

The God who will be gracious

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[0 : 0 0] So that's Zechariah, chapter 12, on page 965. The burden of the word of the Lord concerning Israel.

Thus declares the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and formed the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him. Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples.

The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves, and all the nations of the earth will gather against it.

On that day, declares the Lord, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But for the sake of the house of Judah, I will keep my eyes open, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.

Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of hosts their God. On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves.

[1 : 1 5] And they shall devour, to the right and to the left, all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place in Jerusalem.

And the Lord will give salvation to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah.

On that day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord going before them.

And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn.

On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hazard Rimon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn each family by itself, the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves.

[2 : 5 2] The family of the Shemite by itself, and their wives by themselves, and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. And on that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more.

And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirits of uncleanness. And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord.

And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day, every prophet will be ashamed of his vision. When he prophesies, he will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive, but he will say, I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.

And if one asks him, What are these wounds on your back? He will say, The wounds I received in the house of my friends. A Waco sword against my shepherd, Against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts.

[4 : 19] Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, declared the Lord, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive.

I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refined silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them.

I will say, They are my people, and they will say, The Lord is my God. Charlotte, thanks very much for reading for us. Please keep Zechariah open, chapters 12 and 13, page 965.

Why don't I pray for us before we look at these chapters we're looking at this morning. Heavenly Father, thank you. for reminding us this morning of that great day when you will be seen to be king and acknowledged as king of the world.

And we pray that as we look at these chapters together this morning, please would your spirit speak to us. Please would you convict us of the truths that we read about.

[5 : 29] And we pray that you would change us, that we might be those who would live now in anticipation of that future day. And we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Well, back in the summer, we went on holiday to Austria, and we stayed in a house where in the winter, the main attraction is skiing.

And by the front door, there was a large, laminated, certainly bigger than A4, probably A3, piece of paper. And it said across the top, so you think you're ready to go skiing!

And below it, a long list of about 20 items. Skis, money, sunglasses, sun cream, ski pass, everything you need to go skiing.

And I imagine the reason they had laminated that list and put it by the front door, and there's a separate list on the other side for the children, was because there must have been many, many frustrated days when they thought they were ready to go skiing.

[6 : 34] They got to the bottom of the ski lift and discovered they didn't have everything they needed. In other words, the list was designed to get you from where you were in a house, ready to go skiing, to where you actually wanted to be, at the top of the mountain, just about to bomb down the slopes.

And the second half of Zachariah is similar to that list, in that it shows us how we get from where we are now, the world in which we live in now, to the world of chapter 14, verse 9.

I'll put it there again on the top of the outline. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. The day when God will be seen to be king of his world. Because we live, don't we, in a world where it doesn't always look as if we are heading in that direction.

But God wants us to know in these last few chapters of the book, chapters 9 to 14, that that is the direction world history is heading in, that is where we are going, and how he will get the world from where we are now to the world of chapter 14, verse 9.

It's a future that Zachariah describes as the day. So just have a look down at chapter 12, and you can see there, it's there at the beginning of verse 3, on that day.

[7 : 56] But then also verse 4, verse 6, verse 8, verse 9, in fact it's mentioned 16 times in these last three chapters of the book, chapters 12, 13, and 14.

The day when God will decisively intervene and usher in the end of history and a new creation. The day towards which the whole of God's world is moving.

You see, whoever we are here this morning, whether we're just kind of looking in, as it were, of the claims of Christian faith, or perhaps you're here and you're a fairly new Christian, or perhaps you're here and you're a struggling Christian, or perhaps you're here and you've been a Christian for many years, whoever we are, God wants us to know that his plans for history are on track.

And what becomes much clearer in the New Testament is that on that day, rather than being one particular day in history, actually represents a whole period of history.

That is the period of history between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus at the end of time. Which means, of course, that when Zechariah talks about events on that day, the events he's talking about could have their fulfilment in one of three places, three horizons, as we might call them, which I've tried to reflect on that diagram there on the service sheet.

[9 : 31] The first horizon is in the life and death of Jesus, Jesus' first coming. The third horizon is the final return of Jesus at the end of time.

And the second horizon is the years in between, between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus. Jesus. And some of the events which we're looking at today will be fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus, some the second coming, some in the days we're living in today.

And the key, often, as we'll see, to deciding which of those three horizons Zechariah is talking about is the New Testament. And hopefully that will become clear as we go on. Well, there are four things God wants us to know about that day.

