

Title: Do you believe this?
Text: Zechariah 9
Theme: God's promises of judgment and blessing
Series: Zechariah #10
Prop Stmt Faithfulness is worth it because God will bring judgment on his enemies and blessing upon his people.

Read Text:

There is an old joke that says that grandkids are God's reward for not killing your kids. Well, the truth is, one of the main themes of Scripture is that faithfulness to God will pay off in the end. In fact, one of the fundamental divides that distinguishes people of faith in Christ from the world is this idea of self-denial. We live with a view of our real home has not yet come. Our entire life on this earth may never "pay off" or be "fair." But that is okay, God will make all things right. He will most likely NOT make all things right in your life on this earth, but he will make all things right in the life to come. That is a clear teaching in Scripture? Do you believe this?

The unbeliever has no such promise and therefore tends to live with the view of taking everything he or she can grab, right now. Proverbs calls this person a fool. Proverbs preaches self-denial and self-control. Christ is the ultimate model of this. He humbled himself now, in order to be exalted later. He died now, so that he and us could be raised. There is an eternity's size gap between immediate gratification and ultimate satisfaction. Do you believe this?

The book of Zechariah is an illustration of this truth. The first 8 chapters are full of some heavy-lifting. The opening 6 chapters are all of these apocalyptic visions followed by two chapters of narrative. These 8 chapters are not the most popular and well known passages in the Bible. They have been a challenge to preach through, and yet God has met us over in these texts and I am so grateful for that. But, these last parts of the book (chapters 9-14) are different. They are so different that some have even speculated that someone other than Zechariah wrote it. I don't believe that, but Joshua, Zerubbabel, Zechariah and the rebuilding of the Temple are not mentioned anymore in this book. Because now instead of just focusing on the time of Zechariah's life, God pulls the angle back and allows us to see the bigger picture. So, the reward for plowing through these first 8 chapters is the discovery of some beautiful and amazing promises that God gives about the future. But, like the book of Revelation, (the NT counterpart of Zechariah) this book provides serious warnings to those who reject God and amazing promises to those who trust Him.

Think of it like this. Zechariah ministered at a specific point and time in history. God raised him up because there was a problem and he was called to address that problem. But, that problem (the rebuilding of the Temple had stopped) was not the ultimate problem and the solution (completing the project) was not the ultimate solution. The ultimate problem was bigger than what they imagined and the solution was also much larger than they could imagine as well. God consistently addresses immediate issues in our lives in order to point us to ultimate ones. But, ultimate issues are weighty. The

weight of God's glory in judgment is unbearable and the weight of God's glory in salvation is unimaginable. This text addresses both.

I. Look out, God is coming in judgment. (1-8)

Eric Wester served for many years as a chaplain in the U.S. Army. Part of his job was to visit the family of a soldier who had died and accompany the officer who was assigned to deliver the news to that family in person. Since the army does not want the family to hear this news first from someone else, it was often an urgent and yet extremely difficult assignment. In an interview with NPR, Eric said how he and the other officer would have to process the news themselves. They would talk about their own lives, reflect, pray, then brace themselves for what they had to do. These officers had a message they had to deliver and it was a burden. It was a heavy burden.

Zechariah also had a burden. (v.1) Some people think that if you just "let it out" that you will feel better. No doubt that is true about some things, but not about this. The reason this is a burden is because Zechariah is shown that the LORD God is the ultimate warrior king and he is going to wage war against his enemies and it will be overwhelming. Verse 1 opens with the same language as chapter 12. Here it speaks of God's judgment on the enemies of Israel. In chapter 12 it speaks of God's judgment on Israel (more on that in a few weeks). Remember, this situation in Israel then, was used by God as an illustration of what is to come on a global scale.

