

Introduction

A few years ago, my mother entrusted me with the treasury of the family photos. There are literally thousands of pictures. I have been going through them and making digital copies which I intend to pass on to my brother and sister and other relatives. Looking at all those old photos has led me to look back as well. I have found this true for myself and I wonder if you have found it to be true for you. As I age, I begin to look back more and more. One reason is that there is less and less to look forward to. But another reason is the wonder whether or to what extent my life has really made a difference. So it was encouraging this last week that for Melissa's Spring Break we took a little trip down to Arkansas to visit with some friends from the first church I served as pastor. We got to reminisce and talk about where folks are now to whom we said "goodbye" more than 25 years ago. Not all the stories are happy ones but overall it is a dose of encouragement that the faithful brothers and sisters appreciate the time we were with them. And we could all use some encouragement now and then. This morning we are turning to a text that was meant to be encouragement to disheartened saints. It intersects with our observance of Palm Sunday, and I trust that God will speak encouragement to your heart as well.

[Read text and Pray]

The days were long and hope was in short supply. It had been almost twenty years since Cyrus the Persian had emancipated the Jews who had been brought to Babylon under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. More than 42,000 Jews had returned home commissioned to rebuild because the city of Jerusalem, its wall, and the temple had been destroyed. The people faced difficult circumstances. Though they were free, taxation was high. Their neighbors did not like what they were doing and opposed them at every step. The work was hard and those who remembered the temple of old were disappointed in what they were building. According to Zechariah 4:10, the people thought of their time as a "day of small things." They felt insignificant. It seemed that work mattered little. The temptation to just give it up was upon them.

It was to these very people that God sent both the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They brought messages of encouragement to the people. Through Haggai, the Lord declared that latter glory of the house they were building would be greater than the former because he would fill it with the glory of the Lord. Zechariah's message from the Lord was that when the time was right he would set things in their proper order. There would be prosperity in his cities and comfort for His people. Central to this restoration would be the coming of a new ruler in David's line. Thus God's word to his people in Zechariah 9:9-10 is meant as a message of encouragement. The LORD encourages his people with three assurances: His zeal for them, His desire for them, and His plan for them.

I. The Zeal of God for His People.

You will notice the designation by which the Lord addresses his people here. He says, "Rejoice greatly. O DAUGHTER OF ZION! Shout aloud, O DAUGHTER OF JERUSALEM!" There are a number of designations of God's people in the scriptures. They include the Israelites, Israel, House of Jacob, sons of Abraham, Ephraim, and God's chosen people.

Here through Zechariah the Lord calls his people a daughter. It is meant to communicate a particular aspect of their relationship to the Lord. If as a parent you have had both a daughter and a son, you will easily identify what the Lord is communicating. You love your sons and you love

your daughters equally, but you care for them a little bit differently. You recognize the difference in the genders. Males are meant to be protectors and providers. Females are meant to be helpers who are more vulnerable and to be protected. You want your sons to be tough and driven to protect. Meanwhile you will protect your daughter as you hope the man will do who eventually takes her hand in marriage.

I was in an emporium last week with all kinds of signs that you come across in tourist towns. I found one that expresses what I am talking about. It is the message of a grandfather to a man who would like to date his granddaughter. These are things for that man to keep in mind: 1. She is my princess not your conquest. 2. If you hurt her I will hurt you. 3. If lie to me I will know. 4. I have a gun. 5. I have a shovel. 6. I also have an alibi. 7. I don't mind going back to prison.

When the Lord calls his people the daughter of Zion, the daughter of Jerusalem, he is declaring his zeal for them. He is expressing his vigilance to watch out for her well-being and deal appropriately with those who take advantage of her. It is what he says in verse 10: he will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem.

The Lord is zealous for his people. Nahum 1:2 says, "The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies." And anyone who destroys his people is his enemy. It is a New Testament concept as well. First Corinthians 3:16-17 asks, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." It is a reminder to each of us to love the people of God and seek the good of the people of God. God's people are to him what your daughter and granddaughter are to you. We who belong to the Lord are very precious to Him. He watches over us and avenges us.

It should encourage you to know how much better it is to be a daughter of Zion than a daughter of anyone who despises Zion and her people. Anyone who makes himself an enemy of God's people makes himself an enemy of God. The world may beat us down. The world may strike against us, call us crazy, scoff at us, declare that we are weak and ignorant. But the world who claims to be wise and opposes God could not be more foolish. It stores up for itself wrath for the day of judgment. Just know that a hostile word may scoff for a season, but its days are numbered. And our God will avenge the wrongs of the world against his people. Let it encourage your heart to know that you are this precious to God if you truly belong to him.

