

Live the Victory!

Zechariah 9:9-12 (NIV)

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. ¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

Victory is not just celebrated in the moment. We throw parades: parades for VE-Day and V-J Day signaling the end of World War II, parades for the Apollo 11 astronauts after they had returned from the moon and had gotten out of quarantine, parades as the Super Bowl winning team gets back to their hometown.

The Prophet Zechariah has us picturing a victory parade with his words from the Lord: “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.” (verse 9) Zechariah gives these words around about 480 BC. What victory are they celebrating? Many of the Jews had already come back from their Babylonian exile about 50 years earlier. They had dedicated the rebuilt temple about 30 years earlier. They weren’t immediately involved in any wars, even though at times the surrounding nations had made their lives hard.

Looking at the words before verse 9 and the ones after, you hear a lot of “I will” statements. The Lord says, “I will cleanse the unbelieving nations and they will belong to me, making them my people along with those in Judah. I will encamp around my people so that no oppressors will ever overrun them again. I will take away the chariots and warhorses and battle bows. I will proclaim peace to the nations. I will rule to the ends of the earth. I will free your prisoners. I will restore twice as much to you.”

These things hadn’t happened yet. Why does the Lord tell them to celebrate a future victory? I mean, even today we still have all sorts of wars going on. There hardly seems to be a day of peace in Israel. And what about these prisoners in the waterless pit?

Israel is a desert climate. They couldn’t count on rain except in specific seasons, and they didn’t have rivers running through all their areas. They needed to collect water in pits that they dug. However, they would eventually get used up or dried out. Put a man in one of those pits, and you have a waterless pit that you can’t get out of unless someone lowers you a rope and pulls you out.

Some of God’s people were trapped in places that they saw no way out. But not a physical space. This was a spiritual, mental place. Maybe it was a depression over the fact that it took some 20 years to rebuild the temple and it paled in comparison to the one Solomon built. Maybe it was a depression that the walls of Jerusalem still lay broken in a heap of rubble or that there were still many Jews who stayed in Babylon and didn’t return with them. Maybe it was a trapped feeling that they were not a military powerhouse and the next kingdom that wanted to could swoop in and subjugate them all over again.

Maybe it was the sense of being trapped because as hard as they had tried, they could never keep all of God’s laws. They were still sinning, still falling short. Yes, the Lord had returned them. Yes, the temple had been rebuilt. But how long until we cause it to all come crashing down because of our failures, our sins?

What makes you feel like a prisoner in a waterless pit that you can’t climb or claw your way out of? Do you feel the same disappointment and depression over the fact that your sins keep coming. You commit the sin. You feel the sorrow over doing it. You hear God’s words of forgiveness. You know that you are restored and made new, but then you do it again...and again...and again. Just feels like you can’t get out of this cycle of sin, this waterless pit.

Maybe your waterless pit is seeing how not in control you are of your life and this world. Advocate for it all you want, but you can’t actually make people get along with each other. You can’t make the world leaders lay down their arms and just play nice. You can’t control your boss and what they do, the hours they assign you, the work they dump on your desk. You can’t control how your kids behave, though you have tried just about every parenting book that you can think of along with a whole lot of prayer. You can’t control inflation and the housing market, how everything is getting so much more expensive without your pay keeping pace, leaving you with less and less every month. You feel trapped, longing for our King to actually come and make good on all these “I will” statements and bring that peace and release us from our waterless pit prisons.

This is why the Lord gives this word to Zechariah to share with his people and recorded it for us. Although we are feeling depressed, trapped in sin, in this world that we can't control, God wants us to have a victory parade, to live as if we've already won.

Really this is what we see happening as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He came already righteous, having lived a completely perfect life, never having sinned once. He came victorious over every temptation that was ever thrown at him. The devil still had a big fat zero next to his scoreboard. So the people rightly lived the victory, rejoicing greatly and shouting victory.

We know, though, that the battles were not over. Jesus still had more temptations to come: his betrayal, his suffering, his death. Yet we also know that the empty tomb and his resurrection are coming. It's part of history, an accomplished fact. Jesus really is righteous and victorious over all of our sin.

We don't have to wait for the victory to happen to have God's victory, to live in it. When God says that he is going to do something, he always does it. He had returned the exiles when he said he would. He made sure that the temple got rebuilt just as he promised.

We get to look back on Jesus coming into Jerusalem with the victory palm procession and the fact that all our sins were paid for on the cross and that Jesus was raised from the dead proving that his payment was accepted by God. But we are still waiting on the other "I will" statements to become true. We are still waiting on all the weapons of war to be taken away. We are still waiting to see us freed from our depressing waterless pits of sin.

In announcing this victory parade through Zechariah, God was giving his people and us hope, not just a feeling or a wish that something good would happen, that God might pull off the victory, but telling us exactly what to expect. God is righteous and victorious. Peace is coming. Peace with God is yours now. Celebrate it now. Though you haven't seen all the battles against sin, death, and the devil fought yet, the outcome is already decided. Live the victory because it's already yours.

Why? Because the Lord said: "As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you." (verses 11-12) Because Jesus' was shed his blood, our sins truly are forgiven. We really are made new. We have peace with God. Live that victory right now that all our sins are already forgotten, never to be brought up to you or me again. We are rescued out of your waterless pit and will most assuredly be brought to God never to experience temptation or sin again. God guarantees it.

As far as God ruling to the ends of the earth, yes, we still want to see more, but he's doing that right now. We say we believe that when we say that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, this position of ruling over all things here on earth, in control of all the nations of the world, over all the world leaders, over your boss, over your kids. It may not look that way to us because we would make people do things differently if we were king, but God says he is ruling to the ends of the earth, and he always does what he says. So that rule is now and will be forever.

Live this victory meaning that you have nothing to fear with all these things you don't control. God's got all of this. He's our fortress. We are always safe with him, no matter how this world, this life, throws at us. Yes, these things may very well still hurt us, but we are always safe and always victorious with the Lord since he has already come righteous and victorious.

And the day is coming when all the weapons of war are destroyed and taken away. There is a day coming when our righteous and victorious king comes again, when all will see him and acknowledge him reigning from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth. On that day, that Last Day, Judgment Day, we will enjoy twice over everything we have ever enjoyed here on earth.

Yes, we are still waiting to see the total victory, just like the Jews in Zechariah's day, but we get to live that victory right now. God will make good on his Word because he is righteous and victorious. He has freed us from our waterless pit and from worrying about that which we can't control. This is our hope, our sure and certain future. Live Christ's victory for us now. Amen.