**Your greatest Need**

Text: Zechariah 10

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**Scriptures:** Zechariah 10

**Series: Zechariah.** Sermon 13 of 19

**Theme:** The redeeming work of the Shepherd-King

**FCF:** We can forget (or not know) that our greatest need is for a Saviour

**Proposition:** Continue to follow Jesus because His flock is transformed when their Lord is with them

**Introduction**

What is your greatest need?

If your greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If your greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If your greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If your greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer;

But your greatest need is forgiveness, so God sent us a Saviour.

A Saviour who offers forgiveness to all who will listen to his voice and believe on him. Once forgiven we are right with God and He gives us both physical and spiritual life forever. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, said of those who belong to Him: **“***My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand*” (John 10:27-28)

The gift of life from Jesus is what you and I need the most and we can only receive this life if we follow him, like sheep in Bible times would follow their shepherd whom they knew. This morning we’re going to look at the work of the Shepherd-King from Zechariah 10.

1. **The Shepherd who provides (1-2)**

When 43,360 Israelites returned from captivity in Babylon they faced many challenges in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Their priorities had been to sort out their own houses first and to leave the Lord’s house until later. So, through His prophet Haggai, God says that because of this, there is a drought and therefore there was no grain, wine or oil production. In those days there was no fridge in the kitchen and no supermarket down the road. If the spring rain didn’t come, food crops did not grow, and the people faced starvation. Rain became a symbol for the people’s greatest need.

Here in Zechariah 10, we begin with a reminder that the LORD God is the One who brings the rain that enables the ground to yield up food as plants grow. Today clouds can be seeded to produce some limited precipitation under certain circumstances. Huge travelling irrigators cover productive land on the Canterbury plains, but even this complex technology ultimately depends on rivers flowing from mountains where the rain must fall if there is to be sufficient supply to keep agricultural production going.

What was true of rainfall and food cropping 2500 years ago also is true today (v1): “*It is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone*”. Only God can open the heavens and bring down much needed water (Jer 14:13-22).

So, the prophet Zechariah says, The LORD is the One to ask if you want rain! Don’t look to false gods. Don’t expect comfort from idols (teraphim); this term refers to household idols like the one Rachel stole from Laban (Gen 31:34). Small objects of worship which could likely fit on a mantelpiece. Don’t trust the diviners; like the parrot Richie the Macaw who some people put their hope in for predicting the Rugby World Cup winner. These diviners in OT times recounted their dreams which gave false hope. Like the false prophet Hananiah, who in the time of Jeremiah, “*persuaded the nation to trust in lies*”.

To whom or to what do you look for comfort? When your life ‘becomes pear-shaped’, ‘turns to custard’? When you experience a drought of hope/strength? When ‘the chips are down’. When you have a serious and critical time in your life? When you receive a cancer diagnosis, suffer a major financial loss, someone you love deeply dies or wounds you terribly? When you are caught up in a persistent pattern of sin which you have not been able to overcome?

As long as people like you and me rely on somebody or something without sufficient power to provide what they need, they will be in trouble. This afflicted condition is like that of ‘wandering sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd’ (v2). What is a shepherd? somebody who looks after a flock of sheep! We know that Abel, one of Adam’s sons was a keeper of sheep. The role of a shepherd is to protect and provide for his sheep.

Shepherding was the main occupation of the early Israelites; e.g. Abraham (Gen 12:16) and Jacob (Gen 30:31-40) who, before he died, blessed Josephs two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. He said: "*May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day… may he bless these boys*” (Gen 48:15). The Lord had been Jacob’s shepherd, as he had been David’s (Psalm 23).

David had been a shepherd boy at Bethlehem before the Lord God anointed Him as king saying, “*you will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler*” (2 Sam 5:2). David was to protect and provide for the people under his care. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel referred to Israel’s leaders as shepherds (Jer 23; Eze 34).

So, what is the idea expressed here of being like “*wandering sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd’*? It is that of being lost, vulnerable, and in trouble because there is no good shepherd, no faithful king, no reliable leader, to provide what is needed for clear direction, protection and to supply what is lacking.

The **greatest need** of these people was for a shepherd. Someone who would provide for them. The message here is clear: it is the Lord, the God who created this universe and everything in it, who is the Shepherd they need. He alone can provide, giving them the comfort of having their greatest need met.

In John 19, Jesus said “*I am the Good Shepherd*”. Jesus was born as a man, yet clearly showed that he possessed the power of God. He alone calmed a storm (Mark 4:39), he alone multiplied food for thousands (John 6), he alone supplies living liquid. Water which becomes in those who receive it a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Jesus said, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). Jesus is God and has the power to provide not only for your greatest need; but for your every need.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who provides. He is the One that Zechariah, inspired by God’s Spirit, is writing about here. He is the one who calls out to his sheep “*follow me*”, “*come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28).

Will you follow the Good Shepherd? He alone can provide for your greatest need.

He is also the One who strengthens…which brings us to our second point…

1. **The Shepherd who strengthens (3-7)**

Those who returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem 2500 years ago had been weakened. The people had been scattered; the northern kingdom conquered by the Assyrians in 722BC and dispersed; the southern kingdom overrun by the Babylonians; Jerusalem was captured in 587BC.

Notice the references to ‘Judah’ in verses 3,4 and 6 and to ‘Joseph’ and the Ephraimites in verses 6 and 7. Here Judah represents the southern kingdom, and Joseph/Ephraim the northern kingdom. The idea in our text is that of the **entire people of God** being strengthened.

