

“See, your king comes to you”

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[0 : 00] So at St. Silas, we've been in this quite mysterious book, Zechariah, in a series. He was a prophet, so a messenger from God to his people around 500 BC.

It's about 500 years before Jesus came. And this morning, we start the next section of Zechariah, which is chapters 9 to 14. It actually gets more difficult to understand, believe it or not.

And yet, in some ways, you might feel more important because these five chapters of the Old Testament are the most quoted section of the Old Testament by the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, when it came to them explaining for us what Jesus was doing when he died on the cross.

So we've got to work at this to enrich our understanding and to build our relationship with God because the Gospel writers were so keen that we understood what Jesus was doing through the lens of Zechariah.

But there are two things that make Zechariah difficult for us to understand today, or at least two. And one of them is that Zechariah collapses history. He's looking ahead at everything that's going to happen between his time and the end of the world, and he doesn't describe it like a textbook would.

[1 : 17] It's more like he's erected a big cinema screen, and he's just throwing up images for us of the things that are going to happen. So we're not meant to sort of scrutinize it and go, oh, well, that will happen then, and then that will happen then.

No, we're just meant to marvel at the future that God has in store. The second thing that makes Zechariah hard for us is that he uses the past to describe the future.

So he's talking about the future and how God will bring a great victory in the future over people who stand against him. But to describe that future war and victory, he uses battles that Israel had previously fought before.

Hopefully that will help us as we look at what's going on this morning. So it's worth thinking before God, how are you feeling about the news this week as we come to Zechariah 9?

And as I said, some people here may be feeling excited, may be feeling happy. Lots of us may be feeling frightened. Just, it's not long ago that we were reeling from this horrific murder of the MP, Joe Cox.

[2 : 30] And amidst the tragedy, lots of people were talking about the dangers in our society of far-right extremism, we're concerned and yet we feel, in some ways, personally powerless about that.

Then we've had this referendum. It's gone against what many of us expected. And for many of us, then, the future feels uncertain. The volatility in the stock market shows us that, doesn't it? We've got these huge, looming uncertainties now about the future for Scotland, the UK, Northern Ireland, the European Union, and there are implications for our jobs and our homes and our futures. Well, Zechariah chapter 9 was written for God's people at a time of far worse insecurity than that. As I thought about on Friday what to preach about, I thought about whether to change and depart from the current series, to pick something else.

But Zechariah 9 should speak really relevantly to us in this, because God's people were feeling really insecure. They were surrounded by powerful enemies. They lived around Jerusalem at that time.

[3 : 38] They were poor. They were vulnerable. And God lifted their spirits. And he did it by showing them his big plan. And that's what we need to hear this morning.

We need to hear what God's big plan is so that we rest secure in that whatever's going on. If we are fixing our hope on God's future that he promises here, we'll gladly devote ourselves to serving him

today, whatever the economic and political climate looks like.

Now, chapter 9 naturally breaks up into three. If everybody around you is losing their heads this week over Brexit, here are three things that every Christian can do.

The first one is keep your eyes fixed on your protecting king. In verses 1 to 6, God lists some of the nations and cities that had given Israel a terrible time in their history.

So have a look at verse 1. The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus. The message there is that God stands against the nations who are committing evil.

[4 : 49] And in the verses, as he mentions place after place, he moves from the far north, further away from Jerusalem, where God's people lived, gradually further in towards where they would have been feeling more in danger.

And God brings judgment in his promises. So it's important to say, this is about people living at that time. If you look at verse 5, it mentions the Philistines who'd stood against God and his people for centuries.

They'd shown themselves to be against the living God. But in verse 5, it also mentions Gaza. So it's got nothing to do with Gaza today. It's about the Philistines who lived in Gaza at that time and how they treated God.

The vital point that's being made is that God is powerful. He knows exactly what's going on in the world. The prophets were very clear about that.

And Jesus was very clear about that. That God protects his people now and that a day is coming when the world will be put right. And that will include a day when people are held to account for how they've treated God and one another.

[6 : 01] We need to remember that as good news when we feel powerless to change things in the world today. If we keep our eyes fixed on this God and this future, we can be steady.

Be steady. And I guess lots of us find this idea hard, don't we? We find the idea of God coming in judgment hard. We know people who don't trust in Jesus today who would stand outside of his kingdom.

