louder than grace. When you are CONVINCED, you are **not good enough** for God.

⇒ **Hidden sin and unhealthy habits:** When pornography or gossip or bitterness or substance abuse or greed or all of the above **stay hidden** instead of being brought into the light.

⇒ **Distraction and busyness and screens:** When there is **ALWAYS TIME** for one more episode and one more game and one more scroll, but never enough time to **be still and present with God**.

- Choose your 'Babylon' from this list. Or name the one that came to mind. And confess it honestly before God. Without any excuses.
- **You don't have to fix it before you come.** You bring it as it is, and you step out of it by stepping toward Him.
- This is what it means to JOIN Him: not just believing in God but leaving your Babylon and entering His presence. God promised that He Himself will be our wall of fire and the glory within. Leaving Babylon is **not stepping into emptiness.** It is stepping into a Person.

TRUST HIM.

- In ZECHARIAH 2 God reminds Israel that He promised them a future far beyond what they expected. A future that DID NOT FIT inside their **traditions or expectations.**
- We like being in control. When life **fits into spreadsheets and to-do lists and tidy systems of theology and doctrine.** Our plans make us feel safe – that we own the future.
- But ZECHARIAH 2 reminds us that God's promises cannot be measured or boxed in. GOD'S KINGDOM does not fit our spreadsheets. God works on a different scale and with different priorities.

- He reminds us that our futures truly matter to God. That GOD DREAMS over our lives in ways **far larger and holier and more enduring** than anything we can plan.
- God gives us a choice: do you trust what He has planned for your life? He allows us to **either resist Him or obey Him**. We can STAY in Babylon or return to Jerusalem.
- Just need to know that we will face the consequences.

Are you trusting yourself or will you trust God?

Are you clinging to small, self-limited plans you can control, or will you open your hands to God's overflowing plans?

- Trusting God might mean staying where you are and being faithful. Even though it is not your dream job.
- Trusting God might mean stopping all the excuses and taking the leap. Make the change.
- Trusting God might mean surrendering your wants and needs for healing or reconciliation or open doors.

- An easy way to practice this is to take one area of your life – it can be your work or family or finances or health or relationships – and say out loud everyday this week:

Lord, this is yours. I trust your plans here more than my own.

WELCOME HIS PRESENCE.

- God does not only protect from a distance. *God comes close. God offers nearness.*
God shows up right in the middle of our MESSINESS.
- God does not walk around our mess and stay outside it. In Jesus, **God crossed every line and stepped into** OUR WORLD and OUR STORY and OUR PAIN.
- Jesus did not just drop in for a quick visit. As Emmanuel He came to stay. He poured out His Spirit on us.
- ZECHARIAH reminds us that Jesus is closer than my own breath.

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

John 1:14 The MESSAGE

- For years I struggled to notice God's presence in my life. On the good days and my bad ones.

- I tried to live out SIMON AND GARFUNKEL's *I Am a Rock*:

I've built walls
 A fortress deep and mighty
 That none may penetrate
 I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain
 It's laughter and it's loving I disdain
 I am a rock I am an island

- I tried to dodge my emotions like *rolling through a four-way stop* – never really stopping long enough to feel anything.
- I kept people at a distance, and, if I am honest, I kept God outside too.
- Only when I **went to therapy** and began to *trust God with my emotions*, did God's presence start to feel real.
- Becoming more aware of God's presence usually happens when I *loosen my grip on my own 'Babylon'*. Slowing down enough to notice that God is already here.
- I will not improve my awareness of God' presence if I stay trapped in my own noise and hurry. I need to let some of that go. I need to pay attention.
 ⇒ One easy thing you can do: start each morning and end each day by sitting quietly for two minutes.

⇒ Breathe slowly and pray:

Jesus, you are here. I am here. We are here together.

- When the post-Christmas blues hit and real-life rushes back in, it can feel as if God has gone quiet. Zechariah 2 gives us a different picture to hold onto in that moment.

Leave Babylon. Trust My plans. Let Me live with you.

JOIN / TRUST / WELCOME

BLESSING

May the Lord Jesus, our **Emmanuel**, God with us in every breath and every burden, go before you into this day and stay beside you in every step.

May His presence quiet your worries, His grace cover your failures, and His hope lift your heart. And may the blessing of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – rest on you and remain with you, now and always.

AMEN.