

Then the Lord my God Will Come

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[0 : 00] There were several moments preparing the sermon when I almost gave up on Zechariah 14. I thought, we've had a lot of Zechariah, maybe I can get away with just going on to something else. And yet, it's a time, isn't it, to think, do we really believe what the Bible says about itself?

2 Timothy 3 says that all of Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness. So even a chapter like Zechariah 14, there's a story of a young guy taking a girl on a date to an art gallery full of some of the greatest masterpieces ever painted.

And he was trying to impress her. So to try and sort of show off to her, he started kind of pouring scorn on the paintings as they went by. You know, there was these Rembrandts and Turners and Vermeers and he was saying, oh, look at that one.

And the perspective's all wrong and look at that one, it's just that face isn't accurate and the colouring's all wrong on that one. And eventually, the curator couldn't stand it any longer and came up and said to him, tapped him on the shoulder and said, young man, you are viewing some of the finest pictures that have ever been painted.

They've endured through generations. They've caused the finest artists and the most perceptive art critics who've ever lived to gaze at them in wonder, sometimes even for weeks, literally.

[1 : 22] It's not these pictures that are on trial today. It is you, the viewer. Well, to a far greater extent, when we come to the Bible, there is the danger of us thinking, what do I make of this?

What useful thing does Zechariah 14 have to say to me? What do I make of it as though we're judging it? When, of course, what matters much more when we hear God's word is what does God think of us and how we react to it?

But it's hard, Zechariah 14. So let's pray. Let's ask God to help us as we look at it together.

Heavenly Father, for us in our fallenness and our limitations, this is a difficult part of your word this morning.

But, Father, we thank you that you are a father of great mercy. And we pray that you'll open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word.

That you'll give us the faith we need to trust what you've said about the future, strengthen the hope we have in the future you've planned. And we pray that that will overflow in love for you and for others.

[2 : 28] For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. As always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful. And it would help me if you could keep your Bibles open at Zechariah 14.

I don't know what shapes your decision-making in life today. Some of us are people who just live in the moment. We think, well, I just kind of see what today's going to throw at me. And I just respond. Spontaneous people. There's a bar called In Deep. I don't know if you know it. It's around the corner from here. Just on the riverside there, In Deep. And I cycle past it both ways each day on the way into St Silas during the week.

And one thing that amazes me about In Deep is if the weather is Dreek, there's no one there. But if it's sunny, the place is packed. You can't get your bike through because all these people spill out by the river and they're all drinking together in the evening.

And it's really nice to see people out like that. But it makes me think each time, where have these people come from? That their lives are planned in such a way that they can think, the weather's nice.

[3 : 30] I'm going to go for a drink at In Deep. None of those people have got three children under six. Because there is just no, I mean, to go to In Deep, we would have to plan that weeks in

advance. And if it was pouring down, we'd still be there because we planned it and there's no going back.

But some people are like that. They can live spontaneously. Maybe you're somebody who's a bit like that. Some of us make decisions that are based very much on our past and how we've lived previously.

If we've had a background that's been quite troubled, if things have happened to us that we wish hadn't happened, it can make us risk-averse and cautious. If we've had a background where we've been very successful in things that we've tried, we tend to be more of a risk-taker and think, yeah, you know, I can back myself that this will work out.

So we perhaps live based on things in the present. We live based on things in the past. But one of the things that should shape our decisions now is what's going to happen to us in the future.

And, of course, we saw an awful example of this in Italy ten days ago with the earthquake. Lots of people died. Many more homes were destroyed. And it took people completely by surprise what happened in Italy.

[4 : 40] And no doubt in the weeks and months that built up to that Tuesday evening, that Tuesday night, people would have been doing exactly the same kind of things that we do in Glasgow. Some people will have been redecorating their homes.

People will have been getting extensions, will have been getting a new kitchen, buying new white goods and that sort of thing. And then in one catastrophic event that they didn't know was coming, that all looks like a complete waste of time.

So it's vital, if we know what's coming in the future, to shape our lives today in light of what's going to happen. And in these last three chapters of Zechariah, God tells us about the future.

It was written for God's discouraged people in the 5th century BC to inspire them to live wholeheartedly for God. So as we're looking at it, we should be thinking, how does what Zechariah says here inspire me to live for God now?

And first of all, let's notice the head-exploding drama of God's plans. One of the reasons this is such a hard bit of the Bible to understand is it's a type of writing called apocalyptic.

[5 : 46] And I defined that a fortnight ago when I was speaking as apocalyptic writing is like a series of symbolic snapshots of the activity of the work of God. I don't know whether you've seen the adverts on the subway at the moment in Glasgow for the new 4DX cinema that's opened in Glasgow.

So the idea is with the cinema now that you don't just go and see something and hear it, but you can feel the wind and the rain, and your seat moves to give this impression that you're really part of things. And it's this kind of multidimensional, multisensory experience of what you go to watch.

