

"On that day" - How to Keep Going

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, St. Silas. Thanks, Malcolm, for reading. And it'd be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Zechariah 12 and 13. As always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet as well, if you'd like to see where we're going this morning.

There's a lot happening, isn't there? There were a lot of announcements, but it's exciting at the start of a new term in kind of school life thinking to have a lot going on in the next few weeks. Next week, we've got a visiting speaker, the Bishop of Blackburn.

So a bishop from England is coming up. He's my old bishop, so I wanted to come and support the ministry here. And he's terrific. Bishops in general can be variable. He is a terrific bishop.

And it would be great to come and support Julian and hear from him next week as he comes and preaches and celebrates the Lord's Supper with us. Now, if you're here for the first time, we're coming very near now to the end of a series we've had in this book Zechariah.

And it's an important book in the Bible, but it is hard work to understand because it's a style of writing called apocalyptic. And you could think of apocalyptic writing like this.

[1 : 0 7] It's like a series of symbolic snapshots of the work of God. It's not giving precise details of what God's going to do. It's more like a load of different ideas and images being projected onto a screen or looking at some Instagram images, but not quite knowing what order they're going to come in.

So let's pray. Let's ask God to help us as we look at what Zechariah is promising for us today. Father in heaven, we thank you so much that your love moved you to send your son, Jesus Christ, into our world to make yourself known to us and to save us.

Father, he taught us that the Old Testament were the scriptures that testify about him. And we long to see him. And so we pray that this morning, by your spirit, you will open our eyes to see Jesus in this text and change our hearts that we could respond rightly to him.

For we ask this in his name. Amen. Well, I put a heading at the start of the notice sheet there. Zechariah is at Clash in Dougal. Kathy and I have been on a couple of holidays at this place up in the Cairngorms National Park called Clash in Dougal.

And it's a farmhouse. Now, from the farmhouse, you can look down at this... It's on like a hillside. And you see you have this view all around you. And the mountains are one part of that view.

[2 : 4 9] So you can sort of focus with your eyes on the mountains. And you can see the Cairngorms National Park, the Cairngorm Mountain Range. And because of where you're standing, you can look at the mountain peaks and you kind of describe them as if they're all the same place.

So you might say, there's snow on the mountains today. There'll be good skiing on the mountains today. If you took the Funicular Railway, you could get up the mountains. But of course, if you drive the 40 minutes from Clash in Dougal to the Cairngorm Mountain and the other mountains in that range, you would know very clearly that they're very different places.

You'd be on one mountain and you'd know that the next mountain along is a completely different place. It feels very far from you. And yet from Clash in Dougal, they all look like the same place.

And you'd describe them as one. What's true of us in terms of that kind of perspective on space is true of Zechariah about time as he looks ahead.

He's writing in 500 BC. And I don't know whether you noticed the repeated word as we had it read for us. On that day, we had that expression, that repeated expression, on that day.

[4 : 00] Chapter 12, verse 3, on that day. Verse 4, on that day. Verse 6, on that day. Verse 8, on that day. Verse 9, on that day.

Verse 11, if you go on to chapter 13, verse 1, on that day. Verse 2, on that day. And it's there in verse 4 as well. So God is clearly pointing his people to the future and what he's going to do.

But he describes it from Zechariah's perspective as though it's all happening at the same time. And it's as though we live, not at Clash in Dougal, but on the mountain range.

In that we're now part of that future. And when you read Zechariah, some of the promises that are made to happen on that day have already happened now. They happened when Jesus died on the cross.

That's the center point of human history as he died on the cross. Some of the promises we read about in Zechariah are happening right now as we live the Christian life and we see that God is establishing his kingdom in the world today as people put their trust in Jesus.

[5 : 06] And yet we're also waiting for a future day when Jesus comes in glory. And on that day, a lot of these promises will be finally fulfilled.

I hope that just helps us understand what's going on as we look at these promises. We're not there to go, well, hang on, is there one day when all this happens? No, some of them are spread out over the future as Zechariah looks forward.

But why do we need to focus on the future? Again, just thinking about mountains or hills in my experience. We've got our two oldest girls now are old enough to go on a walk with us when we're on holiday.

We were in the Lake District in the summer for a week. And we'll set out on a walk. We'll sort of pick a hill and try and get up a hill. And our youngest girl will go in the backpack and the other two will set off with us.

And we'll look for bugs and sticks to kind of keep them occupied on the way. But they tire. So after about an hour, optimistically, or sometimes 10 minutes, they will start to get discouraged because they can see the uphill direction and they don't appear to be anywhere near the top of the hill.

