**Life Under the Scroll**

Zechariah 5:1-4

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Deuteronomy 28:1-6; 15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Zechariah 5:1-11

*Suggested song of response: STTL277 ‘And can it be that I should gain’*

**Series: Zechariah**. Sermon 7 of 19. 6th night vision

**Theme:** The judgement of God on specific sins of His people

**FCF:** We tend to think that sin can be hidden from God’s sight

**Proposition:** God cannot dwell with his people if there is sin in the camp

**Introduction**

Have you ever looked up to the sky and seen a banner being towed behind an aeroplane, perhaps with an advertisement like “Eat at Joe’s for fine dining” or “Donald Trump for president”? In this 6th night vision, we are looking at a God’s own Word; a banner of truth.

1. **The Banner of Truth**

The sixth night vision which Zechariah receives is of an airborne banner, a large flying scroll, 10 meters long by 5 meters wide. Some have suggested that there is a connection with the porch of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6:3) which was the same size as this scroll and where the law was usually read. However, the huge size in this vision serves more to emphasize the seriousness of God’s Word and the fact that it can be easily read by the whole covenant community. This unrolled scroll is unusually large for a written document; it is big enough for everyone down below on the earth to read.

The picture here is of God’s law hanging with His authority over the people of the ‘whole land’ – that is the promised land. The covenant community is being called to account for their sins in particular lying – swearing falsely and stealing.

At this stage in history, commodity inflation was crippling the economy. The widespread financial problems were compounded by thieves and perjurers whose wickedness caused further misery for the population. When social evil like this happens, it is not only sin against the people, but against the Lord Himself (e.g. Ps 51:4).

The flying scroll here is open for all to read. It forms a large placard 10mx5m. It hangs over the people, calling them to account for their social evils specifically here to habitual theft and lying. When God gave His law to His people He taught them that keeping that law would result in blessing and prosperity, whereas breaking it would bring curses and disaster.

The message here is that the people could not expect God’s presence to be with them if they continued to be breakers of his covenant law. They were being reminded that right worship of God always leads to right living. If it does not, then God’s presence is not one of blessing, but of curses.

As we heard in the 3rd night vision, God was promising through His prophet the rebuilding of Jerusalem into a ‘supercity’ with an expanding population. There would be immigration from the nations as people were joined with the Lord by being brought into His kingdom. However, there would also be deportation, for those who wilfully sinned because unholiness, wickedness, ungodliness have no place in the presence of the Lord.

Just as the law containing the covenant curses hung over the people for all to read, so today the Word of God is over the church, informing us of the standard of truth of our God.

This banner of truth, the Bible, has a vital role in our lives. This law of God is a tutor or guardian to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal 3:24). *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:12-13).*

It is good that the Word of God is central to our meetings as a church. Certainly on the Lord’s Day when we meet together to worship morning and evening. Also, when we study the Word together, when we meet for fellowship and prayer.

The Bible is much more than theology, it is also God’s standard of living for us. Only when we strive to please him and recognize how much we need his grace can we grow in understanding the great joy of being part of the kingdom of God. The precious privilege of being a member of Christ’s church.

1. **The Deserved Destruction**

The angel describes this flying *banner* of truth as being ‘the curse that is going out over the whole land’. What does this mean?

The reference to ‘the curse’ in verse 3 links this super-scroll to God’s law, in particular the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 and proclaims the penalty for breaking the relationship between God and His people: *“The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him”* (Deut 28:20). Symbolically the scroll is filled with the Word of God; both sides containing the words of the law.

Notice the penalty which is written on the flying scroll: every thief will be banished, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. The Hebrew word translated ‘banished’ (Naqua) has the sense of being purged out, cleaned out, completely removed, deported.

Here is the link to the 3rd vision. If God is going to live amongst His people, then those who have broken His covenant must be removed. Holiness cannot cohabit with unholiness. God cannot dwell with his people when iniquity remains with them.

