

Conquering King

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[0 : 00] Well friends, I'll pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word and we pray today that you might teach us from it. And we pray that we might glory in your Son, hope in him, love him and love each other and love the world that you've placed us in.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well friends, you might remember that earlier on this year I spoke to you about John Calvin. It was a particular anniversary and I spoke to you a little bit about him and his life and his theology.

Well Calvin spent his life writing and rewriting one particular work. It got thicker and thicker and thicker and then very thick by the time he got to the end of his life. It is called The Institutes of the Christian Religion.

Now two large volumes like that. Most people just call it The Institutes and everyone knows what they mean. Well, when I was at Theological College I was obliged to read The Institutes and to sign a little statement that said I have carefully read Calvin's Institutes 1, 2, whatever.

And I did. But I must admit that I skimmed it. I didn't read it as carefully as I might have read it. I did enjoy it. I learnt lots from it. Well, recently I have started reading it again to fill in those gaps from those many years ago.

[1 : 23] And today I'd like to paraphrase one of my favourite passages. Calvin is talking about the life of Jacob. And at one point he chooses to outline Jacob's life.

And here is what he says. I have put it in slightly more modern idiom. But nevertheless, I've got the germ of it from Calvin. As for Jacob, he says, Here's a notable example of nothing but extreme unhappiness.

He passes a most troubled boyhood at home, dreading the threats of his elder brother. Finally, he's compelled to yield and to flee from his family. Far from home he is received by his uncle Laban. Laban subjects him to seven hard years of cruel servitude. Laban cheats him of his favoured wife by an evil trick. And he has to undergo further long years of servitude for the wife of his love. He complains of long days scorched by the sun's heat and wakeful nights of frost and cold. For 20 years he is daily afflicted by the injustice of his father-in-law.

[2 : 28] And if that's not enough, his own household is a mess, filled with hatred, quarrelling and rivalry amongst his wives. When he attempts to return home, he is pursued and further insulted and abused by his father-in-law on the way.

Then there's his brother. However, he fears that his brother Esau might do something terrible to him as he waits for him to come. But when Esau is finally seen, he falls down half dead at his brother's feet.

And there is a blessed relief as Esau is more favourable to him than Jacob had dared to hope.

However, once he returns to the land, he loses Rachel, his most dearly loved wife.

Then he hears that his favourite son by her, Joseph, is torn by wild beasts and is dead. He's so overcome with grief at his son's death that he weeps long and he refuses all consolation, declaring that he has no choice now but to go to the grave in sorrow.

In the meantime, his daughter has been seized and raped by people in the land and his sons take bold and unconscionable revenge and thereby make him hateful to all the inhabitants of the land, therefore at constant risk of peril from them.

[3 : 44] Then his firstborn son sleeps with one of his wives or maids. Then incest finally pollutes his family.

And near the end of his life, as a result of seeking to feed his family, the only remaining son of Rachel is also threatened. That's finally resolved. But when he is restored to Joseph and meets Pharaoh in Egypt, he declares to Joseph that his days on earth have been short and evil.

He asserts that he has passed his life in continual misery and absolutely denies that he has experienced the prosperity which the Lord had promised him.

Friends, can you hear Calvin? He's crystal clear. You see, we tend to view the stories of the Bible heroes and think that their life was relatively good under the good hand of God.

But Calvin recognises that maybe that was not the complete truth, if the truth at all. And so he ponders, what was Jacob's secret? And we might ponder, what was Joseph's secret after him? [4 : 55] And what was the nation of Israel's secret as they encountered trouble after trouble after trouble? True, much of it of their own making. Particularly, what was their secret as they suffered the great torture of the exile for 70 years?

Well, today we're going to learn. And as we learn, we'll tap into one of the great secrets of biblical faith. We will learn what makes a person of God able to face difficulty in life, even as Jacob did. And we will learn also what God is like. And I hope that's whetted your appetite for our passage today. It is a passage richly quoted in the New Testament. It is one that has guided the self-understanding of Jesus and shaped his life and his ministry.

