

The God who will come

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[0 : 00] The burden of the word of the Lord is against the land of Hedrach, and Damascus is its resting place.

For the Lord has an eye on mankind, and on all the tribes of Israel, and on Hanath also, which borders on it. Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise, Tyre has built herself a rampart, and heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like the mud of the streets.

But behold, the Lord will strip her of her possessions, and strike down her power on the sea, and she shall be devoured by fire.

Ascalon shall see it, and be afraid. Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish. Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded.

The king shall perish from Gaza. Ascalon shall be uninhabited. A mixed people shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of Philistia.

[1 : 08] I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth. It too shall be a remnant for our God. It shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites.

Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro. No oppressor shall again march over them, for now I see with my own eyes.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war horse from Jerusalem. And the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations.

His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

[2 : 25] Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope. Today I declare that I will restore to you double, for I have bent Judah as my bow.

I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.

Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning. And the Lord God will sound the trumpet, and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.

The Lord of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour and tread down the sling stones. And they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl drenched like the corners of the altar.

On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people. For like the jewels of a crown, they shall shine in his land.

[3 : 29] For, O, how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! The grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

We've been thinking this morning, haven't we, about the fact that God speaks to us by his Spirit through the Bible. Which means, of course, that listening to a sermon, listening to a talk, is not a kind of passive exercise.

It's your responsibility as you listen, is to make sure that what I'm saying is what God is saying in the Bible. So let's have our Bibles open as we do that.

We prayed already, so we shall begin. And I want to, well as you can see we're going back to Zechariah this morning. We're going to look over the next few weeks at the second half of the book of Zechariah, which we looked at the first half back in September.

All our talks are recorded and available online if you missed any of those. And those of us who are here back in September will know that at the heart of Zechariah is God's call to return to him.

[4 : 42] Now I take it that for some of us, for some of us, that means returning to God for the very first time as we come to put our trust in Jesus Christ for the first time.

But for all of us, that means lining up our lives with what God is doing in his world.

That is what Zechariah is about. Because I take it that it's very easy to profess to be a Christian, but for life essentially to be about me and about what I am doing in my life and my plans for my life and so on.

A magazine came through our door a couple of weeks ago and it was all about getting God to do what I want him to do for me.

So I was encouraged to write down the changes I wanted to see in my finances, in my health, my family and my inner life. And it said this, If you're reading this, it's because you want to be the next person to achieve something great for yourself.

[6 : 08] Now I hope that most of us this morning could see that that kind of teaching is just plain wrong. It is the prosperity gospel, which far from lining up with what God is doing in the world, wants God to line up with what I'm doing in the world and what my plans are for the future.

But I guess if we are honest, it is nonetheless all too easy to live as a Christian like that. For life to revolve around me and my goals and my ambitions and what I want to achieve.

So for example, that may be work. Work may be the overriding thing I am committed to. And whatever God is doing in his world just has to kind of fit in with that and fit in with the leftover bits of time and so on that I have.

Which means, of course, that if we return to God, we need to be absolutely convinced of what God is committed to doing in his world. We need to be convinced of the whole direction of world history from now until the end of time.

And that I think is what these final chapters of Zechariah, Zechariah 9 to 14, help us with. They're written in what is known as apocalyptic language. Apocalyptic simply means an unveiling, a drawing back.

[7 : 36] It's as if in these chapters God is lifting the lid on the rest of history. You get similar kind of language in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, in Revelation at the end of the New Testament.

And rather than kind of giving us a series of dates in the diary by which we can mark off the rest of history, this kind of apocalyptic writing paints kind of graphic images on a big picture, on a big canvas for us to grasp and to get our imaginations around so that we see very clearly the direction of world history and so that we marvel at what God has in store for his creation.

Well, there's an outline of today's talk on the back of the service sheet. Do follow it. Do take notes if you find it helpful. Lots of people find it helpful to take notes so they can look at their notes again in the days ahead.