Well, Zechariah didn't have the technology to do that for us, but in a way he kind of does that with the images that he gives us. He's throwing images at us that are meant to play with our emotions so that we really feel and sense something about the future.

That might not literally be true, but gives us an important response emotionally. So just look at verse 4 as an example of that. Verse 4. In verse 10.

What's going on?

[7 : 23] Well, the Araba was the Rift Valley, so that's the deep land. And what we're learning here is the mountains are being split open in this image. The land in the Middle East is being flattened down, but Jerusalem, that symbolizes the people of God, is standing firm.

Now, it's not literally a prediction of what's going to happen, but what God is describing, we can't imagine. Our previous experience of the world, of our lives, of what's going on in history, cannot prepare us for what's coming, so Zechariah just throws extraordinary pictures at us.

The writer Barry Webb says this about this moment in Zechariah. It's as though the entire Old Testament scriptures, as Zechariah knew them, are being ransacked for images and languages to express the wonder of what is happening at this climactic moment.

This is language stretched to breaking point to describe what is indescribable. And Zechariah helps us see that in verse 7. I don't know if you noticed that, but he says in verse 7, it will be a unique day.

That's the point. Zechariah is describing here primarily the day Jesus returns in glory and majesty. And it's going to be nothing like anything we've experienced so far.

[8 : 39] And it's just important for us to reflect, I think, on what a big view of God that gives us. That God is promising he's going to do something in the future that if he was actually to tell us literally

what it would be like, we would be incapable of understanding it.

And maybe there's a point there that we just need to ask ourselves, are we limiting that same God in what he wants to do in our lives today? Are there things that this God might want us to do for him as part of his plan for our lives that we write off because we think, no, God would never ask me to do that.

It's just so out of my comfort zone. Would we dismiss something that God might have planned for us as too challenging when actually we need to remember that God's plans for the future are head exploding?

That's the kind of God that we follow. So it's head exploding. But it's also, it is horrific. And we have to face up to that. That's our second point, the horror of God's victory.

Most of us here, I take it, don't know what it's like to be in a city that gets sacked. But the people of Israel did know that. A couple of generations previously, their city had been besieged and destroyed.

[9 : 51] And that's the language Zechariah chose to use to describe the end times, the nature of the world for God's people before Jesus returns in glory.

And we see that at its worst in verse 2. Verse 2, I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it. The city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped.

It's awful. Again, it's not literal. It's not literally what's going to happen in the future. And yet the Bible is clear that all over the world today, God is restraining evil.

That for us as fallen people, our hearts naturally are bent on disobeying God and turning away from him, and on wickedness. And all over the world, even among people who are not Christians and don't acknowledge God, the reason that there's still such goodness in the world is simply that God restrains our desires.

He restrains evil. In the world. And there are moments, and there will be moments, when God takes the restraints off, and he lets people, he gives them over, in effect, he hands them over to what they want without him.

[11 : 05] And so we see people rage against God and rage against his will and rage against his people. We've become more aware of that, really, haven't we, in Britain, in the last couple of years, as news of the persecuted church worldwide has got better.

It's got more accurate. We're more aware of how Christians are being treated around the world. And we might be thinking, how can this be right? What's written here, what we see in the world, how can a good God allow this?

Now, we're going to tackle that question in a month's time. In this series, we're starting in the evening, second Sunday of each month, big questions. Next month, in October, we're going to look at how could a good God allow suffering?

So you might want to come to that, and you might want to bring a friend to that. We're not given the answer here in Zechariah, but I think it's worth just saying this. We have to let God be God. And as soon as you allow your God to be an all-good, all-powerful God, who's an all-knowing God, we have to accept that there might be reasons why he would allow something to happen that we do not know or understand.

As soon as you've allowed God to be big enough to be all-good and all-powerful and all-knowing, we have to let him be big enough and trust him that there might be reasons why he'd allow horrible things to happen with his eternal plan for the greater good that we could just never understand.

[12 : 34] So it makes you shudder reading this, but will we trust him? And I hope even that there might be a way we find verse 2 reassuring.

Reassuring in this way. If awful things are happening to you in your life today, it is not evidence, it is not evidence that you have fallen out of God's family or out of God's favour.

It is not evidence that God has lost control. It is just evidence that you are living in a world where people are raging against God and that desperately needs God's intervention.

intervention. But that intervention is going to come and that's what we see in verse 3. The very next verse, verse 3. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as he fights on a day of battle.

So I don't know what your default picture is of God, but this is God, the heroic warrior, coming to fight, coming to fight for his people to protect every one of us who has put our trust in him.

[13 : 42] And the judgment that he then brings on the people who stood against him and done these horrific acts is described horribly in verse 12.