But even against those nations around Israel who treated God's people so horribly, as God speaks against them, there is a great word of grace here. I don't know if you noticed it, even in the conquest.

Anyone can turn back to God, anybody, before it's too late. Just look at the end of verse 7.

Describing the nations around Israel, those who are left will belong to our God and become a clan in Judah.

And Ekron will be like the Jebusites. Well, Ekron was, again, describing people who weren't among God's people. The Jebusites had been a group of Canaanites when God's people entered the promised land.

[7 : 12] And in David's time, they got incorporated into God's family. They became part of God's people. That's an offer open to anybody from these nations in verses 1 to 7.

And it's still open today to anybody in Glasgow. Turn back to God through Jesus Christ and become one of his people so that these promises of judgment give you nothing to fear and are a word of hope.

And what does that mean for the, well, what does the coming of this warrior king actually look like? This warrior God who's going to make sure that things are right for his people.

Well, have a look at the picture of protection for his people in verse 8. He says, But I will encamp at my temple to guard it against marauding forces.

Never again will an oppressor overrun my people. For now, I am keeping watch. There's this great contrast between verse 1 and verse 8 and the watching.

[8 : 14] In verse 1, For the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord. So the warrior God comes and the whole world is watching God, anticipating what's God going to do as the mighty God comes in judgment.

And then incredibly, in verse 8, God tells us where he's looking. As he arrives at the door of his temple, he is watching his people with eyes determined to see them protected and secure. Just imagine if you met Barack Obama. I guess one of the most powerful men in the world. Perhaps the most powerful man in the world. And imagine that there's a crowd around him, security, paparazzi, journalists, and you've managed to get right near the front.

And you're seeing Barack Obama and everyone's eyes are on him and he turns and he looks at you. He fixes his eyes on you and he says, I've got your back.

I'm watching you. From now on, I'm going to use everything in my power to make sure you are protected and things work best for you. It would be unthinkable for that to happen.

[9 : 22] But what is being described here is far greater than that. One far more powerful than Barack Obama. So take that with you this week. You'll talk to people who will feel that the near future looks bleak, that it's frightening as we see what's going on in the news, that it's unstable as politicians resign and implode.

When you hear that and when you read about that, remind yourself of these promises that the Lord, our God, is good. He is just. He's a conquering warrior and he's keeping watch over you.

We shouldn't be anxious. But how will the Lord do this conquering that's being described? Well, that brings us to our second point.

This week, when your friends and everybody in your office is losing their heads about the news, keep rejoicing in your unlikely hero. Keep rejoicing in your unlikely hero.

Just have a look at verse 9 and the way God will do all that he's announced. It's shockingly unlikely. Verse 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

[10 : 30] Shout, daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation. gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So how is this king going to make his people feel? They're going to rejoice. We should feel joy about this king. And what's he like? Well, he is a righteous king.

Do you see that? He is righteous. We know as a nation that that's what we need. David Cameron's resignation means we'll be looking for a new leader this year for the United Kingdom.

And we'll all have different ideas about what that leader should be like. But we also know from the unfolding plan of the Bible that that's what we as God's people need.

Just the other day I started looking at what I'm preaching on next Sunday evening at St. Silas as we continue our evening series in Genesis. And right there at the end of Genesis is this promise God will provide a righteous king for his people.

[11 : 36] It runs like a thread through the Bible through the Old Testament. God's people need a righteous king. God will provide that king that they need. And here he has promised a king whom God is right behind.

See, your king comes to you. And most shockingly he is a gentle king. He comes with this scandalous humility. I mean, coming off the back of verses 1 to 8 and this warrior God it's not what we're expecting, is it?

We're expecting a bit of brave heart, aren't we? You know, we want a sort of muscular leader with a blue painted face around here to come and bring this victory that God promises. You know, Ashton Carter is the current U.S. Secretary of State for Defense.

Just imagine if Ashton Carter went out to visit the U.S. Air Force in the Middle East and he rode in on a micro scooter. It would be absurd.

People would be embarrassed that that happened. We want him to be a symbol of strength, perhaps even to be a bit frightening. But not this king, not God's king.