First of all, chapter 12, verses 1 to 9, God will bring deliverance. Verse 1, the burden of the word of the Lord concerning Israel.

Thus declares the Lord who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him. Now, if you were here last week, we looked, didn't we, at chapters 10 and 11 where we saw what would happen when God's shepherd comes, Jesus.

[10 : 43] And that is still in Zechariah's sights here in chapter 12, verse 1, which describes, have a look at it, what God will do on that day as an event comparable in scale to the creation of the world.

God will deliver his people an event as great as creation itself. Now, just notice the movement of these verses before we look at the detail.

In verse 3, the nations of the earth gather against God's people. In verse 7, the Lord gives salvation to his people.

And in verse 9, he destroys the nations that have gathered. Now, that is the movement. And the focus is on Jerusalem, which is shorthand for God's people and God's purposes.

Now, let's have a look at some of the detail in verses 2 to 7. Do you see in verse 2, there's a picture of a siege, a siege mounted against God's people. But as if drunk, the enemy are unable to capture the city.

[11 : 55] In verse 3, Jerusalem, or God's purposes, is described as a heavy stone which can't be removed. You know, the kind of stone which you try and dig up from your garden and you put your back house doing so for the next six years or so, that kind of stone.

In verse 4, the panic of those who try to destroy Jerusalem. Verse 6, the flaming fire by which God will destroy his enemies.

It's an extraordinary picture, isn't it, here, of all God's enemies come to attack God and come to attack God's purposes. And the point is this, that it is just at the point when things look most bleak.

When it looks as if God's purposes have failed, that is the moment when God will triumph. That is when God will act in power to save his people.

So, when is that fulfilled? Well, back to our diagram. it is partly fulfilled in the first horizon. This is describing in picture language what happened when Jesus came to earth.

[13 : 11] And supremely in his death, when people from the nations conspired against Jesus, when the representatives of the Roman Empire conspired together with the religious leaders of the day, just as God said they would back in Psalm 2.

I put Psalm 2 verse 1 on the outline. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed.

See, it is when God's cause looks lost that God will triumph. But this picture of the dramatic deliverance of God's people and the dramatic triumph of God's purposes also points forward to that third horizon to the return of Jesus at the end of history.

The day when God will finally deliver his people and bring them to himself. For those who know their church calendars, today is Advent Sunday when traditionally Christians look forward to the day when Jesus will return.

Now of course, to us it doesn't always look, does it, as if that day is on its way. You look at the news, you look at the world we live in, it doesn't always look like that. There was an article in the Guardian a couple of weeks ago, apparently in 1991, 10% of the population of Iraq were Christians.

[14 : 45] A minority, but nevertheless a well-respected minority. minority. Yet now, 19 years later, why in a few years' time, it's reckoned there will hardly be any.

They've either been massacred or they've been forced to leave the country. Even in this country, it's easy, even as Christians, isn't it, to assume that God's cause is rather lost, that the church is a bit of a lost cause.

And therefore, these are very encouraging verses. God wants us to know he will deliver his people, he will intervene in history, and he will do so when his cause looks most lost.

After all, Jesus himself said, didn't he, that he would return at a time totally unexpected. No one would know when it was going to happen. God will bring deliverance.

Secondly, God will bring repentance. Have a look at chapter 12, verse 10. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

[16 : 12] Now have a look again at verse 10 because there are two surprises in this verse. I think the first is that God will enable his people to repent and call out to him. Now notice that it's not that the people see their need to repent or want to repent, but God pours out the gift of repentance to enable them to repent.

they will cry out to God for mercy as they mourn their sin. And the end of verse 10 gives a moving picture, isn't it, of mourning as a parent might mourn the death of a child.

And then verses 11 to 14, the extent of mourning, all sorts of people, men, women, families, in public and in private. The second surprise in verse 10 is that God himself is pierced.

When they look on me, on him they have pierced. See, the surprise after verses 1 to 9 is that it's not the nations who pierce God, but God's own people who pierce him.

God being pierced by his own people, that word pierced speaks of being stabbed. the kind of word that's used as a death blow. That, so Zechariah, is how you know the day has come when God is acting in power and to deliver his people.

[17 : 50] What do you say, how is this fulfilled? Well, the New Testament shows us this is primarily fulfilled in that first horizon in Jesus' first coming. So turn on will you to John chapter 19, to John's gospel, John chapter 19.