First of all, in the future, God the warrior will come. Verses 1 to 8. Now, I wonder if you ever watch the news or read the paper.

You switch the telly off. You put the paper down. And you're just left with a sense of helplessness. You know, whether it's the war in Afghanistan or endless political wrangling or needless hospital deaths, whatever it is.

[9 : 07] And you're so conscious that actually there's nothing you can do about it. That whatever you were to say, whatever you were to do, whether you were to write to your MP, whatever it was, you are helpless.

Anything you said would be ineffective. Well, have a look at Zechariah 9, verse 1. The burden of the word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place.

For the Lord has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel. Can you see, here is God waiting to act.

The Lord has an eye on all of mankind. The point is that God does see our world and God will act. He is not powerless. He is not indifferent to what he sees in the world. Can you see, there's a great sense of expectation at the start of Zechariah 9.

[10 : 10] What is God going to do? Will world history just kind of carry on as it always has done? Well, no. Because in verses 2 to 8, we see God the warrior advancing in judgment.

Now, I think the picture we're to have in our minds here is a huge map with the country of Syria at the top, the country of Israel underneath it.

And I don't know if you've ever watched any of those, you know, kind of Second World War films when you have a sort of big map of the battlegrounds and you have red arrows kind of all over the place which show the advance of the armies, you know, across a huge swathe of territory.

And there's a battalion moving in here and another one moving in there. I think that's the picture we're meant to have here in verses 2 to 8. As God advances in judgment, starting in the north, in Assyria, advancing down into Israel.

Finally, verse 8, ending up in Jerusalem. Now, many of these nations have been the enemies of God's people. In verses 5 to 6, the cities which belong to the Philistines, they were a constant threat in the 12th, 11th and 10th centuries BC.

[11 : 32] Damascus and Syria, a threat in the 9th and 8th centuries BC. And they were impressive nations. Verse 2, Tyre and Sidon, known for their wisdom. Verse 3, Tyre for its extraordinary wealth and military power.

Verse 3, Tyre has built herself a rampart and heaped up silver like dust and fine gold like the mud of the streets.

Extraordinary wealth and power. And all of them are nations that have refused God's purposes. And so when God the warrior comes to judge, nothing can protect them, neither their wealth, nor their wisdom, nor their power.

Now, in part, these verses were fulfilled in history. So, for example, we're told that in 333 BC, Alexander the Great besieged Tyre and it was destroyed.

But above all, these verses anticipate the day when God will come to judge the entire world. not just these two nations, but the entire world.

[12 : 48] When all those who have refused him will face the judgment. So, notice then that none of the things that people and nations put their trust in and which make us feel secure will make any difference on that day.

Verse 4, The Lord will strip, strike down, she shall be devoured. Verse 6, I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

Pride speaks of the kind of magnificence of a nation. You know, all the history, wealth, territory, institutions, all the things which a nation might take pride in itself.

And they are all struck down. As is their false worship, verse 7, I'll take away its blood from its mouth and its abominations from between its teeth. The other thing to notice in these verses is that as God comes in judgment, he also acts in mercy.

Have a look at the end of verse 7. It too shall be a remnant for our God. It shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites.

[14 : 12] Now, the Jebusites have been the original inhabitants of Jerusalem hundreds of years earlier when Joshua had led God's people into the promised land, into the land that God had promised his people.

And rather than being destroyed, they were assimilated into God's people. They became part of God's people. And I take it the point is here that when God comes, everyone, regardless of their nationality or their culture or their upbringing, who has put their trust in the living God will be saved and protected.

See, verse 8, verse 8 is a wonderful picture, isn't it, of God protecting his people. Then I, God himself, will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro.

No oppressor shall again march over them, for now I see with my own eyes. Here, if you like, is history coming to an end.

Never again will God's people be oppressed. Now, I take it it's hard for us to feel the force of that. But if we were Christians in North Korea or Iraq or China or tens of other nations where it is much harder to be a follower of Jesus, this would be a great verse to rejoice in.

