

Zechariah 9:1-17 "Prisoners of Hope"

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Preacher: Tony Myles

- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- It is our privilege to have with us this morning, Reverend Tony Miles. Tony and Tanya and their family have been here with us for the PCA's Mercy Conference that was hosted at Southwood this weekend. Many of you got to be a part of.
- Tony is a senior pastor of New City Fellowship Church in St. Louis, and we're delighted he and I are alumni of the same seminary and have been friends now for like 36 hours or something like that.
- So we're so excited that he's here to open God's Word for us this morning. Tony, thank you so much for being with us. Thank you, the rest of you all, for making the trip with him as well.
- We're delighted to have you all here. He likes handheld mics.
- [1 : 08] I do. Good morning. It's a joy and a privilege to be with you this morning.
- I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters at New City Fellowship in St. Louis. I want to thank Pastor Will for giving me this opportunity to share God's Word with you and thank my dear friends, Robert and Deneen Blevins, for their hospitality over this weekend.
- It's been a joy to be here. And we're traveling back today so you can pray for us as we get on the road and head back to St. Louis.
- I want to open up God's Word, Zechariah chapter 9. And I'm actually going to read verses 9 through 12, although I'm going to pull from several places in this chapter as we hear from God's Word this morning.
- But listen to God's Word, Zechariah 9, beginning at verse 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.
- [2 : 27] 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. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope. Today I declare that I will restore to you double.
- This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Father, we pray this morning that as we open up your Word, that you would do that work in us through your Word and by the power of your Spirit, we pray.
- Make us more like your Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, Lord, may the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray.
- [3 : 44] Amen. In January, I took a trip to Rwanda with a couple of pastors from my church to the capital city of Kigali.

And we went to meet with some pastors there to explore partnership around theological education for pastors, as well as support for widows and orphans in Rwanda.

And on the first day, our host pastor decided to take us to the genocide memorial in Kigali. In 1994, more than a million Hutus and Tutsis were killed in a three-month period in a genocidal war in Rwanda aimed at exterminating the Tutsi people.

Moderate Hutus who had refused to join this evil were killed with their Tutsi brothers and sisters. Needless to say, this memorial left me and our team completely undone.

More than 250,000 men and women and children are buried at this memorial. Family members attend the memorial each day to pay respect to their lost loved ones.

[4 : 56] And I couldn't make it through. I couldn't make it through the memorial because I was overwhelmed with grief. At the kind of evil that men and women could unleash upon one another.

And I was left asking the question again, is there any real hope for substantial change and healing to come into our communities and into this world?

I mean, add to what I saw in Rwanda, the history of our own country. And the continued brokenness that exists across racial lines. Or the continued division that exists across socioeconomic lines and really all other lines.

And one is left to ask, can we break through the walls of race and class that we keep erecting and sustaining? Can we heal the divisions that exist in our communities and even in our churches?

Is there hope for peace and healing and change? And if there is hope, from where will it arise? Who will bring it? Who or what can we turn to in confident expectation for change?

[6 : 10] It's in the face of these questions and questions like this that the people of God turn to the message of God in his word like that which is before us in Zechariah 9.

We turn to the message of God, the narrative of our Lord, which tells us who are in Christ that into a world where sin and death and evil and oppression and violence and injustice has reigned, God sent forth his son.

He sent forth his son. He sent forth his son. He sent forth his king to put down that rule and reign, to crush the ultimate oppressor and his oppression on the one hand.

And along with that, to rescue those who are trapped under the dominion of sin and death and evil and oppression and violence and injustice, to set them free into a kingdom of righteousness, justice, mercy, and peace.

Brothers and sisters, that message, which is at the center of our living and being as the people of God in this world, is the very message which is meant to drive our mission in this world.

[7 : 27] Whether we are here at home or abroad, the true king has come and he has already begun to set things right in this world. He is, as the shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith says, he is right now restraining and conquering all of his and our enemies.

