

Zechariah 9:9-13

Brendan Hoover

In this passage, the prophet Zechariah writes of better days to come. More specifically, a better king to come. He is writing to the Israelites who had been taken captive and forced out of their homes into unknown lands. When they finally returned to Jerusalem, the temple had been destroyed along with the whole city. They had to rebuild their entire lives, and with all the obstacles this task would have seemed impossible.

In verse 9, he tells this broken people that despite all of the difficult years, they still have reason to rejoice because a king is coming. This king is not like the kings of the past who were selfish and led the people away from God and into sin. This coming king would be righteous and all his decisions would be perfect. His laws and actions would help his people. He would bring them joy and he would even bring them salvation. This anticipated king would be humble. He would rule his people with gentleness and compassion.

In verses 10-12, we see that this king is promised to change the direction of even the most powerful nations. He will bring peace to this world that knows very little of peace. This king will bring an end to all battles. He will free all the prisoners and restore them. His people will have no need for instruments of war because his rule will cover all the world. There will be no battles to fight because the entire world will be gladly under his reign.

We have been blessed to see this prophecy come to reality in the birth of our eternal king, Jesus Christ. It's amazing to see how Jesus truly is a righteous, humble savior who is our God and king. However, this Christmas season may arrive and you find yourself feeling like the Israelites, tired and worn out from a difficult life. The holidays may be a reminder of broken family or difficult life situations. Perhaps you are spending a first Christmas without a loved one who passed away. It is ok if Christmas comes and goes and you don't have a perfect storybook Christmas. It doesn't mean that you are any less Christian or that you are not grateful for the birth of Christ.

After all, verse 13 says that God's people will serve as weapons against the evil in this world. This constant battle within the world often does leave us sad and broken, but regardless of this, like the Israelites, we can rejoice. We can rejoice that King Jesus was born and has conquered sin and given us salvation. We can also rejoice that He will return and reign over all the nations. We can rejoice that King Jesus has already overcome the world. Zechariah reminds us to rejoice in the coming of the King who has given us salvation and will one day finish the battle and bring peace and restoration to all the earth.

Luke 1:26-38

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In today's passage, Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel and is told she has received favor from God and will become pregnant with Jesus, God's son. Immediately after telling her this, Gabriel goes into some detail about who Jesus is; I imagine Mary on some level had to have been somewhat excited to hear this news considering she had been anticipating the Messiah's coming as much as any Jew. How incredible that the Son of the Most High was finally going to appear on earth to establish His kingdom through David's line as it had been promised and foretold long before Mary's time.

Even amidst the initial surprise and possible excitement, fear and doubt regarding the logistics for such a plan and her own involvement in it could have caused Mary not to believe the angel's words - after all she was a virgin. Indeed, Mary had questions about how things were going to unfold as anyone might (v. 34). Gabriel provides a bit more insight into how she will conceive and even encourages her with Elizabeth's news of a pregnancy despite old age, reminding Mary that nothing is impossible with God.

But Mary's more surprising response comes in verse 38 when she humbly states, "Behold I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word." Despite not knowing all the details and in the midst of so many unknowns, Mary's heart posture is one of trust. This stands in stark contrast to the passage before this, in Luke 1:5-25, where Zechariah responds in unbelief to the angel's announcement that his wife Elizabeth will conceive and bear a son in her old age. In verse 36, we read that God has kept his promise to Zechariah, and Elizabeth has indeed conceived just as the angel said she would. Verse 36 encourages me in a special way because in God's mercy he provides Mary with a relative whom she can experience fellowship with in a time where she could have felt very alone. I'm so thankful Luke includes this detail because it reminds me that whatever we face, God is with us, strengthening and upholding us even when the path ahead seems impossible.

Mary's response and attitude toward the angel's announcement is both humbling and encouraging. She believed God that the long anticipated promise of the Messiah would be fulfilled and that she herself would play a role. This Advent season, we all find ourselves in many different situations and life circumstances. Whether good or bad, we all have the opportunity to respond in faith just as Mary did. After all, God already did the impossible in sending His son Jesus. Let us trust Him, believing in his love and care for us and eagerly anticipating all that He can do in our lives.