[15 : 39] The end of history, God protecting his people. So then, that is the first thing we are to grasp before we are to return to God, that God the warrior will come in judgment.

Now, I take it that while for some of us that will be a very difficult thing to grasp and to understand and do ask about that afterwards if you'd like to, nonetheless, for many of us here this morning, we would say, yes, I do believe that at the end of history God will return to judge the nations.

But the question I want us to ask and I think which God is asking us this morning through Zechariah is this, not do you believe it but does it shape your life?

It's a very different question, isn't it? Not, yes, this is the box I can tick but does it control your priorities? Because we're a culture, aren't we, which increasingly lives only for the present.

There was an article in the paper recently about someone who organised a big party in a restaurant to celebrate a birthday or something like that and he emailed out the invitation to 45 people, 45 friends a month beforehand and asked them to reply and obviously replying was critical because he needed to book the right number of seats in the restaurant and so on.

[17 : 09] So two weeks later he sent a follow-up email just to remind people they'd had the invitation, please could they reply. Well apparently the initial invitation brought 12 responses, the follow-up a few more and just days before the party only 23 people out of those 45 had replied.

Not 23 who could come but only 23 who had actually bothered to reply. This is how the article continued.

I discovered this phenomenon is widespread. What's clear is how hard the RSVP rubs against the grain of contemporary life.

In requesting people to anchor a plan in the distant future of a month or hence you are demanding a kind of navigation that people increasingly do not practice. We prefer to remain flexy solidifying our plans incrementally as the day approaches.

I thought that was a very interesting reflection on our culture that we're a culture that lives for today. We don't want to be shaped by things even something a month in the future.

[18 : 26] We want to remain flexible to have our lives shaped by our own agendas rather than by another agenda in the future. But the whole point is that if we're to return to God that does mean living lives now which are shaped by the future which are shaped by the day when God will come to judge his world.

God will judge. That is the overriding reality that is to shape our lives and give them perspective. Well let's move from the future to the past.

In the past God's King has come. Have a look at verses 9 and 10 in Zechariah chapter 9. Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion shout aloud O daughter of Jerusalem behold your King is coming to you righteous and having salvation is he humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt the foal of a donkey I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem and the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall speak peace to the nations his rule shall be from sea to sea from the river to the ends of the earth.

Now these are perhaps the best known verses in Zechariah they're quoted in the New Testament it's why we had that second reading from John chapter 19 as Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

It's very compelling isn't it of course? You see if I was to ask you the question this morning can you tell me what is going to happen in 500 years time I take it we'd be clueless to be a very brave person wouldn't you to put your hand in the air and say actually I can tell you exactly what's going to happen in 500 years time.

[20 : 22] Whereas here is Zechariah 500 years before the birth of Jesus here is the God of history telling us precisely what's going to happen in 500 years time that his king will come and not only that his king will come but where he will come in Jerusalem and his precise mode of transport.

And it's his mode of transport that is the great surprise. Be rather like Barack Obama going to visit American troops in Afghanistan riding around on one of those micro scooters that seven year olds scoot to school on.

You see when God the warrior king sends his king he arrives not on a mighty war horse to judge the nations as we might expect from verses one to eight but when God's king comes he arrives on a donkey.

Verse nine bringing salvation to proclaim peace to the nations. Verse ten. And the way he will do that is hinted at in that word humble.

It's a word which in the original speaks of someone whose outward appearance is unimpressive insignificant whose life is marked by misery and suffering.

[21 : 47] And as such therefore this of course is a description not just of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem but actually of the whole of his life. Born in a miserable stable rejected by many and crucified to bring salvation dying to bear the penalty for our rejection of God that those who trust in him might be at peace with God no longer God's enemies.

And that word peace speaks not simply of an end of conflict but a great blessing a life rich in blessing in right relationship with God.

