

Zech 10
Bad and good leadership
Tim Anderson 14/5/2023

I'm old enough to remember
when they put in Crown casino in Melbourne.
It was such a bad thing to do.
Criminals have a place they can launder money.
One person a week commits suicide there.
Countless families are destroyed
because someone gambles away the family's money.
It's just a bad thing for it to be there.
And once it's there,
it's always going to be an uphill battle to get rid of it.
But here's the point.
Was there any demand from the community?
Were there people clamouring to the government,
"Hey, we want a casino.
Give us a casino."?
I tell you there were not.
It was a decision made behind closed doors.
The community only found out about it when it was announced.
That's not an aberration.
That's the way it usually works.
Bad decisions tend to be made by leaders.
And the people get taken along for the ride,
and they wind up wearing most of the consequences.
You don't think it's the leaders families
who lose all their money playing in the casino, do you?

The same thing is true amongst God's people.
When churches go in a particularly wrong direction,
it's very rarely the people in the pews demanding that happens.
It's mostly something the leaders have dreamed up for themselves.
Without wanting to bang on about the same thing all the time,

take the decision of the Church of England
to run same sex blessings in their churches.

Do you think they did this because of a clamouring of lay people?

No, I tell you.

What were the results of the voting at their general synod?

51% of lay people in favour of same sex blessings,

54% of clergy,

85% of bishops.

It was the bishops leading the charge into church destroying error.

It's not a new thing.

It was the case in Zechariah's day, 500 years before Jesus was born.

That's what we find in Zechariah 10.

10:1 "Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime;

it is the Lord who sends the thunderstorms.

He gives the showers of rain to all people,

and the plants of the fields to everyone."

What's this about?

Is there a drought or something?

Keep reading.

10:2 "The idols speak deceitfully,

the diviners see visions that lie;

they tell dreams that are false,

they give comfort in vain.

Therefore the people wander like sheep

the oppressed for lack of a shepherd."

It feels like Zechariah is changing the subject.

But he's not.

He hasn't gone from the weather to idols without pausing for breath.

It's all about idols.

Let me read the first verse again with proper emphasis.

"Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime;

it is the Lord who sends the thunderstorms.

He gives the showers of rain to all people,

and the plants of the fields to everyone."

The point is that people were praying to their idols asking for rain.
Zechariah is saying to them,
"You idiots.
Ask the Lord.
He is the one who controls the weather.
Don't ask a lump of stone or metal.
That's dumb."

Now of course you can't blame the idols
for the people asking them for rain.
The idols are just statues made by people.
The problem is with the people
who are encouraging other people to pray to idols.
Who are they?

"The people wander like sheep
oppressed for lack of a shepherd."
Shepherd is a Bible metaphor for a leader.
The people need a leader who will guide them in the right way.
But instead
their leaders are encouraging them in the direction of idolatry.
The failure is at the level of leadership.
The leaders are taking the people in the wrong direction.

What does God think of this?

10:3 "My anger burns against the shepherds,
and I will punish the leaders;
for the Lord Almighty will care for his flock,
the people of Judah."

Here is God's promise.

He is going to deal with this problem.

And he's going to deal with it in a way that is most out of favour today.
He will punish the leaders.

Oh punishment.

It is so out of vogue.

It is treated like it is a relic of a bygone era.
You can't possibly still be punishing, can you?
Oh you are a bit of a dinosaur, aren't you?
Well trust me,
God was there before the dinosaurs.
He created them.
And he is still into punishing those who lead others astray.

Is it possible to believe in punishment
without being nasty and vindictive?
Yes it is.
What is punishment?
It is retributive justice.
If that's a bit highbrow for you,
it means getting what you deserve when you do the wrong thing.
It's not about taking someone aside
and telling them how much their behaviour is hurting everyone
and exhorting them to think hard and amend their ways.
It's about you did the wrong thing.
Here are the consequences of that.
And you must face the consequences.

What is currently in vogue is using all manner of strategies
to help people make the decision you think they ought to make.
They might face consequences of a harm minimisation variety.
If someone does the wrong thing with a knife,
you take the knife away from them.
If they do the wrong thing with a car,
you take away their licence.
But at least until you move into the criminal justice system,
we don't actually use retributive consequences.
Children don't get smacked.
Schools don't give out detentions.