Just as a good shepherd protects his sheep against dangerous animals, like bears or lions, who would wound or kill the flock, so the Lord promises to come against false leaders/rulers who oppress his sheep. He says: “*My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock*” (v3) He will care for all his people, He will make all his people strong; restoring them because he has compassion on them in their weakness.

The Lord will go into battle for his own and the people will become conquerors with Him, like a strong horse in battle (v3). The image here is of the transformation of weak and wandering sheep into a majestic warhorse, strong and focussed on conquest and victory. Likewise, the reference to the battle bow coming from Judah, which symbolises power and might.

Can you see the ‘tent peg’ in verse 4? This represents solid stability. Have you ever left the tent pegs behind when going on a family camping holiday? Depending on the design of your tent, you might get away without them if conditions are fine and still, but if a storm comes you’re going to need strong pegs driven firmly into the ground. From Judah strength will come…

From Judah, One will come who is the **Cornerstone**, the foundation upon which a building is constructed. The psalmist declares in Psalm 118 that the Lord had become his salvation. That the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Ps 118:22).

When Peter stands before the rulers, elders and scribes in Jerusalem, filled with the Holy Spirit 500 years after Zechariah wrote the words of our text, he declares: “*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone*”. (Acts 4:11). The false shepherds of Israel had killed Jesus, the Christ, yet in fulfilment of prophesy, from Judah had come the Cornerstone.

Jesus is the Cornerstone, the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20). He became the solid foundation for all whose greatest needs are met by being The Good Shepherd who died for his sheep. No one took the life of Christ from him, but he laid it down of his own accord (John 10:18). He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”. He wasn’t talking about the physical temple building, but about his own body (John 2:19,21). The church is the Body of Christ, built upon Him and strengthened by the Risen Lord Jesus who remains with his people through the presence of the Holy Spirit. He said, “*surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*." (Matt 28:20).

Zechariah prophesies that the Lord is going to strengthen his people by being with them. Look at verse 5: “*Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because the LORD is with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen*”. This military image expresses the lasting truth that when the flock is with their Lord, the Good Shepherd, they are strong because He is there. In Christ, the weak become more than conquerors. There is a victory celebration where there would have been defeat without the strengthening of the Lord.

We saw this in remembrance services for those who have gone to be with the Lord. Even in the face of the death of someone who was much loved, there is joy that in Christ "*Death had been swallowed up in victory*." (1 Cor 15:54). When God’s people gather and experience the joy of salvation in Christ, they are strengthened. Being together with Christ strengthens his flock.

Sheep are no match for bears or lions. Killing a sheep is the easiest thing physically. There is no resistance. Sheep are weak. So are you. So am I. When we come to Christ in our weakness, he strengthens us, for His power is made perfect in our weakness. In the presence of a good shepherd who provides and protects, the sheep are strengthened, they can be bold and confident because of the One who leads them. The shepherd King David put it this way in Psalm 23 “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me*”.

Do you know the comfort of being with Jesus? He is the One who provides for your greatest need, the One who gives strength so that you can continue to follow Him. He is also the One who brings all his sheep together…3rd point

1. **The Shepherd who gathers (8-12)**

Today in an NZ paddock you may well hear a farmer whistling for his dogs, but not for his sheep! Through His prophet Zechariah the Lord says that he will ‘signal for them and gather them in’. The Hebrew word here (sharaq) is often translated ‘whistle’. Like a shepherd calling his sheep, the Lord will whistle to draw his people to himself. 2500 years ago, following the conquest, firstly of the northern tribes by the Assyrians and then the southern kingdom by the Babylonians, the Israelites were scattered. A second exodus is portrayed in verse 11: “*They will pass through the sea of trouble; the surging sea will be subdued, and all the depths of the Nile will dry up”*. The message here is of future deliverance. The surging sea represents chaos and trouble.

Surely I will **redeem them**; they will be as numerous as before. The Lord promises to ransom his people. To bring them back to Himself. To buy them back like Hosea went to the slave market to purchase his unfaithful wife (Hosea 3:2).

This is what Jesus did on the cross at Calvary. “He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.". He came to earth to fulfil prophesies like this one in Zechariah 10. He came to be the good shepherd. He came to die so that the greatest need of rebels against God like you and me could be met. He is called ‘Jesus’ because he saves his people from their sins (Matt 1.21).

The Lord promises to gather his people in the fertile lands of Gilead and Lebanon. To bring in so many that the territory will need to be expanded to contain them. This is a vast in-gathering of God’s people who come under the provision and protection of the Lord who is their shepherd.

To the small group who returned to Jerusalem, this would have seemed almost impossible. How could the Lord bring back together a people who were so dispersed? To us it may seem very unlikely that this congregation would grow to fill this church building to total capacity and that then there be the need to plant more churches because so many were coming to follow Christ.

How does such growth occur? The answer is through the faithful work of the Good Shepherd who calls his people from every nation to come. Notice in verse 9 that his promises extend to ‘their children’. God’s promise of redemption, of salvation, of forgiveness extends to the offspring of believers. That is why we baptise infants.

Jesus is the One who gathers his people into his church. Not only Jews, but from every nation. He said “*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd*”. This prophecy has been fulfilled, is being fulfilled and will be completely fulfilled when Jesus returns.

These words encourage us today to continue to follow Jesus where he leads us, both as individuals and as a congregation. Remember that it is the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who provides for His people. It is Christ who strengthens his church. He gathers His people. The LORD declares: “*I will strengthen them in the LORD and in his name they will walk*” (v12).

AMEN