And notice too verse 10 his rule will extend from sea to sea to the ends of the earth. It's what the Apostle Paul tells us about Jesus Christ in Ephesians as he speaks of the implications of Jesus' resurrection.

I've put Ephesians chapter 1 verses 19 and 21 on the outline. God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. You see there's an extraordinary contrast isn't there in Zechariah chapter 9 between on the one hand God the warrior king who will come at the end of history and on the other hand Jesus whom he has sent first and the point is we cannot have one without the other.

[23 : 38] You see perhaps you're someone and you're you think to yourself well I like Jesus I'm attracted by his teaching but I don't like all this talk about judgment or perhaps you've heard someone saying something like the God of the Old Testament always seems to be a God of judgment whereas the God of the New Testament seems to be a totally different God a God of love you often hear people saying that kind of thing but no it is the same God God of the Old Testament is full of compassion in the New Testament Jesus speaks of judgment more than anyone else in the whole Bible you see the point is that there is an alternative to judgment as if isn't it in verses 1 to 8 here is God coming in judgment but then as if suddenly everything stops and Jesus verses 9 and 10 arrives to offer an alternative to judgment and I take it

God's plea with this this morning is not to reject that offer of peace with God that Jesus offers but nonetheless to realise it is God's final offer that judgment is coming and therefore to see the urgency of being reconciled to God you see imagine for a moment a small platoon of German soldiers in France at the beginning of 1945 the Normandy landings took place the previous summer the allied forces are advancing across France from west to east through Italy from south to the north every vestige of Nazi rule is being destroyed in their wake it's only a matter of time before you too are overrun but then imagine that peace is offered and of course at that point you then have a decision to make will you wait before you are overrun until you are overrun or will you accept the terms of peace as they are offered and I take it that is the picture here in Zechariah chapter 9 in the New Testament

Jesus tells us the final judgment will happen at any time but until then there is this offer of peace with God can I say that if you are here this morning and you haven't yet accepted God's terms of peace if you haven't accepted God's forgiveness we are delighted you are here but can you see too the real urgency of responding to God's offer you see God is not like some dodgy salesman who says you know this is my final offer and you full well know actually it's not his final offer at all and there will be another one in six months time no the day will come when it's too late when the warrior God of verses 1 to 8 will come if you want to know more about how to be at peace with God I'd love to chat to you afterwards or if you have a friend here who's a Christian then do ask them afterwards in the future

God the warrior will come in the past God's King has come let's finally think about the present and then we'll have time for questions after that in the present there's a spiritual battle because in these verses verses 11 to 17 Zechariah is speaking about the time between the coming of Jesus as God's King and the final coming of God to judge but he does say the language of the past which I think is why the language seems to us to be rather unfamiliar so you know just as say in April the weather men may say the weather forecaster may say it's going to be another summer like 1977 at which point anyone over the age of 40 I take it knows that means it's going to be a very hot summer using the language of the past to describe something in the present and I think that's what's going on here in these verses so notice will you in verse 11 how the focus shifts from the

King himself to those who will share in his victory verse 11 as for you also speaking of those who welcome who rejoice at the coming of the King notice verse 11 God's relationship with them is spoken in terms of covenant the blood of my covenant because sacrifice and the shedding of blood is the only basis on which there can be any relationship between God and sinful people and we'll see much more of that in two weeks time notice in verses 13 to 15 that those who have returned to God are now used by God in battle verse 13 they become his weapons for I've bent Judah as my bow I've made Ephraim its arrow I'll stir up your sons O Zion against your sons O Greece and wield you like a warrior's sword notice verse 14

[29 : 28] God fights for them then the Lord will appear over them and his arrow will go forth like lightning the Lord God will sound the trumpets and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south and then verse 15 the Lord of hosts will protect them and they shall devour and tread down the sling of stones and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine and be full like a bowl drenched like the corners of the altar God will protect his people verse 15 they will share in his victory and I take it verse 15 that is a picture of a victory banquet not literally of getting drunk but nonetheless of great rejoicing victory banquets at the end of time and what I want us to grasp is that those in verse 12 who return to God are those then in verse 13 who are called to fight you see here is a people set free to fight for God to be a

