

Zech 9

The king on a donkey  
*Tim Anderson 7/5/2023*

We Australians love an underdog.  
My kids were not old enough to remember,  
four of them were not born,  
when Steve Bradbury won the gold medal in the speed skating  
at the Winter Olympics at Salt Lake city.  
Maybe you can't remember  
but trust me, he's a cult hero.  
Australians don't tend to win gold medals at the Winter Olympics.  
And this guy should not have made the final.  
He only got there  
because some of his competitors in the semi final crashed.  
He was clearly out classed by the other three skaters in the final.  
So much so that he was half a lap behind in the final,  
the other three were busting their guts straining for gold.  
And then there was a pile up.  
One fell, the other two tripped over him.  
And Steve Bradbury, alone and unopposed  
glided across the line for gold.  
And there was no embarrassment in Australia.  
No indeed.  
An Australia cult hero was born.  
I had to show my kids the video.  
Many other Australians won famous gold medals.  
But I showed my kids the video of Steve Bradbury.

If you are an Australian,  
you should love God's method of victory.  
God's victory comes through weakness.  
When God chose a leader for his people in Exodus,  
he chose one who had such a bad speech impediment,  
that he had to get his brother to speak for him.

That was Moses.

When God chose an army to defeat the Midianites in Judges, he whittled the army down from 30000 to 300, so that his army would be weaker than those they defeated.

That was Gideon.

When God chose a mother for his Son, he chose a poor girl from an insignificant family.

That was Mary.

God shows his strength through weakness.

And that is what the Prophet Zechariah prophesied would be the case, in Zech 9.

We begin with the greatness of God's victory.

God's rule over the enemies of his people.

This is verses 1-8.

9:1-2 "The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrak, (it would be probably better translated 'in the land of Hadrak')

and will come to rest on Damascus -

for the eyes of all the people and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord - and on Hamath too which borders on it."

What's going on here?

"I've never heard of Hadrak or Hamath

and apart from Damascus being the place the Paul was riding to when he had a vision of Jesus that turned his life around,

I don't know much about Damascus either."

Well the three places, Hadrak, Damascus and Hamath are the main cities of the Syrian empire.

The people of Israel are watching

while God extends the boundaries of the promised land.

Remember that by the time Zechariah was prophesying,

The destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Syrians had been completed a couple of hundred years previously.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was never restored.

There was no equivalent to the return from exile.

And here the prophet is proclaiming that not only will the Northern kingdom of Israel be restored,  
but the land that invaded it will become part of the promised land.  
That is borders of the Promised land larger  
than ever promised to the patriarchs.

Zechariah continues ...

9:2-4 "And on Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skilful.

Tyre has built herself up a stronghold;

she has heaped up silver like dust,

and gold like the dirt of the streets.

But the Lord will take away her possessions

and destroy her power on the sea,

and she will be consumed by fire."

Tyre and Sidon are the cities of the nation of Phoenicia.

The Phoenicians were noted seafaring nation.

It always feels like a David vs Goliath fight

when anyone opposes the rich.

There was a woman who makes her own brand of clothing

in the news this week.

She labelled her clothing brand many years ago with her name.

Her name is Katy Perry.

Then the super wealthy pop singer of the same name

took her to court to ban her from using the name Katy Perry

on her line of clothing.

Well it took years and almost all her money to defend herself.

But the courts ruled in her favour.

She is allowed to use her own name.

It's news because it's so rare that a wealthy famous individual

loses in court to a nobody.

Impoverished Israel would have felt like that

when they heard Zechariah's prophesy against the Phoenicians.

You mean God is going to take down the wealthy and powerful

on our behalf?

Syria: incorporated into Israel.

Phoenicia, you never heard of them?  
That's because God wiped them from the map.  
Next, the Philistines.  
Four of their main cities get a mention.  
9:5-6 "Ashkelon will see it and fear;  
Gaza will writhe in agony,  
and Ekron too, for her hope will wither.  
Gaza will lose her king  
and Ashkelon will be deserted.  
A mongrel people will occupy Ashdod,  
and I will put an end to the pride of the Philistines."  
Unlike the Phoenicians, you've probably heard of the Philistines.  
But that's because of King David's famous victory  
over the Philistine champion, Goliath.  
But the Philistines were just as obliterated as the Phoenicians.

