

Zech 14
The day of the Lord
Tim Anderson 4/6/2023

When I was in Jerusalem,
I went for a run up the Mount of Olives.

Why?

Well the keen beans I was running with
decided that there was a hill there,
so that was obviously the best place to run.

Why would you run on the flat when you could run up a hill?
Anyway, one side of the Mount of Olives is covered by a cemetery.
Seemed like a strange place to put a cemetery.

It had a beautiful view back over Jerusalem.
Shame that the people buried in the cemetery couldn't enjoy the view.
It's prime real estate.

Normally you reserve the prime real estate for the living
and put the cemetery somewhere inconspicuous.

Some people told me why the cemetery is there.

It's because of a prophecy in Zechariah 14.

14:4 "On that day, his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
east of Jerusalem,

and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from East to West."

14:5 "The the Lord my God will come,
and all the holy ones with him."

And I was told that the Jews believe that on Judgement Day,
the Messiah will stand on the Mount of Olives.

There will be a massive earthquake.

The dead who have been buried on the Mount of Olives will be raised.
And they will accompany the Lord God into the final battle against evil.
They are the holy ones who go with him in v5.

So there you go.

That's why the Jews put a cemetery on the side of the Mount of Olives
with the best views over Jerusalem.

Well I'm not sure that a totally literal fulfilment of Zechariah 14

is how we want to look at it.

Why not?

Well because in the light of earlier passages in Zechariah that we've looked at over the last few weeks,

that seem to find their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus,

I think we should also take this passage

in light of what Jesus tells us about the end of the world.

So what does this passage tell us about the end of the world?

Well first of all,

it is about the end of the world.

14:1 "A day of the Lord is coming"

That is language that is consistent throughout the prophets for the final day.

And as the chapter progresses,

the idea is repeat in more condensed form.

verses 6,8,9,13, & 20 have the phrase 'on that day'.

But what happens 'on that day'?

First of all,

the day when Jesus returns

will be a day of great distress for God's people.

We saw last week

that victory for God's shepherd comes from the jaws of defeat.

The shepherd is pierced by the sword.

His death provided forgiveness for God's people.

A fountain cleansed them from sin and impurity.

But for the shepherd himself,

it didn't look like victory.

And so it was when Jesus died on the cross.

It didn't look like victory.

It looked like defeat.

But it was in fact the greatest victory.

In God's plans, the greatest victory looks like defeat.

We shouldn't expect that it will be any different for followers of Jesus.

What's good for the master is good for his disciples.

14:1-2 "A day of the Lord is coming Jerusalem,
when your possessions will be plundered
and divided up within your walls.

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it,
the city will be captured, the houses ransacked and the women raped."

The last day begins by looking like a rerun
of the day the Babylonians came and took Israel into exile.

That was the worst day in the history of the Jews.

The day of final victory begins by looking like the worst day of all.

It starts bad but it will not continue that way.

God will turn things on their head.

14:3 "Then the Lord will go out and fight against the nations,
as he fights on a day of battle."

Instead of God abandoning his people

as he did when Babylon came to take them into exile,
this time God fights.

If you cast your mind back over the wars that Israel fought in the OT,
one thing stands out.

It doesn't matter how good or how bad the situation looks.

It matters whether God is fighting on behalf of his people.

Gideon and 300 men can beat the Midianites.

Joshua can defeat Jericho just by marching around the city
and blowing trumpets.

It doesn't matter how badly you are outnumbered
if the Lord is fighting for you.

And so it will be on the last day.

The situation will look hopeless.

But God will turn up and save the day.

What does his salvation look like?

Well the Lord stands on the Mount of Olives
and splits the mountain in half.

The earthquake will cause a valley to form,
and that valley will be used by God's people
to escape from their enemies that wage war on them.
I think that's saying
that God will supernaturally provide an escape for his people.

What does the day of the Lord look like?

It will be a day of new creation.

14:6-7 "On that day

there will be neither sunlight nor cold frosty darkness.

It will be a unique day -

a day known only to the Lord -

with no distinction between day and night.

When evening comes there will be light."

This kind of description of the new creation
comes in a couple of places in the Bible.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the new creation with these words.

Is 60:19 "The sun will no more be your light by day,

nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you,

for the Lord will be your everlasting light,

and your God will be your glory."

And the same picture is picked up in Revelation.