A. The big global and materialistic ones (1-4)

Notice the cities that are named: (Map) Hadrach, Damascus (1), Hamath, Tyre and Sidon (2) with an extended treatment of Tyre in verses 3-4. These were cities that were not only major centers of hostile powers against Israel, but, Tyre in particular was a very haughty, self-sufficient, self-reliant city that boasted that no one could conquer it and they had reason for their boasting. The mighty Assyrian Empire spent 5 years trying to defeat this island city and could not. The Babylonians tried for 13 years and could not. The Persians were able to exert influence over the city, but even then the Persians ruled the city through the city's own power structure. Tyre had swagger. But it was different with the Greeks. Alexander the Great would not be denied. In one of the most amazing feats of military history, Alexander not only destroyed the part of the city of Tyre that was on the mainland, but he used the rubble to build a causeway out into the Mediterranean to the island and then laid siege to the city not from the ground, and blockaded her from the sea. 7 months later, Tyre fell. Alexander killed between 6,000 – 8,000 men. He crucified 2,000 and sold thousands (estimates are 13-30) into slavery. Then he burnt the city to the ground and sowed the ground with salt in order to destroy its capacity to be productive. No city of man is any match for God. When you think about Tyre, you could easily think of cities like New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Tokyo or any city that boasts of its inner strength, and declares that it can never be taken down, not even by God himself.

Tyre appeared to be so wealthy, so strong, so protected that she could laugh at any threats that were made against her. She believed in herself. Materialism cannot protect you. It cannot save you. It appears to be strong, but it is a poor substitute for God.

B. The little local and idolatrous ones (5-8)

Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod (Map) were part of the city-state region known as Philistia. These cities banded together and were known as the Philistines. None of these cities was ever a major city in the eyes of the world, but they sure were thorns in the sides of the Israelites. When they hear that Tyre falls, they are hopeless. God is warning them that their fate is going to be the same as the other cities. But, while these cities will fall, the reason for their fall is not because they hoped in their riches; they hoped in their gods. But, like riches, gods cannot protect you and cannot save you. Your only hope is God. When God is rejected, all other defenses and plans ultimately fail. Notice the pattern of the cities mentioned. (Map) Like an invasion from the north to the south, the LORD God is going to bring judgment on all of these enemies. Zechariah has the burden to deliver this message. It is a burden because when you realize what the fate is of the enemies of God, you have no words for gloating.

But, even in the language of judgment, there are hints of mercy. God says in v.7 that he is going to create a remnant for himself from the people of Philistia. In other words, just when you think that these are the last people on the earth to be followers of God, God does the unexpected and draws a number of them to himself. In verse 8 God promises that he will guard Jerusalem (Temple – my house) himself. The message is powerful, isn't it? Jerusalem does not look like much especially compared to the powerful cities of Hadrach, Damascus, Tyre and Sidon, and even to the smaller cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod, but all of those cities are going down, and in the end, only Jerusalem will be standing. All of the cities of man will in the end be destroyed. The city of God will last forever. Do you believe this?

If you really believed this, then what should you think about the enemies of God?

If you really believed this, then how should this inform your grief?

Transition: Last night, the Tigers were winning 1-0 going into the 9th inning. Justin Verlander was pitching another gem of a game. It would have been a fitting end to a great performance if he had been able to finish the game as a shutout. If he had, the crowd would have cheered appreciatively and genuinely. Appreciatively and genuinely is good. However, Verlander gave up 2 runs in the top of the 9th, and now, Tiger fans had their hearts crushed, right? In the bottom of the 9th, Martinez got out, then Castellanos got out. Depression begins to set in. But then Upton gets a walk. Do you dare believe? Do you risk hoping, only to have them dashed again? Well, Collins gets a hit. Then McCann knocks Upton in and we are tied, Iglesias beats out an infield hit that scores Collins and the Tigers win in dramatic fashion. Now, the fans are not merely appreciative, they are going absolutely bonkers. The depth of the misery, accentuated the joy of victory.

II. Look up, God is coming with salvation. (9-17)

Zechariah's burden turns into rejoicing. He commands the children of Zion (the people of God) to rejoice greatly and to shout out loud because the king is coming. God is saying that judgment is coming and it will be severe and you will be tempted to think that all hope is lost. But, keep looking up, the same God who comes with judgment upon his enemies is coming with salvation for his people. In the end, God's people cannot be denied victory. So, rejoice.

A. Rejoice by faith (9-10)

Rejoice now, because you are confident in the fact that God will keep his promises. Rejoice because the King is going to come. Let me ask you this. When Zechariah wrote this, what did the people have at that moment to rejoice in? Circumstantially, what tangible reasons did they have in their possession and experience that would cause them to rejoice? Truthfully? Not a whole lot, right?