Why does God believe in punishment?

Because God is just and justice is good.
Because using strategies to move people in the right direction is good.
But if that's all you do
and they don't have to face consequences,
then our hearts will come up with counter strategies,
so we can game the system and do what we want.

Let me give an example from toddlers
because that makes it easy to understand.
A toddler is playing with a toy.
Another toddler comes and takes the toy away.
You could use a strategy.
Find a second toy and distract them with it.
see if you can keep peace and harmony for a bit.
And you can give fancy justifications for your strategy.
Child development psychology says
that children are too young to learn to share at this age.
Or you could punish them for taking the toy
and give it back to the first toddler.
And deal with the rage and tantrum that is provoked.
The advantage of using the strategy
is that you don't have to put up with a tantrum.
But what does the child learn from this interaction?
If I want something I take it.
Even if I can't have it,
the people in authority will give me what I want anyway.
Is it any wonder
that people who are disciplined
(I'm using that word very loosely)
disciplined by strategies as children
grow up with a sense of entitlement.
Have you ever wondered
why young people seem to have a sense of entitlement?
Here's a reason why.
What does the child learn from the second interaction?

That you can't just take something off someone else,
and if you do there will be consequences.
They may be too young to fully understand it the first time.
But they will get there.
Repetition is a great teacher.

Here's another reason why punishment is important.
It's so victims of crime see justice being done.
With the example of the two toddlers,
you can use a strategy to make sure the first child doesn't lose their toy.
But weak responses to adult problems
often leave victims angry about the lack of justice.
Because the damage that is done to them can't be rectified.
Take the example of Archbishop Hollingworth
that has been in the news.
When he was Archbishop of Brisbane 30 odd years ago,
he knowing allowed two pedophiles to continue in ministry.
The church has a disciplinary process which has concluded.
And the result was that Archbishop Hollingworth
was instructed to apologise to the victims of the pedophiles.
But there was no punishment given to him.
Why not?
Because at 87 years of age and with no formal ministry responsibilities,
he's not likely to reoffend.
The victims are outraged.
They have been damaged by Hollingworth's inaction.
They can never get their childhood back again.
So for them, it's important to see the Archbishop punished.
A system of justice that only does harm minimisation
gives them no satisfaction.

God punishes bad shepherds.
He doesn't just remove them from power,
he punishes them.
It's not just about their victims seeing justice done.

It's also about God himself seeing justice done.
It's not about being nasty or vindictive.
It's about being holy and righteous.

But having punished the leaders,
what will God do for the victims?

10:6 "I will strengthen Judah
and save the tribes of Joseph.

I will restore them because I have compassion on them.

They will be as though I had not rejected them,
for I am the Lord their God
and I will answer them."

God is holy and righteous,

but that doesn't mean he's without compassion.

And his compassion here is for the victims of the leaders.

The people they have led astray.

This compassion is wider than we might imagine.

He's strengthening Judah.

That's Zechariah's people.

But also he will save the tribes of Joseph.

That means the northern tribes that never came back from exile.

Salvation is even promised for them.

What kind of salvation will it be?

Well part of it is to turn their hearts back to God.

10:9 "Though I scatter them among the peoples,
yet in distant lands they will remember me."

The tribes of the north wound up scattered to the four winds.

But part of God's mercy on them will be causing them to remember him.

We know that it's easy to forget.

Most things I find get harder each year.

Forgetting gets easier.

And for people who were scattered to lands

where there was no public gathering of God's people for worship,

no physical reminder of his presence through the temple,
 no sacrifices for sin at the temple,
 and people all around you who worshiped other gods,
 it would be super easy to forget the Lord.
 It had been 6 generations already.
 So easy to forget the Lord over 6 generations.
 But God will cause them to remember.
 God will turn their hearts towards him.

If you think about it,
 that is the greatest mercy.
 None of us can turn to God without him first turning our hearts to him.
 Every story about how someone came to follow Jesus starts with God.
 You didn't go looking for God.
 God came looking for you.
 Everyone's story is different.
 God came looking for me,
 by giving me parents who knew him and loved him.
 God came looking for my Mum through a beach mission team.
 Sometimes God uses a strategically placed Bible.
 Sometimes he uses the love of a friend
 or the diligence of a Christian teacher.
 There are many ways,
 but they all begin with God.

