

Prisoners of Hope

Zechariah 9:9 ESV Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! 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. **10** 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, and from the River to the ends of the earth. **11** As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. **12** Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

- I. The book of Zechariah was written during a time in Israel's history, about five hundred years before Jesus was born in a manger at Bethlehem. It was a time of restoration for God's covenant people. Years before, their forefathers had committed spiritual adultery by devoting themselves to the worship of idols and demons. God had punished them for this by allowing them to be exiled to Babylon (modern day Iraq) for 70 years. Their capital city, Jerusalem, along with their beloved and cherished Temple had been flattened and neglected all of those years.
 - A. But now, King Cyrus of Persia, the nation that had conquered their former conquerors, had allowed the people to return to their home to rebuild the ruins.
 1. Zechariah was one of the Prophet/Priests ministering among the people of Israel during this time.
 2. Among his contemporaries were Haggai, the Prophet, and Ezra, the Priest; who also wrote books of the Bible detailing this period.
 - B. Zechariah, quite frankly, because of his literary style, can often be difficult to grasp. But one thing is absolutely clear and true about this book. Zechariah has a very keen insight on the coming restorative, messianic ministry of Christ.
 1. In fact, the New testament is chock full of direct quotations from, allusions and verbal parallels to Zechariah. One list I found counted 71 instances!
 2. One of the most striking examples is **Zechariah 9:10 ESV** "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, **when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced**, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn." Remember that this was written more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus!
 - a) Did you notice that he spoke of a coming day when Israel would have a "spirit of grace and pleas for mercy" poured out upon them?
 - (1) A day was coming when together, Israel would look on "**me, on him whom they have pierced**", they shall **mourn for him**".
 - (2) Did you also notice the first person reference? They would not only look on "him"; but on "me"!
 - b) Well when was that prophecy fulfilled? Check this out: in Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Bible says that there were gathered in Jerusalem, "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven". The whole "house of David" and "inhabitants of Jerusalem" were assembled.

- c) When Peter preached the message of Jesus to them, literally **showing** Jesus to them, the Bible says they were “cut to the heart” asking, “What must we do to be saved?” They were looking on Jesus, whom they had pierced, and **mourning** for him, just as Zechariah had predicted.
 - 3. In addition to this fulfillment at the birth of the church, in Revelation John points to this passage with reference to the final day. **Revelation 1:7 ESV Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.**
 - C. So, with a fresh understanding of Zechariah’s prophetic ministry, let’s look again at the passage we read earlier. The first verse we read is quoted in Matthew’s gospel on the occasion of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem. **Zechariah 9:9 ESV Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! 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.**
 - 1. This verse signals a welcome turning for the people of God. They have been exiles, but now they are commanded to rejoice greatly, and to shout aloud! Why? Because their King is coming to them! They won’t serve under the thumb of a foreign potentate, but **their** King is coming; someone with King David’s royal blood flowing through his veins.
 - 2. But he is not coming to conquer, suppress, punish or subdue them. Instead, this King will be righteous, and he brings with him salvation, which includes healing, freedom and deliverance in every arena of their lives!
 - D. But the sign of his coming will not be pomp and trumpets blowing with fanfare! He will not be mounted on a mighty, snorting stallion like the leaders of the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, or the Romans did. He will be mounted on a humble, juvenile donkey! As you may know, if you have ever celebrated Palm Sunday, that is exactly how Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem a week before he was crucified!
- II. **Zechariah 9:10a ESV I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off...** Unlike those other nations, He is not coming to make war **on** the people, but to end war **for** his people!
 - A. He will put a stop to the chariot and war horse traffic that has run roughshod over his people for generations. He will obliterate the arsenal that has been amassed against his chosen ones! It is a repeat of what Isaiah had said when he promised that “No weapon formed against them would prosper!”
 - 1. Now, if you have any grasp whatsoever of middle-eastern history, you might think that this prophecy was untrue or meaningless since the Jews have been at almost unceasing war for 2500 years! War has continued!
 - 2. But before you make that conclusion, let me remind you that in Ephesians 6, Paul said that our most real warfare is not against “flesh and blood”, but “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”. In addition to that, Peter talked about sinful desires that “war against the soul”. This means that the battles we fight are by and large inside of us as opposed to outside of us.