So let's look at it together. Please open your Bibles at Zechariah 9, and I'm hoping its page number is there somewhere for you. If not, someone can shout it out. Anyone got a page number?

9, 5, 3. Now, in my view, there are three sections in chapter 9. Verses 1 to 8 focus on God's purpose, presence, and proclamation.

[6 : 01] Verses 9 and 10 focus on God's coming king. And verses 11 through to perhaps 10, verse 1 focus on the accomplishments that happen through God and his king.

Now, let's have a look at each section quickly, and it will be very brief. However, before I do, I want to tell you what the chapters 9 through to 14 are complicated chapters. They are written in a style of writing which has come to be called apocalyptic.

Apocalyptic functions in a very different manner from other literatures in the Old Testament. It's not narrative. It's not poetry. It sounds like prophecy, but it has some differences. And it tends to focus on the past and the present as a way of talking about the future.

So that's just a brief introduction. Let's see what we can make of these first eight verses. First, I want you to notice the heading. It is called a prophecy. Actually, in the original language, it is called a burden, an oracle.

And in the Bible, you see, a burden, an oracle, a prophecy, is an active force. It's a word of God to his people. It comes from his mouth, and it accomplishes his will in history.

[7 : 11] And it's not just for his people. It doesn't just come to his people. It's for the whole world. And that word accomplishes God's purpose. The purpose for which it might be directed by God can be for good, for healing, for judgment.

But we're going to see what it is here. That's our first point about these verses. This is a word from God. It is surely going to accomplish its purpose, as God's word always does.

Second, take a scan through the nations that are mentioned here. Look at those to whom God's word is directed. The first nation is only mentioned here in the Bible.

We know that Hadrach is to the north of every other nation mentioned here. It's beyond the furthest regions, furthest extent of the kingdom that existed under David and Solomon.

But then there is Damascus in verse 1, Tyre and Sidon in verse 2, some cities of the Philistines in verses 5 through to 7. These nations are the traditional enemies of Israel's past.

[8 : 13] And on them we are told God wages war. However, notice the emphasis is not on the past, but on the future. In other words, God is talking about Israel's ancient enemies and they are sort of escalated into the future.

God is saying that no known enemy will be able to stand against God, the warrior king. He will fight against the enemies of his people and he will be victorious. And that's his sure word to his people.

That's his purpose, his future. With that in mind, let's have a look at our next point. Look at verse 8. Let me read it to you. The oracle of the Lord continues with these words.

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.

Friends, the word for temple is actually the word house. And it predominantly in the Old Testament in relation to Israel and Jerusalem and so on means temple. But it can also mean the land where God dwells.

[9 : 16] And can you see what God's saying here to his people? He's saying, I'm going to camp in the midst of you. I will be a guard over you, my people. I'll be present among you. No enemy will be able to get near you or be a threat to you.

I love the final words of verse 8. Literally, they say that the eyes of the Lord are upon his people. Isn't that a wonderful picture? There's God in the midst of his land and his eyes are upon them. That is, he's looking out for them. He's got his eye on them to keep them safe. We began this section, if you look back to verse 1, with the eyes of the people being upon the Lord. But we close it with the eyes of the Lord being upon his people.

What a magnificent picture. Everyone looking to God to see what he's going to do and him looking out for his people. His eyes are upon them. What these verses are saying is that the Lord is going to reign victoriously.

And in that reign, he will gather the remnant of all his alienated people and bring them together before him. And he will be with them and they will be his God.

[10 : 21] God, this is God's solemn word to his people and it can be trusted. But that's not all that God has to say. God's word, God's presence, God's purpose are capped by a very significant event outlined in verses 9 and 10.

God's king will come. Now this king will be very different to previous kings in Israel. He will be what the kings of Israel should have been but weren't.

Look at verses 9 and 10. I put the English Standard Version if you wanted to look in your outlines or you can just listen as I read it. Look at what it says. 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.