However, God's mercy is even upon the enemies of his people.  
9:7 "I will take the blood from their mouths,  
the forbidden food from between their teeth."  
That is, God will stop their idol worship.  
"Those who are left will belong to our God  
and become a clan in Judah,  
and Ekron will be like the Jebusites."  
Now that's amazing.  
The Jebusites were one of the original inhabitants of the promised land.  
When Joshua was conquering the land, they tricked him.  
They dressed up as people  
who had travelled from a very long way away.  
And they urged Joshua to make a treat with them.  
That way they wouldn't get wiped out.  
Joshua neglected to inquire of the Lord.  
He made the treaty.  
And he had to keep his word and not wipe the Jebusites out.  
They became the water carriers and wood cutters in Israel.  
Zechariah is saying that one of the Philistine cities, Ekron,

would be like that.

Their people would be grafted into the ranks of God's people.

This is a prophecy

that looks forward to Gentiles being included among God's people.

That certainly didn't happen in Zechariah's lifetime.

None of these prophecies did.

They look to the distant future.

And really their primary fulfilment is in Jesus.

It's rare in the Old Testament to have these prophecies

of the Gentiles coming in to the kingdom.

But how is it going to happen?

This is the second part.

God's powerful rule through weakness.

Verses 9-13.

Here comes the famous verse.

9:9 "Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion!

Shout daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt the foal of a donkey."

We've all heard that verse before.

It's quoted in the New Testament

when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But before we get there,

let's notice something interesting and perhaps puzzling in Zechariah.

We've already heard this call to Daughter Zion earlier in the book.

2:10 "Shout and be glad, daughter Zion,

for I am coming and I will live among you," declares the Lord.

In chapter 2 it was about shouting

because God was coming to live among his people

as the temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem and God moved back in.

And it poses the question for us,

who is this king in chapter 9?

Is it a human king or is it a divine king?  
 It's a puzzling thing to address a human  
 in the same language you would use for God himself.  
 The Jews would normally be concerned about blasphemy.  
 Of course if you look at Jesus,  
 then you have a human king in the line of David  
 who is also God the Son.  
 What was puzzling becomes clear.

The other thing we notice about the king  
 is that his victory is in weakness.  
 In the ancient world,  
 kings did not ride donkeys, they rode horses.  
 And the weakness of this king is underlined  
 because God is taking away his worldly sources of strength.  
 9:10 "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim  
 and the warhorses from Jerusalem,  
 and the battle bow will be broken."  
 This is a king who has none of the usual sources of worldly strength.  
 He has no kingly steed.  
 He has no army to make him an impressive monarch.  
 Spare a thought for Zechariah's original hearers.  
 They would have been thinking,  
 "This king makes no sense Zechariah.  
 This is not the kind of king we want.  
 Why would we want to rejoice greatly about this king?  
 We don't want a loser in charge of the nation."

And yet the results of this king  
 are beyond imagining in the other direction.  
 9:10 "He will proclaim peace to the nations."  
 There has never been a king  
 who has been able to impose peace on our warlike world.  
 "His rule will extend from sea to sea  
 and from the River to the ends of the earth."

That is, his rule will be worldwide.  
 Forget the boundaries of the promised land.  
 This king rules as far as the Jews' knowledge of the world extended.  
 When they say 'The River' they mean the Euphrates river not the Jordan.  
 That is, as far away as we know the place names.  
 And the ends of the earth means everywhere.

A king who looks lame not powerful.  
 But a king none the less whose kingdom is unimaginably great.  
 Zechariah's hearers must have confused.  
 But for us as Christians,  
 there is no confusion.

The Lord Jesus doesn't look like a kingly king.  
 Some of you watched  
 the pomp and ceremony of King Charles' coronation last night.  
 Jesus had none of that.  
 In an animal's feeding trough when he was born  
 and buried in a borrowed grave when he died,  
 he didn't have much more than that at any time in between.  
 And yet his kingdom is universal.  
 He does proclaim peace to the nations.  
 Peace in the sense that when his rule is finally unquestioned  
 there will be complete peace in every relationship.

Peace in the sense that the only way to have peace between us and God  
 is through the cross of Jesus.  
 There is nothing weaker and less kingly than Jesus hanging on a cross.  
 And yet that is where God made peace.  
 Eph 2:15-16 "Jesus' purpose was to create in himself one new humanity  
 out of the two, thus making peace,  
 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross,  
 by which he put to death their hostility."