Christian to put our trust in Jesus Christ to follow him is to be engaged now in the presence in a spiritual battle standing firm for the public truth that Jesus Christ is Lord proclaiming the gospel promoting the gospel seeking to do so in whatever way we can it is a battle of course that rages wherever a hostile world is confronted with the public truth that Jesus Christ is Lord that he will return at the end of history it is a battle that every Christian is called to fight but noticing these verses is not a futile battle because God is king he fights for his people and there will be victory so verses 16 and 17 give us a glimpse in

Old Testament language of that victory and of God's wonderful new creation verse 16 on that day the Lord their God will save them as the flock of his people for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land for how great is his goodness and how great is his beauty grain shall make the young men flourish and new wine the young women I think that is not a thing to snigger at he is simply using Old Testament language which we see elsewhere in Isaiah and Jeremiah to help the people in Zechariah's day understand what God's new creation will be like and he is picking up on Old Testament language to help us to see that God is calling us to return to him return to me and I will return to you now for some of us that is a call to turn to

God and to put our trust in Jesus for the first time to be at peace with God while he is offering peace but for the majority for those of us who have put our trust in Jesus it is a call to line up our lives right behind what God is doing in his world in other words for life not to be shaped by and governed by what I want to do and what I want to achieve and what my ambitions are all kind of covered in a vaguely Christian veneer but no for my life to be shaped by the fact that God the warrior king will come that Christ has come and that now we're engaged in a spiritual battle seeking to promote the gospel in whatever way we can and I want to ask us whether we're doing that whether we are engaged in the spiritual battle in the here and now are you seeking to promote the gospel with your prayers to promote the gospel with your money to promote the gospel through the way in which you serve here at

Grace Church to promote the gospel through your behaviour through the week to promote the gospel by the way in which you do your job by the conversations you have with your colleagues to promote the gospel in whatever way you can can I say if you are engaged in that battle then be encouraged because this is the reality that really counts and be encouraged because God hasn't left you on your own he is fighting for you and the battle will not last forever but if you are not engaged in the battle then can you see that God is calling you to repent and to repent of a life which is essentially about me and my ambitions and what I want to achieve and to turn and line up my life instead with what God is doing in his world and can

[35 : 08] I say finally for those of us with children which I realise is not all of us but it is a good number of us what are we modelling to our children about what is important not what are we teaching them but what are we modelling to them by the lives we live because of course the lives we live before them will shout far more loudly than what we actually teach them and say to them you see whatever they see in our lives as parents whatever they think our lives are focused on that of course is what they will assume is most important so if they see that our lives are basically revolving around work or sport or living for the next holiday or having a beautiful house or even around family as the most important thing then they will assume that is the most important thing instead let's make sure that our lives as well as what we say to them show that the most important thing is lining up with what God is doing in his world committed to proclaiming the gospel and promoting the gospel in whatever way in which we can and to know that all these other things that yes of course we have jobs many of us and we have homes most of us and holidays again many of us and sport many of us will enjoy sport but know that actually all these things are things we sit lightly to they are good things they are gifts from

God but we sit lightly to them well let's pray and then we'll take questions if anyone would like to ask a question rejoice greatly a daughter of Zion behold your king is coming righteous and having salvation is he heavenly father we praise you very much that you will return in judgments at the end of the world and we praise you that in the meantime Jesus has come thank you that what Zachariah could only look forward to thank you that we can look back and see how Jesus did indeed enter Jerusalem how he died to offer peace and salvation to people from all nations who put their trust in him and we pray heavenly father you'd help us to live our lives now in the lights of these great realities to engage in the spiritual battle confident of victory looking forward to the new creation and we ask it for Jesus sake
Amen