**The Coming King Has Come!**

Text: Zechariah 9

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**Scriptures:** Zechariah 9

**Series: Zechariah**. Sermon 12 of 19

**Theme:** The Lord’s future royal triumph and rule over the nations for the sake of his people as a humble king

**FCF:** We can lack joy amidst the trials of this life

**Proposition:** Rejoice and be encouraged today becausein powerful humility, Christ has conquered the world and brought lasting peace

**Introduction**

So far (in the first 8 chapters of the book of Zechariah) the focus has been very much upon encouraging the returned exiles from Babylon in their task of reconstructing the temple in Jerusalem. We know the precise dates when the revelation of God came to the prophet Zechariah. The rebuild can be nailed down to 5-year period from 521 to 516BC.

Now we come to the second part of this book in which the focus is very much upon future events without clear timeframes. These prophecies are presented in vivid images which the people back then could readily relate to; much more easily than we can today. The type of writing in Zechariah chapters 9-14 is called “apocalyptic” (meaning to ‘uncover/disclose/reveal’). It is in many ways similar in style to much of the books of Daniel and Revelation. We are going to be able to understand some, but not all, of the imagery of the text. Our focus will be upon that which is made clear by other Scripture, rather than on details which remain obscured to us.

Some people have suggested that there are two different authors to this book of the Bible. This idea comes, not only from observing the lack of specific dates and the different style in chapters 9-14, but also because in these prophecies some see the accurate prediction of future events in human history – such as a military conquest of Alexander some 200 years after Zechariah first wrote these words.

Have you heard of Alexander the Great? As a 20-year-old in 336BC Alexander succeeded his father to the throne in Greece, inheriting a strong kingdom and an experience army. He spent most of the remaining years of his life conquering territory throughout Asia and northeast Africa. By the age of 30 he had established one of the largest empires in the ancient world, stretching from Greece to Egypt and into northwest India. Undefeated in battle, he is considered to be one of history’s most successful military commanders. He was a mighty king who conquered his enemies, subduing them and then including them in his expanding kingdom.

This brings us to our first point:

**1. The mighty King conquers his enemies (1-8)**

The first eight verses of our text in Zechariah 9 depict a future military invasion of the lands to the north of Jerusalem. The mighty warrior here is the Lord God Himself. He is pictured as sweeping down from the North and coming in battle against Hadrach (an area in northern Syria, which included the capital Damascus) and then the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast before conquering the Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod.

These pagan cities and the lands they controlled had been the enemies of Israel in the past. In this prophecy they are used to represent, not so much those who unjustly treated God’s covenant people, but rather those who are the enemies of God Himself. The image to grasp here is that of God as an Avenging Warrior making war against all who oppose Him and completely conquering all in His path of justified destruction. I suspect this image was more palatable to the returned exiles back then, who knew what military oppression and social injustice felt like, than it is to us today in 21st century New Zealand. How does the picture of the Lord sweeping down in avenging destruction over His enemies (who are also the enemies of His people) mesh with your understanding of who God is? How does this prophetic word fit with who you think Jesus is?

Listen to Revelation 19:11 *“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war”* Here in Revelation Jesus is seen as a mighty warrior making just war against all the enemies of God in the last battle before the beast and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur (Rev 19:20). It is to this final conquest that Zechariah’s prophecy here points. The close of this age is described this way in 1 Corinthians 15:24-25“*Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*”.

Can you see how later revelation in Scripture helps us to rightly interpret a 2500-year-old prophecy which is expressed in geographical and historical terms which would have been familiar to those who first heard these words of the Zechariah?

Now perhaps you’re wondering about Alexander the Great. It is true that He did march south against Damascus, Tyre, Sidon and the cities of Philistia as described in these verses. The city of Tyre was originally on the mainland but had been relocated to an island a little offshore which was surrounded by a double wall 50m high and 8m thick. Tyre had withstood a 5-year siege by the Assyrians and then a 13 year one by the Babylonians, but Alexander took the city in just seven months! How? He used all the material from the old city on the shore (stones, timbers etc.) to build a causeway out to the island fortress, then he attacked and took the stronghold.