[6 : 17] So what we do is we pack a good packed lunch so that when they start whining, I will say, lunch at the top. Let's keep going.

There's lunch at the top. Now, Zechariah was given for us as Christians to give us encouragement to keep going in the Christian life.

As I said, it was written about 500 years before Jesus came. God's people were living in a land around Jerusalem, the city as it then was, and they were discouraged. They didn't want to keep going.

And God raises up Zechariah to encourage them to put God first and live for him. And that's really important for us today because living as a Christian today can be discouraging.

It's perhaps worth just asking yourself, what do you find discouraging in your life today? Especially if you're a Christian, what do you find discouraging as a Christian? Lots of us have questions we'd love to ask God and they're often about things that we feel discouraged by.

[7 : 23] We might want to say to God, why is this happening to me? Why did this not happen to me? God, if you're really for me, then why am I single?

Or why did my marriage go like it did? Or another key relationship? Or my working life, my job? And so it goes on. We might ask God, why do I get so much stick for being a Christian?

Why do I feel as though you're not very near me so that living for you seems like such a battle? And in Zechariah here, it's as though God is our good father and he sees us struggling on our journey through life, up the mountain, and he says, keep going.

Lunch at the top. Let me tell you what's coming so that you can keep going through what you face. As you look ahead, God says, first of all, on that day, you will win thanks to God's power.

That comes in the first nine verses of chapter 12 and they're summarized at the end of that little section in verse nine. If you just have a look again. Verse nine, on that day, I will set out to destroy all the nations that attacked Jerusalem.

[8 : 45] Now Jerusalem here isn't the city that you'd find on a map today. It's God's people. It's a way of describing God's people. And verses one to nine describe a great war between God's people and everyone who stands against them.

It reminds us that spiritually, the great dividing line across humanity today and through the ages is about how people respond to Jesus Christ. Jesus said, whoever is not for me is against me.

But on top of that, this little section in Zechariah, it's using the language of physical war to describe spiritual warfare. Because the Bible is clear that as well as there being a good God and good spiritual beings, angels, there is a spiritual evil one, the devil.

And there is demonic opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. And we need to remember that, that that's going on today. We especially need to remember if there are encouragements at St. Silas.

I'm encouraged by things going on at St. Silas. I have conversations with people who talk about how moved they are by God's love for them, about how much they are enjoying getting to know God better, thinking on what Jesus has done for them.

[10 : 03] Now we should expect, if we are seeing evidence that God is at work by his spirit here, that we will see spiritual opposition to that. Satan would love to divide us within.

He would love to undermine us and what we are trying to do for each other and for the city. He would love to tempt us into scandal and to ramp up the opposition that we face.

That's the spiritual battle that we are in. But God gives us great assurance here that it is his church that will last. There is great language for us here, isn't there?

I don't know whether you noticed. In verse 4, he says, I will keep a watchful eye over Judah. God's watchful eye is on his church. In verse 8, the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem.

And how will he do that? Well, the victory comes through his church. Look at that in verses 2 and 3. In verse 2, God says, I'm going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling.

[11 : 09] Verse 3, On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for the nations. And then the New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is a stone, a rock, in two different ways.

One is that he is the foundation stone or cornerstone on which the church is built. But Jesus Christ is also, for people who reject him, he's a stone that makes them stumble.

It's as though you stumble over him because you don't respond rightly to God's messenger. So we tell others about Jesus Christ and the Lord uses those efforts in the spiritual battle going on in the world today as he draws people into the church.

God uses the message about Jesus either to save if they respond as God wants them to, or to judge people if they hear about Jesus and they turn away from him.

And the overriding message here in Zechariah is one of encouragement. For we might feel terribly discouraged about the state of the world today, about the state of our lives today, but God assures us that his people will prevail and his purposes will prevail.

[12 : 30] John Simpson, the BBC World Affairs editor, talks about an experience that he had in Rwanda. He was in Rwanda during the genocide and as that was going on the Hutus were killing the Tutsis and he was just outside Kigali and he went to a mental hospital and they stopped at it and it had been occupied by squatters, this mental hospital.

And he heard this horrendous noise coming from an outhouse and he found this madman in this outhouse, a guy who was out of his mind, presumably previously a resident of the mental hospital and he'd been left there locked in this outhouse because the squatters didn't know what to do with him and he says the noise was the worst noise he'd ever heard and he didn't know what to do because he thought if we let him out, this man, he'll probably get killed.

He really had no doubt the man would just get murdered. But they didn't have the drugs with them to look after the man and treat him, to sedate him and take him with them.

So he couldn't work out what to do and in the end he just got all the food they could spare and drink if they could spare and he pushed it under the door into the outhouse where this man was and they drove away.