Zechariah is calling them to rejoice and to shout not because of what God has already done, but because of what he has promised to do. When God promises to do something, it is just as good as if it has already been done. Do you ever get frustrated with Nathan because he is encouraging you to sing? Do you ever think, "Hey some of us aren't that demonstrative" or "Can't we just sit?" You sing, we'll watch." Or, maybe you are thinking more deeply and want to say that if you only knew what I was dealing with you would not be imploring me to sing. And yet, is he not simply reflecting this text? These people certainly did not feel like singing, rejoicing and shouting out loud! Why on earth would they do that? Why are they to do it? They are to do it, by faith. They are to rejoice now before these things actually take place. When we rejoice around the throne of God, it will not be by faith. It will be by sight. We can rejoice now, by faith.

When I perform a wedding for a young couple, I often pray and ask God to give them the grace to laugh the laugh of faith in joy and in sorrow. What do I mean by that? Even in sorrow, I can laugh by faith because I know that sorrow will not have the final word. It is real. It is lonely. It is crushing. But sorrow can only put two outs and two strikes on the board. That is where God draws the line and says, no more. Sorrow can only go so far for God's children.

But, look closely at verse 9. How is the future king described? He is described as (lit.) having been saved. This Savior has been saved because he, himself leaned upon the Lord. This King comes with righteousness, having been saved, and his humble. In fact, he is so humble that this king is not coming to you on a war horse, but on a donkey. This is the text that Matthew used in his gospel (chapter 21) to point out to his own people, the Jews, that their Bible, and their prophet, Zechariah wrote about Jesus, back here. Over and over we saw in Matthew's gospel that Jesus was not the king they expected, not even the king they wanted, but he was the king they needed. This is the only King who could save them, because this is the only King whose death for them would purchase their salvation. This King would do the unthinkable. He would allow himself to be rejected, scorned and

executed, because just like his life was not what they expected, his death would not be what they expected. His death would result in his resurrection. His humility would result not only in his exaltation, but in our exaltation.

That is still true. What Zechariah said way back here still resonates deeply with us. Jesus did not save us like we thought he would, therefore, genuine Christianity does not work like most people assume it does. We tend to think that if our church is going to make a great impact in our community; that we need to be influential, powerful, popular, and have this great presence and reputation. Honestly, we need to be humble. Jesus was humble. And Jesus said, if you are not humble, you cannot be in my kingdom. I am the King of the kingdom. The kingdom of Jesus is going to be a reflection of Jesus. It is my kingdom, and I say who gets in and who doesn't. My kingdom will have the DNA of me. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5.3).

I am going to challenge you to do something that is going to sound scary to many of you, but you need this challenge. Are you ready? Ask the people who are closest to you if, when they think of you, they think of someone who is humble, who is approachable, who is teachable, and who is vulnerable. Humility is a fruit of the gospel. Humility is one of the chief characteristics of the kingdom of Christ. Our local congregation is an embassy of the kingdom of Christ. Our life together now is to be a taste of what life is going to be like in the kingdom.

Look at v.10. God says that his people will not rely upon the normal weapons of war. By the way, Ephraim was a reference to the northern kingdom. God is saying that the coming kingdom of the King is going to be unlike any kingdom you have ever seen. This king does not reign primarily by terror, but in peace. He will speak peace to the nations. His rule will be from sea to sea (Red Sea? Mediterranean Sea? Persian Gulf? – Not sure, but the next line makes it clear that it is actually bigger than anyone imagined.

B. Return in hope (11-13)

Zechariah not only wrote to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem, but his audience included those who hadn't returned from Babylon, yet. To the Jews in Jerusalem his message was, you have returned to Jerusalem, but you really need to return to God. To the Jews in Babylon, his message was, you need to return to God and to Jerusalem, because life is not safe outside of the covenant. God established a covenant with the Jews in the OT. That covenant included stipulations such as living in the land and participating in the sacrificial system. The only means by which you could be forgiven was by offering sacrifices in faith at the temple. If you lived elsewhere, you couldn't do that. If you took God seriously, you were packing the U-haul for Jerusalem. But, for some of them, they had settled into Babylon and were doing pretty well. God was telling them to get out. I will restore to you. I will take care of you. I will protect you.