That day Ezekiel’s prophecy against Tyre was fulfilled (26:12) “*They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea*”. So too was Zechariah’s (9:3-4). “*Tyre has built herself a stronghold; she has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. But the Lord will take away her possessions and destroy her power on the sea, and she will be consumed by fire*.”

Does God’s Word predict future events accurately? Yes, most definitely! This is one of the aspects of the Bible which is different to any other book. The words of Scripture are all “God-breathed” and God knows the future, because He created time! He is from everlasting to everlasting. We don’t need to invent a second author for the second part of Zechariah just because there is an accurate prediction of future events, nor because the focus and style changes as we move from chapter 8 to chapter 9.

Does Zechariah 9:1-8 speak about Alexander the Great in the near future (from Zechariah’s perspective) as well as about Christ in the further future? The best we can say is either ‘possibly’ or ‘probably’. Foretelling prophecy in Scripture may have multiple future fulfilments. However, the most important is always the link to Christ Jesus.

With that in mind, look now at verse 7: “*I will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth. Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites*”. Here God is saying that having dealt with the pride of the Philistines, He will then transform ‘a remnant’ (those who are left) and include them as His own people. This would be like the Jebusites were not wiped out by king David but were allowed to be absorbed into Judah. How? God Himself will remove blood (a forbidden food for his OT people) from their mouths.

Isn’t this how God deals with our pride. With the idols of our hearts? He comes with power, at times cutting off our reliance upon ourselves and showing us how weak we are. Then he stoops down to us and cleans us up so that we can be joined into his family. How is this possible?

God comes to us as our conquering king. In powerful triumph yes, but also in surprising, astounding humility to release us from being held captive…which brings us to our 2nd point:

**2. The humble King releases prisoners (9-12)**

You might not have been too familiar with the book of Zechariah before we started this preaching series. However, you have almost certainly heard the words of verse 9 before! Why? Because they are quoted directly by gospel writers Matthew (21:5) and John (12:15) as they report the triumphal entry of Jesus in Jerusalem; an event which is also recorded by Mark (11:78-10) and Luke (19:28-40).

What is so significant about this prophecy that it is referenced in all the gospels when they describe the time when Jesus was welcomed like a king by the people of Jerusalem? Some spread their cloaks on the road and others cut branches from the trees to lay on the road shouting out “"Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"” (Matt 21:9)

This prophecy in Zechariah is important because these words accurately predict the coming of the promised king, descended from David who would reign as the Messiah. The word ‘messiah’ is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for ‘anointed one’. The Greek word is ‘Christos’. The Messiah, the Christ, is the most anticipated person in the Old Testament. The seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). Of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10). The Son of God (Psalm 2). The great descendant of David (2 Sam 7:12). The Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11). The Servant (Isaiah 42:1-16). The Branch (Zech 3:8). Here He is! He has arrived in town. Not just any town but Zion, Jerusalem, the city of God. The picture here is of the victory procession of a king returning triumphant from battle against the enemies of the people. Here He comes mounted on a young donkey!

In ancient times, the ass or donkey was not thought of as a lowly beast. Important men rode them (e.g. Jud 10:4; 12:14). The King of Israel rode on a mule (1 Ki 1:33; 2 Sam 13:29; 18:9). Whilst a horse or chariot would have been the norm for a king in a military victory procession. What sets this king apart is not so much the type of animal that he rides, but that he comes not in worldly power or status, but in meekness and humility. He is humble/poor/afflicted/humble. He is very different to worldly kings like Alexander the Great or Caesar who would enter a city in great pageantry and pride.

This king is righteous. Not only would he execute justice, govern faithfully and live a life of integrity. He would also deliver the oppressed and give generous support to the weak and poor. He would be everything Israel and her monarchy were called to be, but were not: upright, compassionate, just, merciful and faithful. No wonder he was so welcome in the city!

This king also has salvation. He has been declared righteous and saved by God. Suggesting that this king is both accused and attacked by his enemies but is vindicated and saved by the Lord. He also brings salvation to all who belong to Him. No wonder the people rejoice when he comes!

This king will bring peace. The chariots of Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem will be redundant. The battle bows might as well be put into a museum. They are no longer needed in a time of peace.