In the vision, destruction is promised symbolically to come to the home, the house of the thief and the liar, destroying the structure completely, timber and stones. This judgement connects to a passage in the Leviticus 14:44-45 dealing with regulations for a house contaminated by rot or mildew. If the home is found to be unclean in this way, the priest is to call for the destruction of the structure, including the stones and timber.

What does this vision remind us of? That unholiness has no place in God’s Kingdom.

***“****Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were”. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11a)*

When the banner of the truth of God’s Word is flown over people like us, we are called to account. We cannot willingly live immoral, idolatrous, greedy, intoxicated, lying, cheating lives and expect to gain entrance into the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Many people today believe that they will probably go to heaven because they have been a pretty good person really. Surely God will overlook the occasional ‘white lie’, the odd petty theft, a bit of time shaved off the timesheet here and there? No.

Part of the message which we must proclaim to each other and to the world around us is that “*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31)

The destruction of those who break God’s law is pictured in this vision as the curse of the law entering the home of the lawbreaker and breaking that home down completely. The force sufficient to reduce timbers to splinters and stones to rubble. The effect of this curse is to remove the sinner from the presence of God in the land of promise. The Bible calls the place of separation “Hell”.

The purpose of this vision is to warn the people so that they will look at the banner of truth above their heads and cease stealing and lying.

This text in 1 Corinthians 6 doesn’t end there, but continues with the wicked not entering God’s Kingdom but continues:

*But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:11)

This is the word of grace which brings us to our last point.

1. **The Curse is Removed**

The 6th vision ends with destruction but is connected to next one which portrays the woman representing wickedness in a sealed basket. Both the 6th and 7th visions deal with the problem of iniquity amongst the people.

The seventy-year period of captivity in Babylon had the potential to cleanse the people (Isaiah 48:10), but even after the return of the exiles, impurity remained in the covenant community. As the prophet Jeremiah put it *“the bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out”* (Jer 6:29).

The people were deceiving themselves if they thought that merely rebuilding the temple would automatically lead to God pouring out his blessing upon them. It would be like thinking that just constructing a church building automatically means that God is favouring us.

In this vision there is effectively a call to return wholeheartedly to the covenant itself. This is a call to willing obedience.

You may remember that the 7th vision opens with the image of a measuring basket.

The interpreting angel explains to Zechariah what the basket means “*This is the iniquity of the people throughout the* land”. This iniquity is represented in the vision by a woman who is described as being “wickedness”. She is kept firmly inside the basket by a heavy lead cover. The vision clearly shows that wickedness is well contained and that there is no danger of it escaping again to pollute the land.

In this vision, two flying women have wings like those of stork and they lift the basket up into the air.

These airborne women have the ‘wind in their wings’ as they carry the basket and its contents away. The wind here indicates motion driven by God Himself (cf. Psalm 18:10). Remember how we saw that **It is the Lord who is taking away all the wickedness of His people from in their midst.**

The basket is lifted up between heaven and earth and taken to “the country of Babylon”. It is to this place of Shinar that symbolically God causes all the wickedness of his people to be taken. Then a house is to be constructed to contain the basket of evil. Remember that the idea here is of a permanent place where wickedness will forever remain.

We know that it is the atoning work of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Thieves, liars, the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers can inherit the kingdom of God but ONLY when they come to Jesus Christ and accept that they have broken God’s perfect law.

Then, as they look into the fullness of God’s gracious banner of truth, the Bible, they see Christ! They see that there is a way of escape. As they come to Him and determine to strive and struggle not to succumb to their sinful desires because they want to please God and glorify Him in their bodies, then show that they have saving faith and therefore entrance into God’s Kingdom.

At a recent men’s conference, the keynote speaker was asked “what would you say to a man who is struggling with same sex attraction?” To which he simply answered something like “That’s very good!”. There was a stunned silence in the audience. “Good that he was struggling”.

Are you struggling with your sin? That’s very good. Keep looking at the standard of God’s law. Keep looking to Christ.

Here is part of our mission as a church:

To fly the banner of truth over this congregation and the world around us. To willingly befriend thieves, liars, the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers SO THAT we can point them to Jesus!

AMEN.