**Down with the terrified horns!**

Text: Zechariah 1:18-21

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**Scriptures:** Zechariah 1:18-21; Mark 5:1-20

*Suggested song of response: STTL308 ‘The strife is o’er, the battle done’*

**Series: Zechariah**. Sermon 4 of 19. 2nd night vision

**Theme:** The complete conquest of the enemies of God’s people; unexpectedly by skilful, gifted, craftsmenwho bring terror to those who have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem

**Fallen Condition Focus (FCF):** We can be terrified by our enemies and forget that Christ has won the final victory.

**Proposition:** Christ, the humble craftsman, has completely conquered the world

**Introduction**

Down through history, governing powers have sought to control people by preventing them from assembling together. Think of the Tiananmen square massacre in China, 1989, when students who had gathered in protest were dispersed with assault rifles and tanks.

Similarly, one of the primary strategies of Satan in his war against God’s people includes seeking to separate them, and then conquer them; like sheep isolated from the safety of the flock by a prowling lion.

Today we see the church being scattered by ISIS in Syria where Christian are being forced to flee the land under threat of torture and death. Currently, each month around the world 322 Christians are killed for their faith, 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed, 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians (such as beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, and forced marriages)[[1]](#footnote-1).

Today we see the church in the Western World being scattered by false teachers who say that the church has read the Bible wrongly. Well-meaning, well-presented, skilled speakers assure us that the Bible does not provide a reliable history of the world from creation through to a future when the earth will be re-formed. The church is being scattered today by those who say that we each have a grasp on some of the truth, that we can all be our own interpreters of the Bible. When ‘my truth is my truth’ and ‘your truth is your truth’ we become divided, separated from Christ and easily scattered by Satan.

Do you ever think that unless the church jettisons the doctrines of creation, marriage, sexual purity, sin, hell and the absolute authority of the Bible for all of life and faith then we are just doomed to become more and more irrelevant to the world in which we live? Do you fear that these post-modern forces will eventually scatter God’s people, either through ISIS-type persecution, or subtle smooth talking false teachers so that eventually there will be no true church left?

The returned exiles to Jerusalem felt overwhelmed by the task ahead of them in a troubled world which was hostile to their God. They had experienced scattering at the hands of their Assyrian and Babylonian enemies. Working away amongst the rubble of the broken-down walls and temple, they must have wondered – is it really worth the effort? Will our labours be in vain? What’s the point, if we’re just going to be overrun by more hostile forces in the future?

It is into this situation that the Word of the Lord comes to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo. In our text we find the second night vision. It’s separated from the first vision by a marker: the words “Then I looked up” (cf. 2.1; 5:1; 6:1; 5:5) point to God showing him something new.

In this vision, when he sees four horns, Zechariah asks the ‘interpreting angel” the question “what are these?” It wasn’t that the prophet didn’t know what a horn was! He would have understood well that horns are hard, pointed structures which grow out of the heads of animals like goats, rams and cattle beasts. Horns, in Bible times, also symbolized power and strength. For example, when a new king was enthroned, he was anointed with oil from a horn onto his head (1 Sam 16:1,13; 1 Kings 1:39). The meaning of Zechariah’s question to the angel was “*what do these horns represent?*”

The angel replies (v19b) “*These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem*".

These are the powerful nations who dispersed God’s people, like unarmed students from a city square. These ‘horns’ would therefore include Assyria, Babylonia, Edom, Phoenicia, Philistia, and the Ammonites. We know that part of the dispersion of God’s people at the hands of their enemies was a direct consequence of the people’s evil ways and evil practices. The Lord had been very angry with his rebellious people and had justly punished them by using hostile nations ‘horns’ against them so that they might again return to him in repentance and faith. We saw from the opening verses of this book of the Bible that ongoing repentance is essential for the building up of the church.

We also saw, in the first night vision of the man amongst the myrtle trees, that the hostile nations had become complacent in the peace which followed their conquests. So God spoke through his prophet saying (v15): “*I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity*”. It was now time for these aggressive horns to be brought down.

Some have tried to match up the number four with particular empires or nations. One idea is that the four horns may correlate to four parts of the statue in Daniel 2, or four beasts in Daniel 7, or the horns of Daniel 8. However, this interpretation does not fit the historical facts. During the exile in Babylon, Daniel prophesied about events which happened several hundred years after the time of Zechariah.

The number four here **is not** a specific reference to particular nations or empires. It is **symbolic** of all enemy forces; just as we saw the four chariots were to cover the whole earth in the last night vision and the four winds, represented the four points of the compass: north, south, east and west. The image here then is of the **total sum** of all the nations of the world who are hostile to God’s people. Included in the ‘four horns’ are **all powers** which act to break up the gathered people of God.

Now there is further revelation in the vision, the Lord shows Zechariah four ‘craftsmen’ (v20). The Hebrew word here is a general one (harashim) which means ‘a worker in wood, stone or iron’. The term is used elsewhere for jewellery engravers (Ex 28:11); artisans for temple furnishings (Ex 35:35), metalworkers (Deut 27:15), carpenters (2 Kings 12:11) and stonemasons (2 Sam 5:11).

Today we might call them ‘tradies’. Here in New Zealand, they would be the master plumbers, builders, electricians, painters etc. They are humble workers, not the politically elite, the militarily powerful or those who are educationally advantaged.