[12 : 43] He arrives on a colt. Come on God, just give us something, even just a little horse or something. No, not even a grown-up donkey.

A colt. And that's because his arrival teaches us about the kind of king he is. he is gentle and he comes to serve his people.

But he's not weak. He is not weak. Have a look at verse 10. It begins with him taking the weapons of war away in three goals. Verse 10. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem and the battle ball will be broken.

Then three matching statements about the new world order he will bring. he will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

So let's just look at John's account of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. It's in John chapter 12. It'll come on the screen. John says this. The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

[13 : 59] They took palm branches and went out to meet him shouting Hosanna which means save. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel.

Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. As it is written do not be afraid daughter Zion see your King is coming seated on a donkey's colt.

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

let me ask if you're here and you're still thinking about who Jesus is you're still trying to make up your mind about whether to become a Christian what do you make of that?

That a real man 2,000 years ago on a real day walked along well came up a real dusty road into the real city of Jerusalem and deliberately fulfilled this promise and hundreds more besides some of which he had no control over.

[15 : 05] Do you see what Jesus was saying to you and me? He was saying I'm the one through whom the living God will keep the promises he made in Zechariah. Clearly Jesus thought that of himself.

Now we're accustomed to thinking of Jesus as a personal saviour whom you can encounter personally he's interested in you as an individual when he comes into your life he forgives your sin and he restores you to a relationship with God that lasts forever and that is wonderfully true he is a personal saviour.

He is also far more than that. One day he's going to bring a whole new world order. He will reign over everything. And some of us don't like the idea of an all powerful ruler because we see power so badly abused in the world today.

But do you see the character of this king? This king is a kind king. His riding on a donkey isn't just a one-off statement. No, he did it to epitomize his matchless character.

Jesus lived out what it means to be a king who rides on the fall of a donkey. A servant king. A foot washing king. A king who came to take the darkness in our world away by doing the only thing he could do and bearing it himself.

[16 : 24] And again we need to remember that this week in a nation that will feel in turmoil. that will feel divided. Lots of people saying this week we're a very divided nation.

But you and I we've got the king that we need. And the people around us need this king. For what does this king bring to his people if they will recognize him?

Well have a look at verse 10 in Zechariah 9. Verse 10. God's king proclaims peace. He will proclaim peace to the nations.

It's that big Bible word shalom. Shalom is about flourishing. It's about our souls being at rest because we know God and we're in a right relationship with God.

Shalom is what God made us for and it's what everyone is searching for all around us. They of course wouldn't call it shalom but the flourishing and the soul rest that people need our king proclaims.

[17 : 27] He is the only man who can bring shalom. So this week we'll be surrounded by many people who will feel sad but we can rejoice in our king. This summer as you head away on your holidays many of you have got holidays booked will you rejoice in your king?

You might feel that you really need a break. You might feel you really need a break from your job. You might feel you really need a break from your city, from Glasgow. Well take a break but don't take a break from your king.

He is your source of shalom. So keep your eyes fixed on your protecting king and keep rejoicing in your unlikely hero. And our third point this morning keep serving your transforming God.

Notice that the section starts with liberation in verse 11. As for you because of the blood of my covenant with you I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

I don't know whether you've thought about that image of a waterless pit. I think it's about as bad an image as you could get. And yet it's a picture here of life without God. And God liberates us from that slavery.

[18 : 42] How? Well he says doesn't he it's because of the blood of his covenant. Jesus roared into Jerusalem that day knowing that he was going there.

He set his face towards it to shed his own blood to buy our freedom. Now after that verses 12 to 18 of Zechariah 9 they're a bit like the first eight verses.

They describe a conquest but there's a key difference and it's that we're involved now as God's people. Instead of God just acting for his people he now uses them to achieve his purposes.

So in verse 13 Judah and Ephraim are the names for God's people here. Judah and Ephraim so they're like the Christians of the day. Verse 13 I will bend Judah as I bend my ball and fill it with Ephraim.

Verse 14 Then the Lord will appear over them his arrow will flash like lightning. Verse 15 And the Lord Almighty will shield them they will destroy and overcome with sling stones.

[19 : 47] See what's going on? God is calling his people to arms here to serve our great king who's coming. But the key for us is that this is a spiritual battle. It's a fight against the evil in our world confronting it with good.