Note that this king is spoken of in the third person by the Lord. In other words, it's not the Lord himself. It's someone else. And notice the key words used of this king.

[11 : 26] First, he is your king. Second, he is righteous. Third, he has salvation or he brings salvation. Fourth, he is gentle.

In other words, you see, this king is unarmed and non-aggressive. He's on a donkey, not on a war horse. Friends, can you hear and see the contrast?

In verses 1 to 8, God is a righteous, protective warrior God. In verse 9, he appoints his king. And his king is righteous and gentle and saving.

And by implication, there's a choice between the two. You can be on the side of this God and then receive the rule of this gentle, loving, righteous king with salvation.

Or you can be opposed to this God and receive his judgment. God is holy, you see, and God's holiness compels him to either judge sin and expel it from his presence and kingdom or to save.

[12 : 34] Salvation will find its final expression in God's king, the humble one. But let's now turn to verse 10 and look at the accomplishments of this king. He will proclaim or command peace to the nations, we're told.

And that peace is what sort of peace? Peace with God. He will exercise or be given total dominion. He will rule over every land from sea to sea, from the great river to the ends of the earth.

Friends, do you recognize this king? Of course you do. We've seen him in action in the New Testament, haven't we? When Jesus marches into Jerusalem and toward the temple of God, the words of this passage, as we heard earlier on, are said of him.

But you know, everywhere you read in the Old Testament, you'll hear the echoes of this passage. Listen to the echoes of verses 9 and 10 as I read to you from Philippians 2.

Don't look it up. Listen. Jesus Christ, says Paul the Apostle, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

[13 : 45] By taking on the form of God. By taking on the form of a servant. By being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And therefore God has highly exalted him. And bestowed on him the name that is above every name. So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. You see, can you hear it? A humble servant who offers salvation. And whom God will give all power, dominion and eternal rule.

But I want you to notice something else. I want you to see what the rule of God's humble king accomplishes. It's there in verse 10. Do you see it? It accomplishes an end of war. No more chariots in Ephraim, which represents the northern tribes of Israel. No more war horses in Jerusalem. That is the center of the southern tribes of Israel. Peace among all nations.

[14:50] The gentle rule of God will spread from sea to sea. Now if you don't long for that, if you hear the news that comes day after day at the moment, then there's something wrong with you.

But that is what's coming. Even to the ends of the world. Rule under God's humble, kingly son. That's a picture of God's future. For once God has his king in place, the rule of his king will extend throughout the world until it eventually drives war from the world.

That is where God is headed. A new world. Under a humble king. Filled with peace, extending to all the borders of humanity. God's king will be the means for that.

We don't yet see it, but we will. But let's get back to the final section of our passage. And I want you to notice the language of this final section. God has used the language of Exodus.

That is God as warrior. He has used the language and spoken about the purpose for his people. He has used the language of kingship taken from Samuel, the Psalms and the prophets.

[15:55] And now in verse 11, he talks about the blood of the covenant. Can you see it there? The best translation is the one I've given you in my outlines, which says this. It's from the Holman Christian Standard Version. It says, The waterless cisterns, a word that sort of echoes back to Joseph.

Remember his throne in the well? A waterless cistern from which he was rescued, but he thought that was the end for him. In the Old Testament, the linking between blood and covenant is found at one particular place when God institutes his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai.

And Israel, you might remember, signs up to it willingly. They say, All the Lord has said we will do. Which is why in one sense it can be said to be their covenant, your covenant as it's voiced here.

However, you might know that the linking of blood and covenant also occurs in the New Testament at the Lord's Supper. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.

But there are echoes, other echoes of Israel's past. Did you see it there where God talks about both Judah and Ephraim? In other words, he's talking about all of Israel, representative of all the people of God.

[17:15] Then he talks about how together they will fight against great powers. In the days of Zechariah, do you know what the rising power was? We're talking about 500 BC, but already in 500 BC, one nation was rising to the fore.

Just little hints of its rise. And that is Greece. And so it's appropriate that the battle is done against Greece, the rising world power. God will stand over his people and do cosmic battle.