II. The Desire of God for His People.

We may observe the Lord's desire for his people by taking note of the twice emphasized exhortation as he addresses the daughter for whom he has such zeal. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!" God does not desire that his people be discouraged. He does not want them to be disillusioned by the circumstances in which they find themselves. And not only that, the desire of the Lord for his people is that they be filled with great joy such that it overflows from their hearts to their lips. He does not simply say "Rejoice" and "shout" but "Rejoice GREATLY" and "shout ALOUD." It is the desire of the Lord that his people experience intense joy. And it is the desire of the Lord that his people experience such joy that they simply cannot hold it in; they overflow with involuntary shouts, loud shouts of delight.

On Palm Sunday we remember the day Jesus made his way into Jerusalem the first day of the week that culminated in his crucifixion. It was a day of such great exuberance on the part of a multitude of Jews who escorted Jesus down the mount of Olives into the city of Jerusalem. The Jews were

gathering en masse to Jerusalem in advance of Passover to purify themselves, and they were looking for Jesus and asking each other whether they thought he would come. A large crowd heard that Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Lazarus whom he had recently raised from the dead. They went to Bethany to see both Jesus and Lazarus. The next day many more folks who had come for the feast came toward Bethany, hearing that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. Together they formed a multitude filled with just the kind of jubilation exhorted by the Lord through Zechariah. They were taking branches of palm trees and going out to meet him. John recounts for us that this multitude was "crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.'" They were spontaneously overflowing with exuberant joy.

This is precisely what the Lord called for. You know, people of the world have the idea that being a follower of Christ is boring and joyless. They cannot imagine being happy if they have to give up all the things of the world they enjoy. The thought of holiness and purity of life is the furthest thing they can imagine from rejoicing. They can only identify joy with carousing and debauchery. There can surely be no joy in chastity and obedience to God. It is a sad, sad world in which we live. It paints freedom and deliverance from the shackles of destruction as torture and joylessness. If they could only recognize what the Lord has shown us! True joy and true delight are found in purity and kindness and forgiveness and love and obedience and patience. True joy is found in being free to rejoice in the presence of the LORD.

Constantly, constantly, Satan comes to the people of the Lord like he came to Adam and Eve in the Garden. He asks, "did God really say you can't be happy?" We may reply, "Of course not!" But he persists. But you can't have this and you can't do that. You are supposed to be content with what you have. Your Lord says it is wrong to covet. Besides, how are you supposed to be happy when your circumstances are so hard; when there are so many in the world who have everything they want, and you don't?

The world does not know what it means to be a prisoner set free from your sin, to be a human being who realizes the joy of knowing God. The world, and sometimes we too, settle for so much less than what the Lord desires for his people. C. S. Lewis put it this way, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

When the Lord commands that we rejoice, it is not meant to be a command that we carry out by pure devotion to duty. No, it is the Lord's desire that his people be joyful and happy people. And he gives us every reason to be that way. Our problem is that we listen to the whispers of the devil and settle for worthless substitutes for the riches God has for his people. If you are not joyful today, let me suggest that the main reason is that you have set your sights too low. Be encouraged, God wants you to rejoice. He desires that you be supremely happy. But in order to experience that joy, you must set your sights on the right thing. First and foremost, that "thing" is HIM. Zechariah's message is that the people rejoice because of their king.

III. The Plan of God for His People.

We are still breaking down Zechariah 9. We can be encouraged because this verse demonstrates that the LORD is zealous for his people. We can also be encouraged because it is the Lord's desire for his people to experience joy. And finally, we can be encouraged because of the plan of God for his people. This plan is in fact the foundation of the joy of the people of the Lord. The plan is that the King is coming. The people hearing the words of Zechariah should rejoice because the LORD is

sending the people their king. Their king is coming to them. And this king is unique. The word of the Lord points out four encouraging aspects of the coming king.

A. First, there is the CHARACTER of the king. The prophet's description of Zion's king is that he is righteous and humble. The Jews had known a slew of kings and even the best of them were at times marked by injustice and unrighteousness. The righteousness here spoken of pertains primarily to the righteousness of his rule. When the righteous rule the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule the people groan. And the fact is that for a king to rule righteously, he must be righteous. That is the king who is coming. His rule will bring peace because it will be perfectly just.

Not only is he righteous, he is also humble. This is a striking characteristic for a king because it is hardly ever true of them. But here is reason to rejoice. Israel's coming king is humble. He comes not to be served by the people but to serve the people.

We know what the folks to whom Zechariah was speaking did not know—that this king is Jesus. He is righteous and humble. Unlike any other king, his interest is in righteousness and justice. And he came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. He is the God/ man who was willing to relinquish the prerogatives of deity and be made in the likeness of man and submit his will to the will of another, namely his Father. Such is the character of the coming king.