21:23 "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it,

for the glory of God gives it light,

and the Lamb is its lamp."

22:5 "There will be no more night.

They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun,

for the Lord God will give them light."

Like with all pictures of the end,

it's not wise to be too dogmatic

about exactly how it's all going to turn out.

These pictures are designed to tell us about something

that is beyond our imagining.

Think trying to describe a Beethoven Symphony to a deaf person.

Or a surf beach in Hawaii to an Eskimo.
Light is basic to life.
You can't do much in pitch darkness.
In this creation, God provides light through the sun and the moon.
In the new creation, God will provide light directly.
I guess that's possible because we will be able
to look upon the glory of God in the new creation.
If God provided our light directly now,
that would be too much for us to handle.
But in the new creation,
as perfected and redeemed people,
we will be able to look at God face to face.
And his glory will be our light.

The new creation is not just the lighting.
There are also changes to the land.
14:8 "On that day living water will flow out of Jerusalem,
half of it to the east to the Dead Sea,
half of it to the west to the Mediterranean Sea,
in summer and in winter."
This is about making the new creation fertile.
Water is a precious resource in Israel.
You don't waste a drop.
And some months of the year are very dry.
So this is about having water to make the land productive.
It about having that water for the whole land.
Even the parts towards the Dead Sea that are desert.
And it's about having it all year round.
A productive and fertile land all year round.
There are also changes to make the land safe.
When it talks about making the land like the Arabah,
that means flat as a pancake.
And then Jerusalem is raised up.
This is about safety.
In the ancient world,

being higher than potential invaders gave you great security.
Before the advent of motorised transport,
it was very hard to attack uphill.

As Zechariah says,

14:11 "Jerusalem will be secure."

Now none of this is meant to be taken literally.

Zechariah was just as aware as you and me

that one source of water

doesn't become two rivers flowing in opposite directions.

And he was equally aware

that God wasn't going to literally raise and lower

various parts of the promised land to change the security of Jerusalem.

It's picture language to tell us that in the new creation

there will be unimaginable provision of all we need,

and undreamt of security.

Another part of the picture of the last day

is the judgement that comes on God's enemies.

And the description is not for the squeamish.

It's complete with rotting flesh

and God's enemies turning on one another in their panic.

I won't read it out.

Once is probably enough for one day.

The point is that there is terrible judgement for those who oppose God
by attacking his people.

We don't like to talk about it.

Whenever I preach about God's judgement,

I feel like I'm emotionally manipulating people.

But it's not manipulative to tell people the truth,
even an uncomfortable truth.

You wouldn't want your doctor to say,

"I won't tell her about the melanoma on her shoulder,
because it would make her upset."

That would be medical malpractice.

And so it is spiritual malpractice

to avoid the subject of God's judgement.
 I'm not suggesting that we get loudspeakers
 and find a city street corner to shout at people from.
 But I am suggesting at a bare minimum that we don't tell people lies.
 When someone who is not a believer dies,
 we don't tell their loved ones,
 "Well he's in a better place now."
 No he's not, he's in a worse place.
 Much worse.
 What could you say that's both truthful and not completely insensitive?
 How about, "We will remember his time with us with great fondness."
 Or "I'm really going to miss his cheeky sense of humour."
 It's quite possible to say warm and comforting things that are not lies.
 It's so important not to tell lies about judgement day.
 Everyone around us is telling lies about it.
 How will they ever find out the lies they are hearing are not true
 if we reinforce them?

But even in the midst of judgement,
 God's mercy is still there.
 Some of God's enemies are converted and come to worship him.
 14:16 "Then the survivors from all the nations
 that have attacked Jerusalem
 will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty."
 For Old Testament thought, this is incredibly inclusive.
 God's people were the Jews.
 The nations were to be subdued and avoided
 lest they lead you into idolatry.
 But not in these end times.
 God's mercy reaches out even to those who were attacking his people
 and brings them amongst the community of worshippers.
 The particular religious celebration
 that the nations were participating in is the festival of Tabernacles.
 That was the harvest festival for the Jews.
 Jesus sees a harvest of souls to be won for his kingdom.