This is the plague with which the law will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh will rot while they're still standing on their feet. Their eyes will rot in their sockets and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

Now the Bible uses extremely strong, horrible language like this about the judgment of God. It reassures us that the judgment is just. God is fair. Nobody, when God judges, will be thinking this was too harsh.

It will be shown to be just and good. But the Bible speaks of it like this to warn us so that we will take shelter from that coming judgment because God has provided a way out for anybody.

The radically inclusive message is that anybody can avoid this judgment. We've seen that already in Zechariah. We saw it two weeks ago. One of the reasons I wanted to preach Zechariah is because it strengthens my faith.

[14 : 47] For my money, one of the reasons I'm a Christian is just the awesome way that promises made about Jesus before he came were so incredibly and accurately fulfilled.

And we've seen that in Zechariah writing in the 5th century BC making promises about Jesus coming that you just couldn't make up. You just couldn't have made this up. And I hope your faith has been strengthened by that as we've looked at that.

One of the things that Zechariah was promised is that a man will come who is a spirit-filled priest-king and he'll be a gentle king who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And that this anointed one who's the Christ will be called the branch because he's going to reign over the whole world. His reign will branch out. But he will be struck by people and when he's struck God says they will look on me the one whom they have pierced.

So the only way for that to be fulfilled is for a man to come into the world who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey who is fully God and fully man as Jesus was so that when he is struck down on the cross it is God who is being pierced.

[15 : 57] And the effect of that death was described for us in chapter 13 verse 1 wonderfully. We'll just look back at that. Chapter 13 verse 1 On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

You see that tremendous invitation. Yes there's this awful judgment coming on the world. Come and be washed. Any of you anyone here today who has not yet made faith in Jesus your own Jesus says come and be washed.

There is a fountain ready to clean you so that you stand right with God and have nothing to fear from the future. How is that fountain able to spring up?

Well all of our lives we've taken God's place. We've stood in God's way. We've taken God's position in our lives. So we've taken God's place. And the way the fountain got opened is because God was willing to come into the world and take our place and take the wrap that we deserved for what we've done wrong so that this fountain of cleansing is on offer to you and me.

So as we read this horror of God's coming victory please accept the offer to be washed clean if you haven't already and please be ready to tell others of that fountain so that they can avoid this dreadful day of judgment.

[17 : 27] And passages like this they are a great reminder to us aren't they that we're not messing about here as Christians. That this really really matters. Being a Christian isn't just like your gym membership or your cycling hobby or your wine club membership.

No this really matters. I think of a friend Aaron who I was at church with in London and I was sort of ambitiously going on with my legal career and I remember Aaron being offered a promotion that other people in his workplace really wanted and he decided to turn it down because he felt he wouldn't be able to do that and still lead a home group at church and also he had in terms of the time commitment he felt he couldn't be a good and godly husband lead a home group and do that. Now what does the world think when Aaron makes a decision like that? The world thinks that is completely nuts but what does God think? Well Zechariah 14 says spot on Aaron because this really matters it really matters and yet in the midst of the horror as well there is wonderful hope in Zechariah 14 you might not believe it with the verses we've just read but Zechariah is sometimes called the prophet of hope and we're going to see that so that's our third point the hope of God's recreation so there's this plague on the nations in verse 15 but look at verse 16 then the survivors

from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the king the Lord almighty and to celebrate the festival of tabernacles well that festival was an Old Testament festival for God's people and it was a time of great rejoicing at the harvest it was a bit like our harvest festivals and what we're seeing here is it's a picture of the great rejoicing and happiness when Jesus comes as the king of glory but the harvest isn't of wheat or food it's of people from every nation being drawn in to worship the king in joy together and verses 8 and 9 take us to the real heart of that joy and that hope that we'll enjoy verse 8 on that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea in summer and in winter it's such a good picture because Jerusalem had been under siege and the big problem for Jerusalem when it was under siege was how do you get water in now we're being told there's a picture of God's people

Jerusalem the day will come when living water will flow out and people will live forever because of this water of course a picture that Jesus took up in John chapter 4 we read of him going to a well he meets a woman coming to the well Samaritan woman he asks her for a drink he says to her if you knew who was asking you you would have asked me for a drink and then he says this whoever he says you would have asked me for living water he uses that exact phrase living water whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst indeed the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life when we gather for the future as Jesus returns he will be that source of life and abundance and it goes on in verse 9 the Lord will be king over the whole earth on that day there will be one Lord and his name the only name it's a picture of restoration that's how humanity started in a garden of pleasure and goodness with God's name being the only name that was worshipped and one day