And let me read John 19, verses 33 to 37. Here is the crucifixion of Jesus, page 1092, beginning at verse 33.

verse 33. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he is already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

He who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled.

not one of his bones will be broken. And again, another scripture says, which is Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10, they will look on him whom they have pierced.

[19 : 13] Zechariah, you see, is describing the mourning that will take place when people realize it was God himself they have pierced.

Jesus dying in our place for our sin. As the prophet Isaiah said of Jesus hundreds of years before Zechariah, in Isaiah chapter 53, verse 5, but he was punished for our transgressions, he was punished for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

That is true for all of us. Jesus died, God was pierced for my sin, and for your sin. So let me ask the question of Zechariah chapter 12, which is, have you mourned for your sin like this?

Have you admitted that you are in terrible trouble with God, and that you need his help? have you repented deeply? Have you wept? Because it is for your sin that Jesus died.

And a mourning, a repentance that is not just a one-off thing, but actually that is the mark of our lives, in the ongoing way. Certainly something to pray, isn't it, that for those who we invite on to carol services, that actually God would grant them the gift of repentance, and that mourning for sin and a deep repentance would actually be the thing that marks out all of our lives on an ongoing basis.

[21 : 07] A few years ago, the vice chancellor of Cambridge University was interviewed on Desert Island Discs on Radio 4, the program where someone in the public eyes asked about their favorite music and they give away something about their life and so on.

And he was talking about his passion for sailing. And in the interview, he was asked the question of his sailing, have you ever been rescued? And his answer was very revealing.

He simply said, no, that would be too awful. It's very interesting, isn't it? Too awful. The thought of having to admit that he was in terrible trouble and needed rescuing was just too terrible to contemplate.

See, we need to pray that God would grant people the gift of repentance. It's not something that comes naturally to us, admitting that we need God's help and turning to him.

But notice too that this promise of a day of mourning also is fulfilled in the third horizon when Jesus returns. Because you see, God's warning to us is that if we don't mourn for our sin now, we will mourn for our sin on the day when Jesus returns at the end of history.

[22 : 27] At the very end of the Bible, I've put Revelation chapter 1 verse 7 there on the outline, we're told that when Jesus returns, every eye will see him. even those who pierced him and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

It's a terrible picture, isn't it, of hopelessness. Because of course by then, when Jesus returns, it will be too late to turn to God in repentance.

There will be tragic scenes, haven't there, of grief or mourning in New Zealand over the last fortnight. As it's gradually dawned, then being confirmed, that all 29 miners died in that terrible mining accident.

But you see, that is nothing compared with the mourning, the grief that there will be when Jesus returns, from those who have not mourned their sin before then, because it will be too late.

God is saying to us, we can either mourn for our sin now, and recognize that Jesus died bearing the judgment for our sin, and turn to God now, or we'll mourn for our sin when Jesus returns.

[23 : 48] Not in repentance, because it will be too late, but in mourning at our folly. As we realize that whatever else we got right in this life, the most important thing, we got very badly wrong.

God will bring repentance. Thirdly, God will bring deliverance. Turn over to chapter 13, verse 1. On that day there shall be a fountain, open for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Because, of course, repentance by itself is useless, isn't it, unless God is prepared to take action. My repentance doesn't achieve anything unless God is prepared to step in and take action and say, I forgive you.

And wonderfully, he does do that. Here is a fountain of forgiveness. Those who were here back in September when he looked at Zechariah chapter 3, remember how God promised Zechariah that there would be a single day in history when God dealt with sin once and for all.

And here it is. Not a drip of water, not a trickling of water, but a fountain of water. A wonderful, wonderful picture, a fountain of forgiveness.

[25 : 17] Wonderful news, total cleansing, more than enough. Let me tell you about Antonia Neri, who died 99 years ago.

Her husband ran a little tailoring shop in Newark, in New Jersey, and a man called Frank Zara had paid a deposit to have a suit made and then failed to pick it up.

So one day he came into the shop and he was told by the tailor the suit be sold to someone else unless the guy paid up and paid the money on the suit which he had ordered.

Well, Frank Zara became very angry, he pulled out a revolver and he pointed it at the tailor. At which point his wife, Antonia, threw herself in front of her husband and she was the one who was shot.

And the bullet went straight into her right eye, pierced her brain and she was killed outright. Now that is a story, isn't it, of the most profound and extraordinary love.

[26 : 38] And now for the rest of his life that tailor would be thinking to himself, she was pierced in my place. Her blood flowed for me.

you see, Zechariah chapter 13 verse 1 is wonderful news for those who mourn because of their sin. It is the most amazing news if you have ever cried out to God for mercy and cried out to him for forgiveness.