In Colossians chapter 1 in the New Testament it explains that you could divide the whole world into two dominions two spheres of authority. There's the dominion of darkness where God is rejected and there's the kingdom of the sun the kingdom of light the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Christ and there is a spiritual war going on in the world today. There's a cosmic battle for people's souls and the kingdom of God advances whenever somebody turns to Jesus Christ.

The kingdom doesn't grow unless somebody recognizes that Jesus is their king. That's how you build the kingdom. But whenever we share Christ and someone puts their faith in him the kingdom advances in the spiritual battle.

And in that struggle today against darkness we don't follow the example of a brutal warrior. We follow the example of a gentle king. A servant leader.

[20 : 58] So we fight with weapons of love and humility and self-control because of what he is like. We're not marked by anger. We're marked by joy because we've seen that we have a righteous king.

We're not marked by forcefulness. We're marked by gentleness because he came to serve. We're marked by truth. By speaking truth about him because he is the truth.

And it is a fight to live like that. The reason this language is used of warfare is that it is a battle every day to live for Jesus in the world. We should expect that there will be ways this week that all of us you and me will feel under tremendous pressure to give way to sin.

To turn against God. That's the battlefield. For example you might find that you're at work and you realize some one has gossiped about you or they've slagged you off. And the temptation is to respond sinfully to sin.

But God challenges us to confront wrongdoing with good and love. We follow the example of our gentle king. And as we do that we might not be greatly admired by the world around us.

[22 : 09] But the chapter finishes with a glorious picture of what God thinks of us when we do that. He says look at where I'm taking you. It's as if he points at a mountain in the distance and says if you stick with Jesus this is where you will be one day.

At the top of that mountain. Look at verse 16. The Lord their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.

How attractive and beautiful they will be. Grain will make the young men thrive and new wine the young women. I don't know if you've ever been to see the honours of Scotland the crown jewels at Edinburgh Castle.

I think I've got a picture for our screen of those. Hordes of people go to see them every year.

Priceless jewels. Just imagine of course it could never happen but imagine if it was announced one year that at Edinburgh Castle there was they weren't just going to put on an exhibition of the honours of Scotland.

They could put on an exhibition of the honours of heaven. God's crown jewels. Well everyone in the world would come to Edinburgh to see that. The God who made the stars is going to exhibit the most beautiful things he has made.

[23 : 35] Well God says in Zechariah 9 that one day he will have an exhibition like that and it will be of us. Of people like you and me. Because the sovereign God is transforming us as we grow more like Jesus Christ.

So that in the new creation we will sparkle like jewels in a crown. Sparkling not just because we've been airbrushed on the outside like a picture of a model but because we look like Jesus on the inside.

We're full of love for other people. We don't want to sin anymore. Just think about that next time you walk past Argyle Arcade in Glasgow or an Ernest Jones jewellery shop or perhaps somebody shows you their engagement ring.

God's people will sparkle in his land. That's our future. That's where he's taking us. That's what he's working on today in us. And if we stick with Jesus he'll get us there.

So God gives us a great purpose here no matter what gets thrown at us this week. Serve me God says live for me put me first and let me transform you in ways that will be for your good.

[24 : 51] So Zechariah gives us this new perspective to take into this week. We can have peace about the future. We have great promises of victory and protection from a great God.

Keep your eyes fixed on him. We've seen again our unlikely hero. We've seen him in history. We've seen him in our own lives. Our gentle king righteous and bringing peace.

Rejoice in him. And we have a purpose. We've got a job to do. We keep serving our transforming God so that he can use us to advance his kingdom and transform us so that we sparkle like jewels. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you speak to us in our turbulence, that you are steadfast and our times are in your hands.

we thank you that your promises of a day of judgment are good news for our world, for they will bring the end of evil. We thank you for your grace in those promises that anyone can turn to you.

[26 : 09] We thank you for sending our great king, the Lord Jesus. And Father, we pray that by your spirit in us, you will enable us to rejoice in him this week and to join you in the spiritual struggle to draw others to faith in him.

We pray, Father, that in this unsettling period in our nation, many will be brought to seek the peace that only Jesus proclaims and can bring.

In his name we pray. Amen.