B. The second encouraging aspect of the coming king is his WORK. Zechariah declares that the work of the coming king is to bring salvation—"Righteous and having salvation is he." The coming king who is righteous and humble brings with him salvation. He will bestow salvation on those who belong to him. Now when we hear the word salvation, most of us think immediately of salvation from our sins. Jesus did come to save his people from their sins. That's what the angel told Joseph.

But the emphasis here in Zechariah is the salvation of the nation from her enemies in the world. Look at verse 10. "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off." The Jews in Zechariah's day knew what oppression was. They knew what it meant to be scoffed at and opposed by the people of the world. They knew what it meant to be under the threat of military domination. Here was a hopeful and encouraging aspect of their coming king. He would rescue them from their enemies.

It is an encouraging truth for Christ's followers today as well. Indeed, our greatest enemy is God. Since we are sinners against him, we have incurred his wrath. But God is also our greatest ally. And his grace is greater than our sin. By grace, he has provided salvation from the penalty of sin for all who will trust in Jesus. If you have not come to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ, you can do that right now. And whoever will receive him, to them he will give salvation from sin and they will receive the right to become children of God. But being saved from sin is not all that Jesus provides through his death and resurrection. Think of what this means to us who live in a world of turmoil, where the effects of sin pollute and corrupt the culture, the thinking, the relationships, and the behavior of human beings. Oh, to be set free from the torture and turmoil of this world with its aggravations and temptations! To his troubled disciples Jesus said as much: "I have said thee things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

C. Zechariah tells us of the character of the king and the work of the king, but he also tells us of the IDENTIFICATION of the king. He says, "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." We have seen the identity of the coming king. Here is how you can identify precisely who this king is. He will come to Zion on a young male donkey.

Many may claim to be the Messiah in days to come. Here is how you can easily distinguish some of the imposters. The true God-anointed king will enter Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. I do not know if any other person ever entered Jerusalem in such a way in triumphal procession. But I am certain of this. If there were others, they were not righteous and humble bringing salvation. But Jesus was righteous and humble and having salvation AND he came to the city accompanied by a jubilant multitude. AND his transportation was a donkey colt.

John 12:12-19

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" 14 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" ... 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, ". . . Look, the world has gone after him."

Throwing their cloaks and branches before Jesus, this crowd was visibly expressing its respect and submission to Jesus. Shouting its loud acclamations, this crowd was verbally attesting Jesus as the Messiah. "Hosanna" is a cry for salvation. It literally means "Save us." These words come from Psalm 118:28-29 and there the translation is "Save us we pray, O Lord!" This was their cry as the Son of David made his entrance into the city. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" is an expression of praise to Jesus but also an acknowledgment that he came with the authority of the Lord. Perhaps at that moment some of these folks were recognizing that Zachariah's prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes. Probably many were caught up in the excitement of the many miracles Jesus had performed, most notably raising from the dead a man who had been in the tomb four days. Whatever the case, by week's end the excitement had worn off and most of these same people were crying out for Jesus to be hung on a cross. And yet it was all part of the plan—God's plan. For forgiveness to be granted, Jesus had to die as a sacrifice. And he did. But before he did he made an unmistakable entrance which identified him as Israel's coming king.

D. The fourth characteristic of the coming king to which Zechariah draws our attention is his rule. He tells us in verse 10 that the rule of this king would be absolute and it would be a rule of peace. See the words, "and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." Through Zechariah these aspects of Christ's work are compressed together. Now that Christ has come and died and has risen from the dead, we realize that his peaceful and humble coming has taken place. There remains another coming in which he will ride not a donkey in the posture of bringing peace. Rather, he will come on a white horse to deal out retribution upon the nations of those who have rejected him. He will tread the winepress of God the Almighty. But he will inaugurate a reign of peace—forever peace and absolute peace for his people. Think of what that means. No conflict. No war. No temptation. No turmoil. No unrest. In the new heavens and new earth all will be rest and all will be joy. And that is encouraging news for the people of the Lord.

Conclusion

While there are ways in which the days of Zechariah are unlike our times, there are significant aspects in which the times are alike. It was so for those living in the midst of the Reformation as

well. John Calvin testified, "we see how Satan raises up great forces, we see how the whole world conspires against the Church, to prevent the increase or the progress of the kingdom of Christ. When we consider how great are the difficulties which meet us, we are ready to faint and to become wholly dejected." (Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets, Vol. 15, lect. 142.) Although 500 years later, can we not identify with Calvin's assessment of his times? In this world we have tribulation. Rarely in the history of the world have God's people not known tribulation. But the LORD God wants his people to rejoice. So know this. God is zealous for his people. He desires for his people to rejoice. And his plan is for His anointed king, having come once in humility to come again in power to inaugurate an eternal reign of peace for those who belong to him. So, if you are in Christ today, be encouraged. If not then would you come to Christ the king through faith?