Y'all excuse me, I'm going to get happy in a minute and I'll get a little louder. I apologize for that. It was, of course, into a world where these enemies of which I have been speaking existed that this prophecy of Zechariah came.

The people of God in Zechariah's day, they knew the realities of sin and brokenness and death and injustice and violence. They knew it all too well. They had come out of exile in Babylon.

They had seen and experienced the oppressive power of that kingdom. In fact, they had experienced in their own kingdom through the oppressive rule of certain kings throughout their own history and through the rebelliousness that was in their own hearts.

And I know I don't need to tell you this, but I will anyway, that if you lift up your eyes into this world, these enemies rear their heads in the cities and nations of the world in our day.

[8 : 47] We see it in the clear example, examples of the abuse of authority of those who are meant to protect and serve, but some of whom instead use their authority to oppress and abuse.

We see the reality of these things when we look around our community and we see fatherless children whose fathers are alive but not present. We see it in young people who are finding little acceptance at home, have chosen gangs, who resolve disputes with violence rather than communication.

We see it in churches who have retreated from engaging the brokenness of the cities and communities into which Christ has called them, who have forgotten the call to be in the world and not just of it.

And of course, we can add many other ways in which the realities of sin and death are at work in this world. And we would be undone, all of us in this room, we would be undone in the face of all of it.

But for the truth that resounds throughout this passage, through this prophecy, that the Lord has answered all of it in the person and work of his king and our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

[9 : 58] And he has deposited that truth into his community, into his church. And it is this deposit of truth in the church that makes us as the people of God in the midst of this world, a people of profound hope.

Prisoners, in fact, as Zacharias says, prisoners of hope. You and I, you and I, you and I, we are meant to be prisoners of Christ to convey this hope to the world.

And keeping with Zacharias' prophecy, under the leadership of our Lord and savior, King Jesus, we are called out into the world to actually fight for the establishment of God's hope in the world.

Only we do not use the weapons of this world to fight for that hope. We fight as our king did in humility and loving sacrifice. We fight with deeds of righteousness and peace.

And so this morning, I want to give you three aspects that I think define this hope that we are meant to take out into our world. Just three points and then I'll get out of your way, all right? The first aspect of this hope that we are meant to convey, brothers and sisters, is that the Lord sees.

[11 : 19] The Lord sees. I want you to listen to what is said in verses 1 and 2 of Zachariah 9 and then verse 8. It says, And then in verse 8, it says, Brothers and sisters, one of the themes in this prophecy, one of the aspects of hope that you and I carry as the people of God into this world is that the Lord, our God, sees.

He sees. He sees. The text says he has an eye on all mankind and on all the tribes of Israel. He sees the sin and the death.

He sees the evil and the oppression. He sees the violence and injustice that is in our world. He sees his people and indeed all of mankind trapped under those realities. And of course, God's seeing is not like ours.

God doesn't see like we see. We see and maybe, maybe we're moved to respond or not. We see and perhaps we shrug our shoulders. We see and maybe we turn our heads and our hearts away.

We see and condemn. But God's seeing is different. God's seeing is different. He sees and behind that seeing is a commitment to act, to do something about what he sees.

[13 : 11] I want to tell you this morning, God saw the evil and oppression of his people, the evil and the oppression that his people were under, and he acted to bring down that evil and that oppression, to rescue his people and all those who would put their trust in him from under its power.

God saw the pride and arrogance of the world and its rebellion against him. He answered it and he brought salvation and redemption by sending his own son, his king into this world.

God sees people. God sees people trapped under the powers of sin and death and all that flow from them. And God responds to what he sees.

And a huge part, a huge part of the hope that you and I are meant to take out into this broken world, that we are meant to fight for as the people of God in this world, we are meant to go out into the world and tell them our God sees.

He sees you. He sees what's going on in your life. He knows. He knows. He knows. And he has bound himself in his son to bring salvation and deliverance.

[14 : 24] You and I are meant to be messengers through our words and our deeds that God is a God who sees. He sees the fatherless child that I spoke of earlier.