Here is a fountain. You can look at Jesus dying on the cross and say he was pierced for me. His blood flowed for me, a fountain to cleanse me from my sin.

Now, will you notice this cleansing, this forgiveness is not indiscriminate. It is for those who do mourn their sin and who do turn to God in repentance. We need to say that, don't we, because of course the great British disease is presumption.

Assuming we're right with God, assuming that somehow God will let us in. The kind of thing you often hear at a funeral service, they go into a better place, they're now at peace with God and so on. And yes, wonderfully, those things can be true, but only for those who have mourned their sin and who have repented and trusted in the death of Jesus.

[28 : 01] And notice in verses 2 to 6, it's not just cleansing from sin, but cleansing from false teaching and idolatry, verse 2. And on that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the lands, so that they shall be remembered no more, and also are removed from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness.

In verse 3, prophets who speak lies about God rather than the truth are then killed, as the Old Testament said they should be. In verses 4 to 6, the surviving prophets who survive, why they are then ashamed of their previous profession, rather like the investment bankers were at the height of the credit crunch.

false teaching, listening to people who tell lies about God, not the truth about God.

It's the great danger throughout the Bible, and of course false teaching doesn't simply stay in the minds, it affects the whole of our lives, it affects the whole of a church life. So you see, here is the wonderful promise that God will bring cleansing.

Putting verses 1 to 6 of chapter 13 together, it's a glorious description of the Christian life. Forgiven through the death of Jesus, set free to serve the living God, not false gods, and knowing the truth about God, not lies.

[29 : 36] you and I have much to rejoice in this morning if we are followers of Jesus. God will bring deliverance, God will bring repentance, God will bring forgiveness through suffering.

Have a look at verse 7, it is the most extraordinary verse. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

I will turn my hand against the little ones. Here is God's shepherd, who we looked at last week, God's close companion, his chosen ruler, who is struck by God himself.

Again, just as Isaiah said, Isaiah chapter 53 verse 10, it is the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, because it's through the suffering and death of Jesus, that cleansing and forgiveness is available to all those who put their trust in him and turn to God.

But notice too in verse 7 how the suffering of God's people then follows. So the suffering of Jesus anticipates the suffering of God's people. End of verse 7, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

[30 : 59] I will turn my hand against the little ones. verse, a verse that Jesus uses in March chapter 14, I put it on the outline, to warn his disciples that they will desert him.

Their scattering anticipates the scattering and suffering that is part of the Christian life as we live for Christ. Suffering the means by which God is refining his people, the means by which he will have a people for himself.

Verse 9, and I'll put this third into the fire and refine them as one refined silver and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name and I'll answer them.

I will say they are my people and they will say the Lord is my God. God will bring deliverance, God will bring repentance, God will bring forgiveness through suffering.

These are extraordinary chapters. God is showing us the death of Jesus, you see, is at the very heart of his purposes for his world. How do we get from a world where people don't recognise who God is, generally speaking, to the world of Zechariah chapter 14, verse 9, when he will be recognised and acknowledged by everyone to be the living God?

[32 : 27] How do we get there? Well, the death of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of his purposes. That is the point at which God acts decisively in history. This is the means by which he will deliver his people and he will then be seen to be king over the whole earth.

So let me say as we finish that if you've never turned to God, will you do so? I take it that's what God is saying to us this morning, if we've never turned to him, will you do say, do speak to me or a Christian friend afterwards about how you might do that?

And if you have turned to God, will you commit to God? Will you be committed to his purposes? It's a great encouragement, isn't it?

It means we can live confident Christian lives now in the certain confidence that history is on track, that God's purposes will be fulfilled, that there will be a day when God will be seen to be king over the whole earth.

Let's pray together. And a few moments quiet and then I shall lead us in prayer. Amen. On that day, there shall be a fountain open for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

[34 : 00] Heavenly Father, we marvel how these things, written 500 years before the birth, life and death of the Lord Jesus are so clearly fulfilled in him and also how they, again, so clearly point to that future day when you will return.

thank you for the death of the Lord Jesus, for the forgiveness that flows from his death. Thank you that you graciously enable people to repent.

Thank you for this future day and we pray, Heavenly Father, you would help us to live lives that are marked by repentance for our sin and yet at the same time a confidence in your purposes.

as we look forward to that great future day. And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Thank you.