- B. These internal conflicts are wars that (in and of ourselves) we have no hope of winning. There are no therapists smart enough, self-help books clever enough, or motivational speakers charismatic enough to fix what's broken in you and me. Only Jesus can (and did!) deliver us from what is destroying us: our own flesh, the anti-Christ world system, and the prince of darkness himself, the devil!
- III. But there's more good news! Jesus death and resurrection didn't just work this great salvation for the Jews alone; no, on the contrary, **Zechariah 9:10b ESV 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.**
- A. The coming salvation and end of war that this passage promises is not a Jewish salvation, or a Jewish peace; on the contrary, it is a **global** salvation and a **global** peace!
1. It says that the deliverer (who we know to be Christ Jesus) will "speak peace to the nations".
 - a) This means that the Kingdom of Heaven will not be concerned with "white privilege" or whether "black lives matter"; the only life that will matter will be the **saving life of Christ** transforming the lives of all sin-sick men, women, boys and girls: red and yellow, black and white.
 - b) There will be no more need for summit meetings, treaties, or military force because Jesus himself will declare an inviolable peace across the planet.
 2. Zechariah promises that Christ will reign from "sea to sea" and "to the ends of the earth".
 - a) It means that we will no longer depend on republicans or democrats; activists or socialists, conservatives, liberals, or libertarians to work salvation for us, but that the "government shall be upon his shoulder" and "of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7)
 - b) Though the nations still belch forth fury, threats and smoke, on the cross Christ was crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords; and a day is fast approaching when every knee will bow before him, as every tongue is irresistibly compelled to confess that Christ alone is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2)!
- B. But, practically, what will this great saving by this great savior look like? **Zechariah 9:11 ESV As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.**
1. First, this great saving will be enacted by the shedding of blood. The writer of Hebrews declares that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness".
 2. Second, this blood will initiate a covenant. A covenant is the deepest level of guarantee, promise, or commitment that we can enter into with another. That is why we refer to marriage as a covenant; and why it is such a grievous sin to violate that covenant.
- C. But think about this covenant! How much confidence can you place in...
1. a covenant that originates with God (who the Bible tells us cannot lie)?
 2. a covenant in which both parties **are** God? Biblically, the covenant is **not** between you and God; but between the Father and the Son. You, however, as

- a believer in Jesus, are *in* Christ and therefore receive all of the covenant benefits, not because of who *you* are; but because of who *he* is!
3. a covenant that is enacted by the shedding of God's own blood? The Bible describes Christ as spotless and sinless, yet he was publicly executed in a way deserved by none but the lowest form of criminal. "Was it for crimes that I have done He groaned upon that tree? Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree." -Isaac Watts
- D. This covenant of blood will result in the freedom for the prisoners of sin; freedom, the Bible declares, from the the "waterless pit".
1. What an vivid depiction of human life apart from Jesus! The psalmist cried out, "my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."
 - a) Men and women are constantly searching for something to satisfy their thirst, something to quench the yearning inside of them, but what quenches our inner thirst can only be found in Christ!
 - b) But it is also a clear depiction of the torment awaiting those who reject Christ in the life to come. The rich man, burning in hell in Jesus' parable, longed for Lazarus to merely dip his finger in water and touch his tongue, cooling it briefly from the flame.
 - c) As sinners, we would love to ignore hell, and imagine it to be a fairy tale, but Jesus talked about it a lot and so must we.
 2. But, by grace, we have been set free from our "waterless pit"! We have been given Christ, the living water, to drink forever in endless supply, and told we would never thirst again! We have been promised that out of our innermost beings, the very Holy Spirit of God would flow like "rivers of living water!"
- IV. "Zechariah 9:12 ESV Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double." He is promising by the prophetic voice of the Holy Spirit, that, even though God's people have been set free from the prisons of Babylon and Persia, that they will now be a different kind of prisoner in a different kind of prison.
- A. They had been locked up, because of sin and idolatry, in dungeons of shame, fear, lack, depression, and exile from their calling, destiny and purpose.
 1. Sin does this to all of us! We all think we can "cheat the system" and find happiness in things that ultimately result in our bondage and slavery.
 2. What heartbreaking stories we would hear this morning if every one of us told of our attempts to make a happy life for ourselves, apart from God!
 - B. But verse 12 begins with an admonition to "return to your stronghold". They are to **willingly** imprison themselves into a new kind of prison; entirely unlike what they have just left. They will be "locked up" in Christ!
 1. Throughout the Bible, God is declared to be the believer's stronghold; fortress, and strong tower! Those who are hidden in him are truly safe.
 2. The cry of the rebel and the sinner is for freedom. They want to say, like Sinatra, that "I did it my way!"
 - a) But the New Testament makes it very clear in Romans 6; no one is truly free. You will either be a prisoner of this world or a prisoner of Christ. Ironically, true human freedom is only found in slavery to Christ.

