

**Sermon: 2019/12/18 (The Feast of of Sts. Rufus & Zosimus, Year A)
- Zechariah 3:1-10; Psalm 93; Revelation 4:1-8; &, Matthew
24:45-51 (KJV)_BTR**

[Saints Rufus and Zosimus were part of a group that were martyred by being fed to (wild) animals in the circus in Rome over a series of weeks and days at the end of 107 AD and the beginning of the following year. This happened under the direction of Caesar Trajan, a committed pagan. We know very little about them except the fact they were executed, which suggests they were deeply committed - *inspiring* - Christ-followers.]

Zechariah was one of the very last prophets - the second-to-last, in fact - to preach to the people of Israel before the *long* silence of the "Intertestamental Period" set in.

And, most unusually, he ministered *after* the national disaster which was the "Babylonian Exile."

But though he and some other Jews were, yes, back home (again), their troubles were *far* from over; and, indeed, continue down to our own day:

We see in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra how pitiful the living conditions of the returnees was:

for a good while the people lived in temporary, makeshift hovels and caves.

The Temple remained in ruins, somewhat, for decades too.

What had once been flourishing, bustling cities were ghost-towns - dens for jackals and foxes.

The so-called "Promised Land," which was supposed to be "flowing with milk and honey" - a place with inhabitants like the stars in the sky - was, in actuality, 'gloomy', depressing and lonely.^[n.1]

And *many* of Zechariah's contemporaries were "losing heart": losing *confidence* in their *ancestral* faith.

For earlier prophets - like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so forth, you see, had *explicitly* described a post-Exilic *dramatic* reversal of the Israelites' lamentable predicament, and the assumption was, widely speaking, that this "reversal" would be *immediate*. And yet nothing of the sort, evidently, transpired.

Why?!

Zechariah reassures his audience that his illustrious predecessors predictions

weren't faulty, only they had seen *much* farther ahead than perhaps even they themselves realized: to the *return* of the Messiah, and He - the Messiah - wouldn't come to work the re-shaping of creation - and restore David's lost kingdom in particular - until one other important thing had been achieved first.

What was that 'other' thing?

The extension of the opportunity of salvation to the Gentiles.

And *this* would happen, we see him describe - with unnerving accuracy no less, all at once on 'a single day.' (That's verse 10.)

His vision, in other words, was of the Cross;

Jesus' death.

That is the *true* watershed (of human history), after which *nothing* would ever be the same again.

That is the reason we're about to celebrate Christmas.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See: Faust, Avraham (2012), *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation*, Society of Biblical Literature.