Back then, 2500 years ago, the people yearned for peace in their little patch of territory around Jerusalem but look! this King is coming to “*proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth*” (Zech 9:10). As Abraham Kuyper once famously said: *“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”* This coming king will bring peace to the whole earth!

This coming conquering King also delivers his people. He rescues them from death. Look at the picture presented in v11b “*I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit*”. Dry wells were used as prisons in the ancient world. A waterless pit is a place of entrapment leading to death. The image here recalls Joseph’s rescue from a well (Gen 37:23-28) and Jeremiah’s from a cistern (Jer 38:1-13) cf. Ps 30:3; 40:2; 103:4. The idea here in v11 is that of having one’s life snatched from the jaws of death.

This deliverance will be possible because of ‘the blood of my covenant with you’. The covenant was confirmed by blood sacrifice when God first ratified it with Abraham (Gen 15:9-11). When a covenant was made in the ancient Near East, the sacrificed animals were symbolic of what would/should happen to covenant-breakers. Yet, when God made the covenant with Abraham, it was God himself who passed between the pieces of the slaughtered animals and birds, not Abraham (Gen 15:9-11). This divine action indicated that God Himself would bear the penalty for the covenant-breaking of the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

How is the coming King going to release captives? By sacrificing Himself to restore the covenant they have broken. God Himself showed Abraham that He would keep the covenant on behalf of His people. Moses confirmed the covenant at Sinai, taking the blood of slaughtered animals, throwing it on Israelites and declaring to them: "*This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words*."

1500 years later Jesus eats a last meal with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem having arrived in the city a few days earlier on a donkey being hailed as the triumphant king of Israel. He breaks bread, blesses and breaks it “*This is my body*” he says. Then he takes a cup of wine and says, “*This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many*” (Mark 14:24). The wine is no more his actual blood than the bread is his actual body. The wine is no more his actual blood than the blood of animals was the actual blood of the covenant when Moses sprinkled the people at the foot of Mt Sinai.

The blood of the covenant sealed the solemn promise to Abraham that the Lord God would count his faith as righteousness and that he and his offspring would receive the land of promise and blessing. The blood of the covenant reminded Israel that the terms of the covenant were that they were to love the Lord their God and willingly obey his law. The blood of the covenant is the means by which the coming King releases the prisoners of war. The blood of the covenant is the blood of Jesus Christ, poured out for many as he himself suffered and died not for his own covenant-breaking (He is the perfect covenant-keeper) but for the sins of others like you and me.

Now we can understand the humility of this great King. He does not wage war against the enemy by sending in his troops to win the battle whilst he directs the campaign from the safety of an operations post outside the war zone. No, He goes ahead of His people. He goes alone. He pours out his life unto death to release those who have been captured by the enemy. He is the great humble/poor/afflicted/oppressed King who was led like a lamb to the slaughter. Not speaking in his own defence, but willingly laying down his own life to defend His people – from their enemies.

I have some good news for you this morning. People of God, your king has come! This future-telling prophesy of Zechariah has come true. Jesus reigns and He sets His people free. Free from sin and death. Freed from bondage, liberated to life for Christ.Jesus said,“*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*” (John 8:36).

The promise here is that God will restore ‘to you double’ (v12). Joy instead of past sorrow. True wealth in place of past poverty of spirit. Life instead of death. Hope where there was despair. The double share in the OT was the privilege of the firstborn (e.g. Deut 21:17). Conquering King Jesus shares with His people the privileges which He has as God’s only begotten, beloved Son.

Do you not want this King to rule your life? He is the only truly good Lord. He will protect you and provide for all your needs…which brings us to our last point…

**3. The shepherd King protects and provides (13-17)**

Do you feel like a warrior? Are you ready to go to battle in holy warfare? Perhaps this idea seems uncomfortable. Images of ISIS conducting Jihad come to mind. Beheadings, rapes, imprisonment, ‘ethnic cleansing’, atrocities, violence. Christian Jihad? No. Conquest? Yes!