Since the coming Grecian empire is in view (v.13) I think that this could possibly be referring to the invasion of Alexander the Great who, as I mentioned destroyed all of these cities and was on his way to wipe out Jerusalem when the high priest, based on a

dream that he took from God, ordered all the citizens to wear white and to decorate the city with wreaths. The priests put on their ceremonial robes and welcomed Alexander to their city. One historical tradition says that the priests told him of Daniel's prophecy that predicted his success. What we know for certain is that Jerusalem was spared. This temporary deliverance foreshadowed the ultimate deliverance that God will effect of Jerusalem that I think verse 8 points to. There will be ore on this in the coming chapters.

C. **Respond in confidence** (14-15)

These next few verses are a bit raw and earthy, and that is good. There are 5 images that God uses in verses 14-17: a thunderstorm, a victorious battlefield, a flock, a jeweled crown, and a harvest celebration. Verse 14 describes God as fighting over and for his people as a thunderstorm. His arrow is like lightning. He marches forth like a storm, even a tornado of sorts. When his people see this, their response is confidence. Victory is not up to them, it is theirs because God is fighting for them. They are to devour, (taking the spoils of war), they are to march (v.15) and tread down the sling stones (a description of their enemies). They are to respond in confidence because God is unstoppable and undefeatable.

The end of v. 15 describes the roar of victory. Think of a person who is full of wine and not in a bad way (there is plenty of that), but in a good way. They are toasting. They are celebrating. The picture is that of a soldiers who are standing on the ground of a hard fought battle in victory. They raise their arms and voices and shout lustily and raucously. They have won. But, yet, they didn't fight. God did! Here is our promise. God wins the battle and we get drunk on victory! There are not many specifics here, but we will a few more in the later chapters. V. 16...

D. **Reflect his glory** (16-17)

They are not the mighty soldiers; they are the vulnerable sheep. God fights and we win. They are his flock, they are the jewels in his crown and because of that, they will shine on his land. They will reflect his glory. And then we come to verse 17, which is an incredibly beautiful text. Let me set the stage.

Do you remember the 3rd chapter of Ruth? That chapter takes place during a harvest party. Imagine that you are a farmer. You plant in the spring in order to harvest in the fall. But, just because you plant, does not mean that you will harvest. There are all sorts of things that have to happen and some things that can't happen in order for you to harvest. But, you have to harvest. If you do not get a harvest, you do not eat. If you do not get a harvest, you have no food to sell. If you do not sell food, you have no income and you will have to sell your farm, land, home and perhaps wife and children to cover your debts. There is no insurance. You have to have a harvest. But, in order to get a harvest, it has to rain, but not too much. The sun has to come out, but not too much. And, you can't have hail, or thunderstorms, or fire, or disease, or infestations, or invasions from foreign armies, or theft from neighbors. Farming is very hard, and is full of life-threatening vulnerabilities. So, when you get a harvest and when you get a good harvest,

the joy is off the charts because the work and the risk is so great. The greater the work and the greater the risk; the greater the reward. Farming is in my family. My extended family on my mom's side is full of farmers. My dad is buried in a cemetery in the middle of thousands of acres of corn and soybean fields in Iowa. There is nothing more glorious to the farmer than delivering the crop safely to the market and getting paid for it. Up until that point, there is so much that can go wrong. The celebration of v.17 is describing this harvest party. This is not a "let's go out and get smashed" event. No, this is a "let's celebrate the goodness of God event!" The young men and the young women are full of the joy at the bounty that God has provided them and their joy and laughter is making much of God. Their joy and celebration is reflecting the goodness of God and making the greatness of his beauty known. Here is a party with no hangover. Here is a party that is good, deep, pure, rich, clean, satisfying and truly beautiful. This is what God has in store for his children who trust him.

The terror of God's judgments for those who reject him is unbearable, but the glory of God's salvation is unimaginable. Both are so much bigger than what you or they have ever imagined. God is most glorified in us when we are most joyful and satisfied in him.

Ultimate issues are weighty to face, but they drive us to richness of God's mercies that thrill our souls like nothing else.