He will overpower them, overpower the enemies and protect them. And in verse 16, we're told that his people will shine in God's land. The language here, as I said, comes from the past.

It echoes the present, but it envisions a future. The future is spelled out in the language of the future. Look at verse 16 again. On that day.

On that day, the Lord their God will save them and fertility and blessing will flourish in the land. Friends, this is the stuff of an eternal future. Where God's purposes are headed.

[18:18] Back to Eden. Back to the security of God's presence. Back under the protection of God. Under the eye of God. Friends, do you remember how we began?

Remember I spoke to you about Jacob. And I said that we tend to read the stories of the Bible heroes and think that life was relatively good for them under the good hand of God.

But it was not all rosy, as Calvin has shown us. Jacob himself says that his life was short and troublesome. Literally, I love the literal it is here of the original language.

It says, he speaks to Pharaoh and he says, you know, my life was full of fewness and badness. Fewness and badness. Short and evil.

So what was Jacob's secret then? We see Jacob's secret was that he was a person of hope. You see, he hoped in God. He hoped in God's purpose.

[19:21] He heard God's word from the past. And he looked with hope into the future. And he affirmed that he did not have his hope set on earthly things. Jacob didn't have it spelled out as clearly as here in Zechariah.

But he did know it in German just to show you. When he's laying hands or blessing his sons at the end of his life. Do you know what he says to Judah? He says, you'll be king one day. This is my summary of it. And he says, you'll untie a donkey and its colt. Very interesting, isn't it? Because did you hear the language? So he only knew it in German. He didn't know how it would be fully expressed. But he knew it in German. And did you see it in our passage? Did you notice it in the center of our passage? Did you hear God's ringing declaration? The Lord has a king. And that king, that king, even who is there in Jacob's own life and words, is the means, the method and the mechanism for accomplishing his purposes.

[20 : 28] Friends, this is the basis of our steadfast hope. And once you get this right, everything else is sure and certain. Once you get God's king right, everything else will fall into place.

Hope can reign. For God has guaranteed it all in his son. As the apostle Paul says, all the promises of God have their yes and their amen in him. You see, Jacob may have had a tough life.

In his own words, it may have been full of fewness and badness. However, he had a hope. And that hope was in God's future. And that future was tied up with God's purposes.

And in the end, though he may not have known it, we know it. Those purposes have their center in God's humble king, Jesus Christ. Jacob's hope was secure.

He expressed it by saying, when I die, bury my bones back in the promised land. Because that's where my future is tied up.

[21 : 35] Friends, Jacob's hope was secure. And let me tell you, our hope is secure because it's founded in God's son. Because our hope is in God's king, it will never be disappointed.

By the way, did you notice verse 12 in our passage? After speaking of God's king, God speaks of God's people. And he gives them a marvelous name.

Did you see it there, verse 12? He calls them prisoners of hope. It's a strange way of putting things, isn't it? Prisoners of hope. That is what we are.

We are glad prisoners of this hope. Founded in God's purposes in his son. Prisoners of hope, friends, you see. In joy.

In times of trouble. Amongst the vicissitudes of life. In the distresses of illness and aging. And in the face of death.

[22 : 32] Prisoners of hope. And realize. That once you get God's king right. Hope can reign in the heart.

And let it reign in your hearts. Your minds. Your dispositions. Let this hope take you prisoner. For it will not disappoint. For it is founded in God's son.

Hope, friends. It is the mark of God's people. Along with faith and love. But hope. Let's pray.

Father, we pray that you would make us people. Who believe firmly in your son. And get this right. And then we pray that you would make us people.

Not only of faith in your son. But who love you and love each other. But today, Father, we particularly pray. That you'll make us people of hope.

[23 : 43] For it will not disappoint. For it is founded in your word. And in your son. Father, please help us to hope. In joy.

In times of trouble. Amid the vicissitudes of life. In the distress of illness. In sickness. Even in the face of death.

Make us people of hope, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.