To understand the imagery of the last part of our text this morning, we need to interpret the words in light of what we understand from later revelation. It has been helpfully said that “The New is in the Old Concealed, the Old is in the New Revealed”.

So, let’s look at the New Testament first!  **“***Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*” (Romans 8:35-37) We are more than conquerors brother and sisters, we are part of the army of Christ! Look at verse 13: “*I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword*”

Judah and Ephraim represent the scattered southern and northern kingdoms. Now they are united and used like a warrior’s sword in the hand of the coming King. ‘Greece’ (lit. ‘sons of Javan’) is here symbolic of all those who are not God’s people throughout the earth (‘Javan’) (Gen 10:4, Isaiah 66:19). Some have suggested that the reference to war against Greece here prophesies the victory of Judas Maccabeus against the Selucid (Hellenistic/Greek) ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. It is a historic fact that Antiochus did set up a pagan altar in the Jerusalem temple and offered pigs flesh there a sacrifice. This was probably the ‘abomination that causes desolation’ spoken of by Daniel (11:31 and 12:11). Judas Maccabeus won stunning victories against Antiochus’ generals and eventually occupied Jerusalem and purified the temple.

As we have seen, it is possible that whilst the primary prophecy of Zechariah 9:1-8 refers to the spiritual victory of Christ over the enemies of God’s people, it may have a secondary, prior, fulfilment in pointing to Alexander the Great. Here the primary prophecy is of God’s people joining Him in battle, but there could possibility also be a secondary, prior, fulfilment pointing to Judas Maccabeus. However, we should not let either of these possibilities distract us from the main message of this text.

The main point is that the Lord will lead his people in battle. Notice that he calls them to follow Him with His trumpet. The trumpet was both used to signal war but also to call God’s people to worship (e.g. Isaiah 27:13). It is the Lord’s arrows which go forth like lightening. Victory is portrayed as the enemy’s weapons are disarmed (sling stones like that used by David against Goliath were deadly devices). There is the graphic image of a great banquet in which the blood of their enemies will be poured out as God brings justice. There will be great celebration, not in drunkenness (cf. Eph 5:18), but shouting and jubilation ‘as if’ they were intoxicated with alcohol. *(A helpful event to understand this imagery rightly is the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when people from every nation told of the mighty works of God in languages that they had not learned, but which others understood. Imagine that day! They would have been so excited! Yet, some seeing this concluded “"They have had too much wine.”)* Exuberant Christian joy can look like the loud happiness of drunkenness at times – but without the hangover! And without sin!

How then are we to follow our King, our conquering Commander-in-chief? By adopting His warfare tactics! By using his weaponry! By imitating his martial art.

How would you describe the battle style of King Jesus? Humble/afflicted/laying down his life for those he loved. He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He described his own great battle strategy this way (Luke 9:22): "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life*." Instructing those who would conquer with Him with these words (Luke 9:23): "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*”.

The strategy of warfare in Christ’s army is expressed in Romans 12:20-21: "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good’*.

There is danger in this type of front-line offensive action. But look, our King is ever with us: verse 15 “The LORD of hosts will defend them”. Literally “the Lord of Armies” will defend/protect/ provide cover in the battle so that His people are safe. See how the imagery moves in verse 16: “*The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people*”

This conquering King is the Shepherd King. He rescues his people by overcoming their enemies. Did Jesus not say (John 10:11) "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*”.

The coming King has come, and He is coming again. Coming to bring his people to the land promised by God in the covenant with Abraham. That land will be a place of plenty, pictured at the end of our text in the language of bountiful produce which brings healthy growth; the covenant blessings of ‘grain’ and ‘new wine’ (cf. Deut 33:28).

In the New Heavens and the New Earth, those Christ has rescued will “sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown” (v16). They will dwell in the light of the glory of their King, the Lamb, the humble, afflicted Servant who shed his blood of the covenant as a full and final sacrifice.

Today we rejoice greatly because the coming King of Zechariah’s prophesy has come and is coming! Today we remember Him and thank Him for winning the war against our enemies for us. Today we are encouraged because we are “*more than conquerors through him who loved us”* Today we are called to continue in the battle against our enemies, the world opposed to God, the sinful flesh and the Devil.

AMEN