God will recreate things and put right everything that's gone wrong the sad things will come untrue when Jesus returns and we know all of this will happen when Jesus comes in glory the New Testament takes up that language again of the name of Jesus the risen Jesus has been given the name that's above every name and at that name every knee will bow he is the one that will recognise as Lord it's going to be a wonderful day and a wonderful eternity with him and what will we be like as we share that future with King Jesus well that's how Zechariah ends we've seen the hope of God's recreation or restoration but finally look at the holiness of God's people I don't know about you but when I read the last two verses of Zechariah I thought it was a really strange way to end you wouldn't have guessed that Zechariah would finish what he said talking about saucepans but have a look at verses 20 and 21 with me on that day holy to the Lord will be inscribed on the bells of the horses and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them and on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty seems strange but what's being described here is hugely significant those words holy to the Lord used to be inscribed in one place among God's people they were on the breastplate of the high priest and they were words that were preserved for the most sacred activity among God's people in the temple the high priest one man holy to the Lord and what we're being told here is one day that inscription could be on everything the secular the ordinary as well as the sacred temple activity because everything is now going to be holy everything is done for God and set apart for him so the horses bells the cooking pots the ordinary things of life set apart for God and I wonder if this is an encouragement to any of you here that it means the new creation the picture we're getting here is it's not going to be one endless church service you know maybe that would put you off wanting to go to the new creation no it's going to be this world put right and one of the marks of that is that the whole of our lives will be devoted to God gladly that's the point about the Canaanite mentioned there as well the Canaanites were living in God's land but they weren't living for God and God's saying there'll be people from every nation there but all living for God's glory living their lives as an act of worship to him the angel in Revelation 11 announces it like this he says the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever that's the future and we're left with that vision by Zechariah of the future so that we as Jesus people today are spurred on to live like that now it is all too easy isn't it to think of church activity as the sacred thing and then everything else we do through life as less significant than that but that is sub-Christian thinking the truth is that we go out from here ready to worship God in our everyday lives just as much as we've worshipped him as we've gathered together our act of worship is doing everything for God's glory so when we're washing the dishes at home we're worshipping God just as much as when we're singing together and it's when we live

and work like that that people see the power of a transformed life for God so with us not having [25 : 11] Youth Zone on this morning some of our secondary school guys are in here and let me just apply this to you for the moment teenagers but for the rest of us to think about how it would work for us I heard of a some of you have been on youth camps and I heard of a leader of a youth camp who's very experienced who when someone becomes a Christian on his camp he used to say to them tell your youth leader at church tell somebody at church but don't tell your parents sounds strange but he used to say don't tell them let them see the difference in you when you stop arguing with your brother about what's on TV when you start doing the washing up without being nagged when you volunteer to help with the city mission instead of playing FIFA soccer when they see a bible on your bedside table live it out and they will ask you what's happened what happened in the summer that's the power of true worship of being able to say because I've become a Christian my whole life is now marked holy to the Lord everything I do so as I said at the beginning what most affects your way of life is it just living for today is it do you live your life based on what's happened in the past or is it that your eyes are firmly fixed on the future that God has promised

I'll just finish with a story one man who did that was a man called Anthony Ashley Cooper the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury he was led to faith by his maid when he was 9 years old and he as a social reformer to our nation his legacy included the Shaftesbury Society Shaftesbury Homes the Church Pastoral Aid Society the Bible Society the Association for the Disabled the London City Mission the YMCA and the YWCA he was in parliament and in parliament he spearheaded the reform of the Lunacy Acts to transform the way we cared for the mentally ill in our society he was deeply concerned about child labour so he introduced the Children's 10 Hour Working Bill the Chimney Sweeps Bill the Colliery Bill that took children and women out of the mines he introduced the Education Act that made state education obligatory for all he knew that lots of the children were working so he set up the Ragged Schools Movement so that they had schools outside of their working hours because he dreamed of a nation where everybody could learn to read and write he changed our whole country one man and one of the writers about him

Georgina Batiscombe said this she said no man has ever done more to lessen the extent of human misery or to add to the sum total of human happiness he was so influential he was given a state funeral when he died in London and his biographer Gordon Pollock says this the slums of London seem to have converged on Westminster Abbey in a spontaneous mourning such as England had never seen as one poor man exclaimed our earl has gone God Almighty knows he loved us and we loved him we shall not see his life again well how did one man do all of that he told us just before he died he said this I do not think that in the last 40 years I have lived one conscious hour that has not been influenced by the thought of our Lord's return well that is Zechariah living and it just makes me wonder what could we do together as a group of people if we let our lives be shaped by what God promises in the future let's pray together

Father God we recognise that you are the majestic king we praise you and acknowledge your authority to reign and to rule and to judge and we thank you that you are a God who protects and fights for your people we thank you for the hope that you give us for the future that one day evil will be crushed that Jesus will be acknowledged as king by the world and that we will live forever with lives set apart in worship to you and so we pray heavenly father that you'll help us to keep our eyes fixed on that future and where you are taking your world that we might be more useful to you today as our lives are shaped by that and we bring glory to you in Jesus name Amen we're going to pray together