He sees the victims of brutality, both physical and legal, by those in authority. He sees the women trapped in sexual exploitation and violence. He sees, he sees the pride and arrogance of those who perpetrate injustice in this world.

He sees it all. And in the person and work of his son is freedom from the power and dominion of it all. Southwood, this is a part of the message of hope for which Christ has made you his prisoners, that you might go out and declare to a world that is broken and in need of the hope that Christ brings, that you may go out and tell them God sees you.

God sees you. God sees you. God sees you. In 2009, we took a trip to Congo to connect with a group of churches there that we partnered with around caring for orphans and education and medical care.

And while we were there, we had the opportunity to visit some of the churches we are connected with there. And on one particular evening, we went to worship at one of the churches. And when we entered the church, they were already singing and they were worshipping God vibrantly.

[15 : 54] And it's customary there to sing and worship even before the service itself has begun. And on this particular evening, I was in something of a spiritual fog. It was my first time to Africa.

I was overwhelmed by what I was seeing. The poverty there was hard to come to grips with. As the choir sang, one of our party, a brother named Steve, was looking out over a hill.

On which this church sat and a group of women who were cooking around a small fire they had made outside their home. The house was little more than a brick structure with a tin roof, no doors.

Among these women sat a little girl in a wheelchair. How she had gotten there, was it disease, an accident, some other sort of violence that had been done to her?

We don't know how she got there because we never had the opportunity to speak with her. But as the choir sang, Steve noticed these women start to dance around the fire as they cooked.

[16 : 55] And all of a sudden, this little girl began to lift her hands and join in the praise of God that she was hearing from the church. The choir was singing a song in one of the languages of Congo, Lingala.

The song was entitled, Ameniona. Ameniona. Ni tam wi buia buana. Kwaku wa ye ye. Ameniona. I'm sure I just murdered that, but it's something like that.

But the translation is, I will sing to the Lord because he sees me. I will sing to the Lord because he sees me.

Here was this little girl in the midst of deep poverty, physical brokenness, who knew that the Lord took notice of her. How had she come to believe that? No doubt in my mind it was because the people of God there were proclaiming it to her and her family.

They were declaring, God sees you and he knows you. And he has come to bring his glory and salvation into your life.

[18 : 03] The challenge for us here, the challenge for us here, is to be active in the world on an individual and corporate level to announce to the world that our God sees. On an individual level, the events sometimes that are exploding all around us in our world present us with the opportunity to be present with those who are hurting, who feel crushed, who are oppressed, and to say to them in their condition that the Lord sees you.

The world may not, but God does. And I've been very glad for believers who have participated in peaceful protests from our church at times in our community who have sought to communicate the truth that God sees in justice and oppression and that he cares.

I want to pray that God will continue to lead individuals from this church into declaring his goodness and his hope to those around you and to those in your community for you to go out and say to those who are in despair, God takes note of you and his eye is on you.

Amen, brothers and sisters. Amen. The second thing here, the second aspect of this hope that you and I are meant to declare, one, the Lord sees, two, the nations are reconciled.

Let me read this to you from Zechariah 9, verse 7, and then verse 10. God says this. He says, I will take away its blood from its mouth, its abominations from between its teeth.

[19 : 47] It, too, shall be a remnant for our God. It shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites. In verse 10, he says, I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations.

And his rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. Another theme of this prophecy, an aspect of the hope for which we are prisoners, is that the Lord is king over the nations, and his kingdom is one in which the nations are reconciled together.

They are drawn together in one family. I want to suggest to you this morning that the preaching of peace to the nations is not simply that the nations would hear the gospel and that individuals in those nations, having heard it, would be saved.

Instead, it is a message of peace between enemies. It is those who were once enemies of God and his people being drawn into the community of God's people, into the same family together.

This is what is in view in verse 7. The imagery of taking away blood and abominations from the mouths of the Philistines is a message of God's commitment to put an end to the idolatry of that nation and, indeed, the nations of the earth.

[21 : 10] And in these words, it too will be a remnant for our God. It shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites. I want you to listen to what one commentator says about that verse.