Again, the number four here does not indicate the actual number of individual craftsmen, but rather represents God’s work in bringing about change for all the earth. It’s really not obvious to Zechariah why these craftsmen have appeared in the vision. It would be understandable for him to expect to see a horn, or perhaps four horns, who would bring down the hostile forces who have scattered God’s people like chaff in the wind. So he asks the angel about the four craftsmen (v20) “*What are these coming to do?*”

The interpreting angel explains (v21): "*These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people*."

In the Ancient Near East defeated captives were made to lie down with their heads under the foot of the conquering king. The hostile nations had conquered God’s people and they remained downtrodden; living under the rule of foreign nations. No one could ‘raise his head’ when the Assyrians, Babylonians or Persians were in control. Just as no Christian can safely raise their head in ISIS controlled territory today.

Then come the four craftsmen. They seem quite ordinary and unassuming. There would not appear to be much that they can do to bring down these powerful horns. Then the totally unexpected happens, Zechariah is told that their purpose is to terrify the forces against God’s people and bring down the hostile powers. You could sum up the bold mission statement for the four craftsmen as “*down with the terrified horns!*”.

In this image there is a reflection of the vision in Daniel chapter 2. That image of an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance, made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. A strong and mighty structure struck down by a simple rock, not quarried by human hands. A seemingly small rock which then became a huge mountain, filling the whole earth.

This second night vision reveals that God will topple the world powers who are hostile to His beloved people in an unexpected way. These craftsmen are divine agents carrying out the will of God in bringing a complete end to the hostility against His people, finally enabling them to be gathered together, never to be scattered again.

The workers rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem needed the encouragement of this vision so that they would keep trusting their Lord and not be frightened by the hostile ‘horns’ which opposed them. They needed human courage founded on divine promises and this is exactly what God provided through His prophet Zechariah.

2500 years later, we look back on this vision and we have greater knowledge than the returned exiles who first heard of this vision. God has revealed more of his plan to us than he had then to them. Time has passed since the Word of the Lord first came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo. God has now spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things (Heb 1:2).

We now know that the uncut rock of Daniel’s vision, which destroyed the seemingly powerful nations who oppressed Israel points forward to Christ. Likewise, the four craftsmen point in this second night vision forward to our Lord Jesus whose mission on earth was to bring down Satan, that serpent of old.

Interesting that Christ was not born into a leading political family or adopted into one like Moses. Interesting that Christ was not raised by a Jewish Zealot as one expert in guerrilla warfare, equipped to tackle the Roman Empire on its own terms. He was not a physically mighty man like Samson. Interesting that Christ was not educated by an esteemed rabbi, as the Apostle Paul had been well trained by Gamaliel.

No. Jesus was raised in the humble home of a carpenter; a craftsman tradie. Yet He is a greater leader than Moses, a stronger man than Samson, a wiser teacher than Paul.

Like the four craftsman who entered Zechariah’s second vision, Christ’s powerful work against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms was unexpected. Who would have through that a carpenter’s son from Nazareth would cause evil powers both on earth and in heaven to tremble with fear?

Remember how Christ’s presence terrified the demons. A man with an evil spirit living amongst the tombs in the region of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20) was possessed by a legion of many demons. These evil disciples of Satan knew that Jesus was “The Son of the Most High God”. They cried out to Christ using the man’s mouth “*Swear to God that you won’t torture me!*”. The demons were extremely frightened of Jesus, begging Him not to send them away. He threw this horn down, sending the demons into a herd of unclean pigs who then ran over a steep bank and drowned in a lake.

Remember how Christ’s presence troubled human rulers like Pontius Pilate. He could find no basis for a charge against Jesus, but he didn’t want to risk a Jewish riot when so many shouted “Crucify! Crucify”. So Pilate answered them: "*You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him*." (John 19:6) Then we read that the Jews insisted, "*We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."* When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid” (John 19:7-8)

When evil is confronted by Jesus, the carpenter’s son from Nazareth, he brings terror. Hostile horns tumble to the humble son of a craftsman, the Son of God. Jesus brought final conquest and justice not through military might, political power or by a fancy display of worldly wisdom but rather through gentleness and sacrifice, courage and obedience.

To all who saw Jesus, betrayed, bloodied and bruised, struggling to carry the cross upon which he would be crucified by strong Roman soldiers, part of the foreign occupying forces in Israel. It looked like evil had won, his disciples were scattered, the life of Jesus almost at an end. Then we read: “*When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals-- one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:33-34)

This is how Jesus throws down the horns of the nations and of our own hearts. By laying down his own life, he makes it possible for God to forgive the sins of His people. How? By suffering the terror of death itself. Yes, the terror of slowly and painfully suffocating and bleeding to death. But more, the pain of hell. Separation from the love of God. Experiencing the full force of God’s just anger against sin. Would this have been terrifying for Jesus? – more than you and I can possibly imagine. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 15:34)

Today we remember our Lord’s death. We remember that sin and death have been conquered. We are reminded that we no longer need to be terrified by the threat of hostile forces against us. Brothers and sisters, we no longer need to fear the coming judgement of God, because Jesus bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions and by doing so brought us peace and healing.

Now Jesus gathers God’s people. He assembles them into churches like ours. He speaks to us through His Word, encouraging us that whilst there are still hostile horns in the world today, he has come to terrify them and to throw them down. He gave this comfort to his disciples before Calvary and today by His eternal Word he brings encouragement to us.

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33)

**AMEN**

1. Source: opendoorsusa.org/christian persecution/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)