He tells his followers,
"The harvest is plentiful
but the workers are few.
Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore
to send out workers into his harvest fields."
If you want a Christian reading of the nations streaming into Jerusalem
to celebrate the harvest festival,
it would a great harvest among the souls
of those who grew up with no knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

At various times we do see revivals
where many people come to faith
from unbelieving backgrounds.
I'm told that the closest we have come in Australia was in Newcastle.
It was more than 100 years ago.
There was such a turning to the Lord
that it caused deaths in the coal mines in Newcastle.
The mining supervisors were converted
and they stopped swearing at the miners.
The only problem was
that the miners couldn't understand the instructions
they were being given
because the supervisors' language had changed so much.
And mistakes were made that caused deaths in the mines.

I was complaining to a retired minister friend this week.
We run a breakfast at the local high school.
But we aren't allowed to mention anything about God.
How are kids there ever going to come to put their faith in Jesus?
The minister said to me,
"You might not be allowed to talk to them,
but you can pray for them, can't you?"
Of course we can.
It struck me that we have a prayer time after the breakfast each week.
We pray for the kids to learn well at school.

We pray for those who have difficulties at home.
 We pray for the teachers
 to have good relationships with the kids and each other.
 But it's actually rare for us to pray for the kids to come to know Jesus.
 And there's no rule
 telling us what we are allowed to pray for after the brekky.
 We actually impoverish what we can offer
 if we only hold out a free feed.
 Why would you only give people an egg muffin and a pancake
 if you could offer them relationship with the creator of the universe?
 And how can we complain about what we aren't allowed to do
 when we aren't doing the things we are allowed to do?

The final picture of judgement day is of everything becoming holy.
 I remember growing up at St Agnes' in Black Rock.
 They called the front of the church, this part up here, a sanctuary.
 There was a little red candle hanging from the roof up there.
 It was to tell you that God was living in the sanctuary.
 And that's how things were in the Old Testament.
 Now it was a very long time ago that I was at St Agnes'
 but it wasn't quite back in the Old Testament.
 They had clearly taken a few years
 to realise that the New Covenant was upon us.
 In the Old Testament
 or to say it another way,
 under the Old Covenant,
 there were some special religious items and religious places
 that were set apart as holy.
 They were dedicated to the Lord's service.
 So the High Priest had a special turban that he wore.
 And written on the turban were these words:
 "Holy to the Lord".
 It was a visual reminder
 that the High Priest was set apart for God's work.
 He was a special person, with a special job.

No one else in the nation
was Holy to the Lord in quite the same way as him.
But in Zechariah's vision of Judgement Day,
suddenly everything becomes holy.

14:20 "On that day, 'Holy to the Lord',
will be inscribed on the bells of the horses,
and the cooking pots in the Lord's house
will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar.

He's not telling us

that there will be something special about the bells on the horses.

No. The point is that even something as mundane as the bells on horses
will be holy to the Lord.

Everything will be holy to the Lord.

Even the cooking pots

will be like the most precious and set apart religious paraphernalia.

Everything will be holy to the Lord.

We have a prayer that we say after communion.

"Father we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice."

It comes from Rom 12:1.

"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,

holy and pleasing to God -

this is your true and proper worship."

What is holy to the Lord for Christians?

It's our bodies.

That means the whole lives we live in God's service.

There are no special religious items with special holy status.

The chalices we use for communion

could just as easily be cups from the kitchen.

The table we use to celebrate communion on

could just as easily be a table from Ikea.

We don't need candles.

We've got lights.

Everything is holy to the Lord.

And that means all of it is used for his glory.

What does Judgement Day look like?

It looks like God's victory.

So when distressing times come we don't despair.

God's victory is around the corner.

Judgement Day is a day of new creation.

We will be able to look upon the glory of God

and it will be the light by which we see everything else.

Judgement Day is a day of bountiful provision and security

for God's people.

If you've ever wondered if you are going to be able to pay the bills,

if you've ever worried about your safety,

plenty and security are around the corner.

Judgement Day strangely is a day of judgement.

Uncomfortable as that may be,

we must not sugar coat it.

God's enemies will face eternal punishment.

And yet in the approach of Judgement Day,

God's mercy will reach out.

Some of his enemies will become his friends.

That is the urgent task of the church,

to work towards this goal with all of the energy he gives us.

It's as Zechariah looks to the end

that he sees holiness spreading to everything

that is used in God's service.

If a person has the Spirit of Christ living in them,

they are Holy to the Lord.

And even the most ordinary things

become Holy to the Lord when they are used in his service.