And God's work in us doesn't finish when he draws us to himself.
 10:12 ""I will strengthen them in the Lord
 and in his name they will live securely,"
 declares the Lord."
 You may have played bowls or watched other people play.
 The bowling balls have a bias.
 They don't roll straight.
 We are like bowling balls.
 We have a bias to drift away from the life of faith.
 But God will strengthen us in the Lord.

He provides a community around us to strengthen us.
 He gives us his word which teaches us and corrects us
 and trains us in how to live.

He provides us with regular rituals like the Lord's Supper
 so that we keep focused on the most important thing that God has done.

How was this prophecy of Zechariah fulfilled?

It wasn't fulfilled in Israel's history.

The northern tribes were never gathered in.

The fulfilment must be in Jesus.

God replaces the bad shepherds with a good shepherd.

The good shepherd is the Lord Jesus.

He is the one who goes looking for his sheep
 when they are not looking for him.

He leaves the 99 sheep to go and look for the one lost sheep.

And when he has drawn the sheep to himself,
 he keeps them safe.

Jn 10:27-28 "My sheep listen to my voice;

I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life,

and they shall never perish;

no one will snatch them out of my hand."

Jesus is the one who fulfils the hope of Zechariah 10.

Jesus is the one who causes people to remember the Lord.

Jesus is the one strengthens us in the Lord

and in whose name we live securely.

But Zechariah isn't quite finished.

As he draws this section to a close,

he goes back to where he started:

The bad shepherds, the leaders who make the people go astray.

11:1-2 "Open your doors, Lebanon,

so that fire may devour your cedars!

Wail you juniper, for the cedar has fallen;

the stately trees are ruined!

Wail oaks of Bashan;
the dense forest has been cut down!"
Just like at the start of the passage,
when he was talking about praying for rain,
this is actually not about trees and forests.
These trees are a metaphor for the bad leaders.
They are pictured as the most impressive trees the Israelites knew.
The cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan
were what Solomon used in building the temple.
And the bad leaders are pictured like that
because they are proud and influential
impressive looking people.
That's one of the reasons that bad leaders can do so much damage.
Humanly speaking they look impressive.
They might come wearing ornate robes
or with fantastic minds and impressive theological qualifications.
And the people think,
"Who am I
to question such a well spoken and widely acknowledged leader?"
Well, people have trouble spotting them and dealing with them.
God does not.
11:3 "Listen to the wail of the shepherds;
their rich pastures have been destroyed!
Listen to the roar of the lions;
the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!"

Those who abuse his people
and lead them astray from his love,
God will tear down from their lofty positions of power.

So we have in Zech 10 a contrast between bad and good leaders.
God punishes the bad leaders.
The good leader is pretty much only one person
and that is Jesus.
Jesus will draw people to God.

Jesus will strengthen them in the Lord.
That's pretty much the message.

What should we do with it?

Where does it leave leaders like me?

1. If we start leading people astray,
we can be sure that we will end up like the oaks of Bashan
and the cedars of Lebanon.

Don't lead people away from Jesus,
that has to be the number 1 thing on a minister's job description.

2. It means that serious study of God's word is necessary.

Necessary for me and for you.

Sometimes people think that Christian ministry
is somewhat akin to being a social worker with a religious hat on.

Get a basic understanding of Christian belief

but spend most of your time being nice to people,

helping them through the distressing things that come upon them in life.

Well we do want to show love.

But Christian social work can't be the main focus of ministry.

Why not?

Because there will be bad leaders trying to lead the flock astray.

They will come with subtle perversions

of Christian truth that are hard to spot.

Ministers need to be sharp so they can recognise error.

We need to be good at explaining that stuff to people
so they don't get led astray.

Those things are our particular calling.

The helping people through the tough parts of life
is actually a calling of all of us.

And when churches try to make that the particular focus of ministers
inevitably the discerning of error

and the teaching and warning part is neglected.

Have you ever wondered why the Salvation Army

isn't bursting at the seams with people praising God on a Sunday?

I mean they have recently closed their Hastings Sunday Service.
It's because they expect their officers to be religious social workers.
It doesn't work.
People don't get led to Jesus.

We have to keep the main thing the main thing.
The main thing is pointing people to the Good Shepherd.