And he says in his book that he just still feels so agonized by that situation because he thinks he did the wrong thing, that he just prolonged the man's life for a few more days till he would have died of starvation.

[13 : 57] But he can't work out what else he could have done in the situation. There just was no way to solve the problem. It's awful, isn't it, to imagine what that must have been like for him.

But in truth it's just a picture of how we should all feel about what's going on in the world today. We long for the world to change. We're called by God to do what we can.

But the reality is we are powerless to put the world right. There are things that we cannot change. And in our worst discouragement about the world the Lord says to us lunch at the top.

Keep going. Let me tell you there is a day coming when I will put everything right. Goodness will triumph over evil. But sometimes we're part of the problem ourselves.

So when we hear God say goodness is going to win how do we know we're going to be on that winning side? Well that's the second thing that God wants us to know about the future. Our second point.

[15 : 00] On that day you will be clean thanks to God's pain. Just look at what's gone wrong in verse 10. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication.

They will look on me the one they have pierced and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

Well that's awful grief isn't it? The grief of somebody with just one child and the child dies. And did you see that everybody then accepts personal responsibility for this grief that's going on.

So in verse 12 it says the land will mourn and then it goes through all the individuals of God's people each clan by itself with their wives by themselves. So you've got the clan of the house of David and their wives of Nathan of Levi of Shimei verse 14 and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

This is the people of God mourning and grieving over what they have done. And most shockingly of all the one speaking has to be God himself.

[16:13] And you see what he said? They will look on me the one whom they have pierced. And in 500 BC this is just immensely puzzling as Zechariah brings this message from God.

What possible historical event could it be referring to? The people pierce God and then they grieve over the sheer awfulness of what they've done. I don't know whether you've ever had that kind of feeling of sort of a shock realization that you've done something terrible and feeling really guilty about it.

I was in the Cub Scouts as a boy and I remember when I was about 10 years old going on a Cub camp and we were staying in this room me and the boys that I was with were in a room where there was a balcony outside and there was a fire door onto this balcony and we just had this fun idea that we would get one of the leaders she was about 18 probably and we'd kind of entice her out onto the balcony and then we'd shut the door on her just for a moment on the balcony and she realized what we were going to do so she sort of ran for the fire door and we all grabbed the door and kind of pulled it shut so that she was stuck outside it's my mic off can I go to this so we so we we were on the inside and you've got kind of eight ten year old boys all pulling on this fire door as hard as we could to keep her out and then we looked down and her hand was in the door and we realized that we were kind of crushing her hand inside and it was this horrific moment as we just realized what have we done you know this was meant to be a joke and we've kind of and she was she was okay but she's really hurt and we'd done and we just felt awful that's the picture of guilt that's going on in our passage here the kind of grief that's going on among God's people all of God's people shedding tears as they realize the horror of what they're responsible for and yet those tears are met with a fountain just have a look at verse one of chapter 13 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 so the sight that brings so much grief to God's people is being used by God as a means of phenomenal grace in chapter 12 verse 10 he pours out his spirit on his people his spirit of grace in 13 1 he opens a fountain of cleansing to wash away all the sin and impurity of his people it's so mysterious and then in verse 7 the plot thickens even further this time it's not God being pierced just have a look at verse 7 awake oh sword against my shepherd against the man who is close to me declares the Lord Almighty strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered and I will turn my hand against the little ones so the one man who is close to God his chosen shepherd for his people is struck down and by this stage in Zechariah we know a lot about that man we've learnt a lot about him so far he's God's coming shepherd king and the gospel writers had no doubt that the one being promised here by Zechariah is Jesus Christ in chapter 3 of Zechariah he's called the branch because God says his rule is going to branch out across the whole world he's called the high priest because he's going to be the one who comes and stands in the gap between God and his people in chapter 4

God calls him the anointed one because his spirit will come on this man and he will be empowered to achieve God's salvation and then in chapter 6 the priest gets crowned because this branch is the spirit filled royal priest king who is going to come how will we recognise this man who is so central to God's plans in Zechariah well then he tells us in Zechariah 9 that we're to look for a gentle king who will come riding into Jerusalem on a colt the foal of a donkey and in chapter 11 which we looked at last week we look for a man who gets sold for 30 pieces of silver as he is rejected and now in chapter 13 he stands beside God as the man who is close enough to him to be the one God appoints as his shepherd and then in accordance with the will of God he is struck down and the gospel writers tell us this was fulfilled the night that Jesus is rejected and he gets arrested the people scatter as Jesus is arrested here we see that it was part of God's plan