He says, the Ekronites will be melted up with the people of God, like the Jebusites with the Judeans. Those who were once separated are now brought into the life of the community of God's people.

Those who were once enemies, those who were once enemies, are now made the people of God.

And that's good news. Because every single one of you in here, you were once an enemy of God. And God reconciled you to his son. But he not only reconciled you to his son, I just came to tell you this morning, God has more kids than you.

And they actually look different than you do. And God has brought them together into his family to unite them together with you. And make us together one family.

[22 : 23] Former enemies are now reconciled. And make no mistake, people of God, This is a huge part of the message of hope that we are meant to carry into this world. This world that is still in so many places and in so many ways divided.

The cross of Christ has brought peace between us and God. Yet that same cross, according to Ephesians 2, has brought peace between man and man across all the lines that divide us.

I love to tell people the preaching of the gospel is the preaching of God's reconciliation of us to himself.

But if Ephesians 2 is right, and it is, it is also the proclamation of God's reconciliation of his family Jew and Gentile together.

The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile is the model of the reconciliation between all clans and all tribes under the rule and reign of King Jesus.

[23 : 24] We are part of the same family because we have together put our faith in Jesus Christ. But I want to tell you this morning that if you give yourself to what it means to be prisoners of hope in this world, part of what that will mean is that it will mean, Southwood, it will mean for you embodying this message of reconciliation, the reconciliation of the nations together in your own city and in this world.

Amen. Amen. Amen. This call, I want to say to you this morning, this call to reconciliation actually means that we hang out in zip codes where Jesus hangs out.

And with people in those zip codes that Jesus hangs out with. The call to reconciliation is not just racial, it's socioeconomic.

It's no accident that we often find Jesus in places and with people whom society has written off. And it's no accident that when he is engaging those in authority, he is often speaking or acting on behalf of those who have been crushed by that authority.

I was telling the folk yesterday that if we're really going to be a church that reaches the poor, if we're really going to be a church that communicates the good news of God to the poor, then we have to be a church that is willing to be a family to the poor.

[25 : 00] I don't even go to Southwood. You hear I'm using the we, the collective we. But that's God's call for you.

It's for you to be a church that embodies this message of reconciliation across all the lines of division that you might declare to the world that in Jesus, God has proclaimed peace to the nations of the earth.

Amen, people of God. We need God to awaken us to the call of reconciliation that calls us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who sat by a well with an outcast Samaritan, ate dinner with rejected sinners, touched disenfranchised lepers and sick folk.

If our message of hope is going to resonate in this world, it's going to resonate only as you and I become a community in which folk like us are not simply ministered to, but become truly a part of our family.

Amen. This hope for which God has made you a prisoner is a hope that you are meant to declare to the world.

[26 : 23] The Lord sees you. The nations are reconciled. Here's my last point this morning. The people of God are victorious.

Amen. The people of God are victorious. Listen to what Zachariah says in verses 13 through 17. I have bent Judah as my bow, and 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 sword. Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning. 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 on his land.

[27 : 27] For great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty. Amen. I said this earlier, but let me say it again.

Sin and death and Satan, they have been defeated in the person and work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has triumphed over them through his death and resurrection. That truth is central to our life and our witness in this world as a people of God.

But you know if you have walked any significant time among the broken, among the hurting, among the poor, the vulnerable, or the needy, that these realities, though they have been defeated, are still at work in the world.

Indeed, even in our own lives as believers, we still do battle with sin and death and the evil one. But in terms of our mission into this world, we are going to confront these realities, and they do exercise an influence and empower in the world that can sometimes feel overwhelming.

Tyre and Sidon were real enemies who exercised a real oppressiveness in the world against the people of God. And to Israel and the surrounding nations, it would have appeared as if nothing could conquer them.

[28 : 44] Any of you all know what I'm talking about? Any of you all ever felt like the weight of the world was going to crush you? You've ever felt that sense of despair at the brokenness in your own heart, at the brokenness in the world around you?