- b) “The irony of New Testament lordship is that only in slavery to Christ can a man discover authentic freedom.” —R.C. Sproul
- C. But Zechariah describes these prisoners as “prisoners of hope”. What a strange designation! I have known many people in jails and prisons, and I would never describe their position as being marked by hope.
1. Hope may be one of the most misunderstood things in the church. Most of us describe “hope” as wishful thinking. “I hope I get a raise, new car, etc.” I hope this candidate gets elected, or that one doesn’t”.
 2. But biblical hope is sure. It is an assurance of things promised. True hope is the necessary twin of faith. The Bible describes hope as an “anchor for our soul”. It says that, “hope does not put us to shame”. It says that this hope makes us bold. The appearing of Jesus is called our “blessed hope”. Peter says we have been “born again” to a “living hope”.
- D. A true believer, trusting only the work and power of Jesus Christ to produce salvation, therefore is a “prisoner of hope”...and you will never find them trying to tunnel out! They learn to appreciate being locked up in that prison!
1. When you’re locked in a prison of gospel hope, it matters little whether the sun is shining or the rain is falling; whether your stocks are soaring or the market is crashing. You don’t get caught up in whether you have a clean bill of health, or two weeks to live. It matters little if everyone adores you; or if you’re public enemy number one!
 2. This is because your hope is no longer chained to the weather, the markets, your health, or the approval of others. You are the slave of Christ in the prison of his everlasting hope!
 - a) This is not to say that you won’t experience the normal emotions associated with loss, disappointment, loneliness, rejection, sickness, and death, etc. These things are a part of every life. They were even a part of Jesus’ life. Why do you think he wept at the mouth of Lazarus’ tomb?
 - b) But as believers we can look past the threats and attacks of the present to the unshakeable hope found only in the message of Jesus! **Psalm 43:5 ESV** “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”
- V. So what is the point of this Gospel reminder on the occasion of the last sermon preached at City View Christian Fellowship’s storied 18 year history as a church? Well, I could try to convince you that everything from here on out will be “a tiptoe through the tulips”. I could try to convince you that all we need is to stay out of debt, put together some slick marketing, provide great programs that the people of Lubbock want, and do everything from the way we greet guests, to the way scrub toilets with excellence and the people and the money will flood through our doors.
- A. But, as I said in my message last week, if our hope is connected to any other strategy than the unceasing proclamation of Jesus Christ; crucified, resurrected, ascended and reigning, we might as well close up shop right now.
1. Because if we do all of those things I mentioned, one of two things will happen:
 - a) First, we could discover that we’re not very good at doing all those things with excellence, and we could **fail** miserably; bringing disgrace to the name and kingdom of our Lord.

- b) Or possibly we could **succeed** beyond our wildest dreams, as many churches have, by every worldly metric: size, popularity, budget and the like; only to find we have the praise of men, but not the approval of God.
- 2. I've said it over and over, but I'll say it again. "Some trust in chariots, some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." He is our hope. He is our rejoicing. He is our message. He alone is our confidence.
- B. So I'm not telling you to become prisoners of the hope that we will become some notable church, or that some mind-blowing destiny awaits us. That would be to call you into the prison of hype, not hope.
 - 1. What I'm asking God to raise up for North Ridge Life Church is faithful laborers, who are imprisoned by the hope that can only be found in one message, that points to one Lord; placing all of our confidence in him alone.
 - 2. I'm praying that we will all return to the stronghold, the rock, the fortress, the strong tower. I'm praying that hidden in him, we will be given a double portion. **Zechariah 9:12 ESV Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.**
- C. We're not asking for a double portion of notoriety or influence or power; but a double portion of grace, of wisdom, of faithfulness, of love, of devotion, of patience, of peace. We are asking for a double portion of souls to be born into the kingdom of our great God and his Christ.

Psalm 20:1 ESV May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!

2 May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion!

3 May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! *Selah*

4 May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans!

5 May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions!

6 Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.

7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

8 They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.

9 O Lord, save the king! May he answer us when we call.