Also peace in the sense

that his subjects advance the aims of his kingdom by peaceful means.  
Remember when Peter picked up his sword  
to defend Jesus in the Garden.

Jesus rebuked him and healed the man whose ear he cut off.

The greatest shame in Christian history is the crusades,  
because Christians decided to fight to establish the kingdom of God.

Every time the church gets its hands on worldly power,  
it has always, without fail,

been the cause of the church going off track in Christian history.

Do you think it helps the church

to have bishops in the house of Lords in England?

No, I tell you.

It inevitably compromises the leadership of the church.

How can you serve a humble master who rides a donkey  
while you are clutching at worldly power yourself?

Jesus' words to the apostle Paul need to be etched on all of our hearts,  
and the further you rise in worldly power,  
the more you need these words.

2 Cor 12:9 "But he said to me,

"My grace is sufficient for you,

for my power is made perfect in weakness.""

Where does the church flourish?

Unsurprisingly, it flourishes in places where the people have nothing.

In the poorest nations in Africa and Asia,

the church is growing rapidly.

God's power is made perfect in weakness.

Where is the largest Anglican Church on the Mornington Peninsula?

The answer is Hastings.

It also happens to be

the least well off place on the Peninsula economically.

Is that a surprise?

No.



I often think that I would be a better minister if I could do less stuff.  
If I didn't know how to play the keyboard,  
other musicians would step up.  
Sometimes being capable is a handicap  
because we need weakness to amplify God's grace.

We've had God's rule over the enemies of his people 1-8.  
We've had God's powerful rule through weakness 9-13.  
And finally we turn to God's eventual triumph 14-17.

There's a big shift in the picture of the king and the picture of the Lord.  
The king is weak and lowly.  
There's nothing demure or understated about the picture of the Lord.  
His arrow flashes like lightning.  
He sounds the trumpet and marches with the storm.  
He empowers his people and they triumph with slingstones.

When we think about these pictures as Christians,  
we are reminded of the now and the not yet of the Christian life.  
God's grace through weakness is now.  
God's triumph and the exultation of victory is the not yet.  
The day will come when his victory is evident to all.  
The gospels talk about Jesus' return being like a coming on the clouds.  
Every eye will see him.  
His glory will fill the earth.  
Those who oppose him  
will cry out for the mountains to fall on them and cover them up.  
That's not our experience right now.  
But it's good to know that will be the final outcome.

Our weakness is not always easy to deal with now.  
We don't like feeling like we are not masters of our own destiny.  
But it's far easier to cope with our weakness now  
if we can be reassured  
that God has the final situation completely sorted.

And it is completely sorted.  
 Isn't the picture of our eventual salvation just beautiful?  
 9:16 "The Lord their God will save his people on that day  
 as a shepherd saves his flock.  
 They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.  
 How attractive and beautiful they will be!"  
 When king Charles wants to show off the glory of his kingdom,  
 he puts on a crown of magnificent jewels.  
 When God wants to show off the glory of his kingdom,  
 he shows off his jewels too.  
 His jewels are the people he has saved.  
 You are the attractive and beautiful ones.  
 If you are a Christian,  
 then you will sparkle like jewels in a crown.

You might not feel particularly attractive.  
 Not just physically attractive  
 but capable of drawing other people to your magnetic personality.  
 Or attractive because of what you are able to do  
 that brings people together and blesses them.  
 But when God has done his work of saving you,  
 you will be supremely attractive.  
 You will be like a jewel dug up out of the ground  
 that looks like a dirty stone.  
 But when the gem cutter has finished his work,  
 the jewel shows off all its radiant beauty.  
 That's us.  
 When God has finished with us we will sparkle.

What's the value of us knowing this now?  
 It gives us joy,  
 as we see God's grace through our weakness now.  
 I might be weak now,  
 but one day I'm going to sparkle.

## Zechariah 9

God rules over the enemies of his people 1-8.

The thing that stood out to me there  
was God's mercy on the people of Ekron.

Even some of his enemies are redeemed.

God rules powerfully through weakness 9-13.

God makes peace through the weakness of the cross of Jesus.

And his grace will be sufficient for us in our weakness.

God will triumph 14-17.

We can have joy in our weakness

because as God's redeemed people we will sparkle.