Indeed, when we come face to face with the brokenness of our world, with some of the things I mentioned to you earlier, like fatherlessness and racism and violence, it can feel like those realities are winning in the world.

It can feel like they can't be conquered. They can't be overcome. Indeed, if we're honest, when we are faced with these things, our natural reaction is to despair. But because of what Christ has done, because he has, through his death and resurrection, conquered all of these enemies, you and I have the freedom to go out into the world and to announce that in Jesus Christ, there is victory.

We have the freedom to confront the brokenness of our cities and our world, prayerfully asking that God's kingdom would come, that his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Because of the ultimate victory, somebody said amen. Thank you so much. Somebody over there said amen. I was going to say it earlier that I'm a black preacher and I love calling and response, but you must have felt me on that.

[30 : 27] But because of the ultimate victory of Christ over these enemies, we can have the good hope that in this life, we will see, as we engage the brokenness of this world, we will see God's victory breaking out into people's lives and in the communities in which we live as we wait the day for Christ to bring victory in all of its fullness.

And I want to tell you this morning, you are prisoners of hope, Southwood. You are prisoners of hope to announce that victory to the world. There's a song, and the words are, In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, we have the victory.

In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, Satan, you have to flee. Oh, what can ever stand before us when we call on that great name?

Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus, we have the victory. The reason I love that song is because it recognizes two important truths. Our victory as Christians is ultimately rooted in the Lord and not in ourselves.

Number one. Number two, this isn't a triumphalistic proclamation. It is rather a confident expectation, a projection of hope that God and his people will ultimately triumph over the evil that is in this world.

[31 : 55] Amen, people of God. The way in which we bear witness to this victory is through the visible demonstrations of the gospel's power to heal and to restore and to change.

Every time, listen to me, every time you take your resources and use them to help someone in need, in the name of Jesus, you are demonstrating the victory that has come in Jesus Christ our Lord.

When you walk alongside a family or you adopt a child that has been abandoned, neglected, or abused, you are announcing the victory of Jesus over this world and his power to deliver people out of the brokenness of this world.

When you stand up in the face of injustice and you cry out for justice, you are announcing the victory of Jesus over this world.

When you build relationships with people who are not from your tribe, you are announcing the victory of Jesus over the divisions that are still at work in this world. In all of these ways and more, we are meant to be the Lord's prisoners of hope to announce the victory that starts now and will be fully established when the Lord returns.

[33 : 06] So I want to encourage you today, Southwood. I want to encourage you to ask God to show you ways that you might enter into announcing this victory of Christ in your community.

Look for opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus, to love, to serve, to help, to bring God's healing into the lives of others. And trust me, if you ask for the Lord's help to discover ways to enter in and announce his victory, can I tell you, the Lord will hear you and he will show you.

Brothers and sisters, we are prisoners of hope. We know that in Christ and him alone is the redemption that the world is crying out for.

You and I have tasted that hope ourselves. If we have put our faith in Jesus, we've tasted that hope ourselves. And it is this hope, this redemption, that we are called to announce to the world with our words and our lives, to say to the broken, to say to the hurting, to say to the needy and the vulnerable, to say to the poor, the Lord sees and is mighty to save.

To say to the nations, in Christ, we are part of the same family. And to say to those who are in despair and hopelessness, in Christ, there is victory.

[34 : 45] May Christ empower you by his spirit, Southwood, to be those who give yourselves to carrying God's hope into this very broken world. Amen?

Let me pray for you. Father, thank you. Thank you that you have deposited this hope into our hearts.

Through the victory of Christ over sin and death, Lord, there is hope. Hope because you see. Hope because in you is reconciliation.

Hope because in you, Lord Jesus, there is victory. I pray. I pray for Southwood. I pray for this church, Lord, that you would make it a place where people encounter this great hope.

Make them, make them together prisoners of hope for you. Lord, empower them by your spirit to declare that hope in this world, we pray. And ask it in Jesus' mighty name.

[35 : 52] Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. frowns.

We'll be right back.■■■. Orca