God promised it five centuries before he calls on us to strike the shepherd so that he doesn't have to strike us and this man is also God in the flesh so that in verse 10 God can say they will look on me as they crucify him the one whom they have pierced and as he's crucified a fountain of cleansing is opened just as John tells us as Jesus is on the cross and they pierce his side this flow of blood and water comes out the blood that had to be shed so that God's shepherd could die the death we should have died for the way we've treated God so the fountain of cleansing springs out from the expiring body of this perfect spirit filled priest king promised five centuries earlier and this sadness that was being described here this morning this grief it's a picture of that key miraculous work of God's spirit today

[22 : 10] Jesus promised that what he would send the spirit to do is to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment the spirit comes and convicts us of our guilt about the way we've treated God and each other so that we know we're not the people we ought to be and we're gutted about that and then he brings us to this fountain and he invites us come and be washed let me wash you of all that you've done plunge yourself into the crimson fountain and I promise you will be clean so there's great comfort here for the downcast if we feel unworthy for God if we feel that we've let him down and that discourages us to keep going as a Christian God says lunch on the top remember that on that day when Jesus comes in glory I will show everyone that I look on you today as though you are completely clean not because of your performance but because my shepherd was struck down for you so we move on and the third thing to focus on about the future is this on that day you will be pure thanks to God's refining for Christians today we're free from the penalty of sin

God has taken that penalty away in Christ we're free from the power of sin we don't have to sin anymore but we're not yet free from the presence of sin and God shows us here he gives us a glimpse of what one day we're going to be first of all he says one day there'll be no more lies told about God so he uses the image of false prophets from the day false prophecy is just speaking words about God that are not true and God brings it to an end in verse 2 on that day I will banish the names of the idols from the land and they will be remembered no more declares the Lord Almighty I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land so in verse 3 the families of those false prophets are ashamed of them in verse 4 the prophets are ashamed of themselves in verse 5 they deny their past they say I'm not a prophet I'm a farmer the land has been my livelihood since my youth they're walking away from the ways they've led people away from the truth and God is telling us that that's the future so that we ensure that we're not false prophets today we have to make sure of that that we don't distort or deny

God's word we mustn't change the morality of the church today so that it's more acceptable to society and go against what God says in his word and we speak God's word to each other and we speak it to the world then alongside the removal of false prophecy God's people get purified but the hard thing for us to see is that they're purified in a fire so there's a sifting first and the people who don't truly believe are taken away in verse 8 in the whole land declares the Lord two thirds will be struck down and perish yet one third will be left in it and then look at what happens to God's people in verse 9 this third I will bring into the fire I will refine them like silver and test them like gold God is making his people the people he made them to be he's making them more like Christ but he does it through a fiery trial and the Bible is very real about how tough living in the world today can be a world of sickness a world of suffering and sin in Peter's first letter one Peter

I'm reading that with a number of guys from here at the moment and we were struck in chapter 1 by the way Peter says that the people he's writing to are suffering grief because of their trials he knows there is grief they've had other Christians killed for their faith some of them are suffering terribly they've lost their homes and the Bible is very real about that but Peter also says in that letter that if we hold on to God those trials can be used by God to prove that our faith is genuine and more than that he can use the fire of living in the world today to purify us to make us more like Christ I know that some of you today with what you're going through might find that hard to accept but it is true and one day we'll be able to look back and see God's goodness in all of it and just look at how the chapter ends the Lord promises on that day they will call on my name and I will answer them

I will say they are my people and they will say the Lord is their God so friends keep going in the Christian life there's lunch on the top it is a struggle it's more than a struggle because it's a spiritual battle to be a Christian but God says remember where you're going one day there'll be a great victory for good over evil if you're a Christian you have been cleansed in a fountain of God's grace and you're on your way through a purifying fire to a place where we'll call on God's name and he will answer us where he'll say these are my people and we will say the Lord is our God I'll pray in a moment let's have a moment of quiet perhaps just to look back over the passage I put some questions on the handout for reflection if you'd find that helpful let me pray in a minute's time we praise you mighty and everlasting

[28 : 05] Father that you are protecting your true church all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus across the world and you are using her to advance your kingdom against the spiritual powers that you warn rage against her we praise you for the day coming when the victory will be yours and will be seen to be yours enable us we pray to keep our eyes fixed on that day when goodness will prevail thanks to your power that day when you will confirm that you find us to be clean thanks to your pain endured at the cross and when we live in purity thanks to the ways you have transformed us in the refining fire of life today help us to ponder these things so that we are encouraged today to live in the light of them in Jesus name we ask Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen areas, shapes, areas,