King over all the earth

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0:00] This is God's Word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray for his help! Father, this is your Word, and we thank you for it. We pray that you would help us with it now, to see and know Christ through it. Lord, open our ears, soften our hearts, that we might receive all that you have to teach us through it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, let me begin with a question. How would you explain text messaging to someone from the 18th century? So there's often the point, isn't it, where we realize we don't really know how anything in the 21st century works. But really, I just want you to think how you would do it how would you go about explaining that to someone from 250 years ago?
Well, here's what I don't think you would do. You wouldn't say, would you? Well, you just start by turning on your mobile. You know, if it's out of battery, just connected to some electricity, you just kind of use the keyboard on the screen, some radio waves get sent to the tower, the message kind of moves through some computers, the other person's phone reads some binary code, and the message is then displayed on an LED display.
You wouldn't say that, would you? I hope. Even if that's all true, which it might well not be. I don't really know how text messages work. Even if that was all true, right, you wouldn't say any of that, because that wouldn't make any sense, would it, to them.
They wouldn't understand any of it. Now, if you want to explain the future to people living in the 1700s, you have to use, don't you, language that people living in the 1700s will understand, making references to things that are familiar to them then.
[2:10] Describing things in such a way that they, in the world they lived, could fathom something of what you're talking about, even if it kind of fails to give the full picture.

Maybe sending a text is like writing a letter that kind of arrives immediately at someone else's house as soon as you've written it, no matter how far away they live. It's better, isn't it, to leave them with some unanswered questions than just sort of completely baffled by words and phrases that make no sense to them.
That's true of us explaining texts to people in the 18th century. It's true of God explaining the future to us and to all of his people throughout history.
Right? God uses language and references that his people do understand to point to a future we cannot yet fully comprehend.
That is what is going on here in Zechariah 14. To these returned exiles, God is speaking in words they understand to describe a future that they could not yet fully comprehend.
[3:32] That is sort of part one of the introduction, right? How should we understand passages like this? Right? But I understand that we are like those people in the 18th century having text messages explained to us. Now, as we come to this passage, right, God is not saying to us now, just as he wasn't saying to them then, the future will be exactly like this.

No, he's using language from Israel's past to give a sense of what is to come in the future. So part one of the introduction, right, how we understand these kinds of passages, part two of the introduction, if I'm allowed that, I'm doing it anyway, is how we are going to approach this particular passage.
Like the previous couple of chapters, you might have picked up that what we just read is all about that day. We get it again and again through chapter 14, on that day. But as Joe really kind of helpfully explained to us last week, that day is not a kind of single literal date that we could circle in the calendar.
there is depth to it. Joe used the analogy of Zechariah kind of seeing a mountain range in the distance, far off.

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But as history has moved nearer and nearer to that mountain range, it has revealed a kind of depth to it that was not perceptible from further back. And where we are now, today, right, two and a half thousand years later, is in the mountains, right, between some of the peaks.
[5:11] And so some of what Zechariah says here will happen on that day, we really can say, has come with Christ. But we say that also knowing that there is another day when Christ will come again.

There is a day that has come, but there is also a day that is coming. And we are going to approach this passage this evening in light of where we are amongst the peaks, what we have already seen in Christ's first coming, and what we are still waiting for when he comes again.
If you think that's confusing, just be thankful we're doing it this way. It was initially just going to kind of walk us through the passage. I had seven points. Every one of them had sub-points to it. We would have been here until nine o'clock. This way we've got two points rather than 19.
I'm pretty confident this is better. So we're just going to take two sweeps through the passage, thinking about how this has come, and then go through again, thinking about what is still to come.
Let's just get into the first one of those then, thinking about the new creation that has come, where we see salvation from suffering. We'll see the kind of new creation and salvation language soon, but the first thing we come across in this passage is suffering.
[6:42] The first couple of verses of our reading were quite shocking, weren't they? verse 2 in particular, I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken, and the houses plundered, and the women raped.

Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. As we try and kind of wrap our heads around this, let me immediately take us back just to where we began.
God is describing to them, then, a future reality, but he is using descriptions of their past to give it a sense of what is to come.
When the original readers heard this, they would be immediately thinking, exile. When the Babylonian army marched on Jerusalem, some 80 years before this, verse 2 is what happened.
But remember, when explaining text messaging to someone from the 1700s, you might well reference pen and paper to help them understand the kind of thing is going on, but that is different, isn't it, to saying pen and paper is what texting actually involves?
[8:10] I think so too here. This is a physical description to help God's people understand what would prove to be a primarily spiritual reality. Now, we have a lot to get through in this passage.

We can't stop here for long, but I am conscious, right, even just reading this kind of language here in verse 2, it probably raises questions, doesn't it, for all of us? But for some, it will cause real pain. It is, isn't it, emotionally charged language. That is no accident, but for some, I understand, it will cut too close to the bone.
If that is you, can I just say, please come and speak to one of us afterwards, to myself, to Anne, to Judy. I know they'd be more than happy to speak about this with you, to help you through it.
But it is the same weight that makes us feel so uncomfortable, perhaps slightly sick at the thought.
[9:19] That is the physical language God uses to get us to a right sense of our catastrophically dangerous and perilous and awful spiritual condition.

The New Testament speaks of us before Christ as being those who were dead. Dead in our sins and trespasses. Slaves to sin.
Surrounded by a wicked, a cruel enemy from who we cannot escape, who wants to see us suffer terribly. That is where we were.
It is the physical description, isn't it, that really gets to us. But the spiritual danger this is pointing to is, it feels hard to say, but it is far more serious than even the worst physical damage any enemy could threaten.
It is the most dire of situations. But into that situation, salvation comes. What we have across these opening verses is a picture of Jerusalem right under siege, that there are three sides surrounded by seemingly unconquerable enemies.
[10:49] That is on three sides. Behind is a great mountain, a mountain range blocking the route of escape. But then, what happens?

Verse three. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on the day of battle. On that day, his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the

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east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley.
There are enemies around. There is a mountain behind. But the Lord comes and splits apart the mountain.
Why? So that he can come through and defeat the enemies while simultaneously opening the way for his people to escape.
And in a very real sense, this day has come that the Mount of Olives, right, some of us will immediately be joining some of the dots there. Who comes to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives to defeat the great enemies of God's people?
[12:05] The Sunday school answer is the right answer. Jesus. But what are the enemies he comes to defeat? It's not, is it, men bearing swords and shields. It is not a physical foe he comes to fight.

But he comes to defeat death, to set his people free from the power, the tyranny of sin, to disarm the devil and those who fight for him.
Jesus has come and won that victory over the great enemies of his people. And because he has come, we can escape.
We get that language there in verse 5 of God's people going free. And it is a picture of something that has already happened for us in Christ. Jesus has defeated death.
We can escape it because of what he has done. He breaks the power of sin so that we can go free from our bondage. And the result, amazingly, is a new creation. Verses 6 to 8 there are laden with creation language.
[13:14] that the deliverance of the Lord brings something new with it. The dominion of darkness is destroyed so that in the evening there's not a fading light but a full light.

There is life-giving waters flowing out of God's dwelling place. Again, in one sense, that day has come, 2 Corinthians 5, 17. Paul says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. And it has come or it can come to all people because the waters of this new creation flow to the east and the west.
They're going out in both directions. All people can come and be made new. Verse 16 there gives us an amazing picture of people from all nations coming into God's heavenly city to worship Him.
And all those who come are made holy. The last few verses of this chapter give us a kind of taste of that. Where once in Israel's history there was kind of a select few priests and a select few items that were holy that they could kind of dwell in God's presence.
[14:32] well now because Christ has come because we have been made new and purified by Him every single person from every nation who has come to worship Jesus can come near.

As we do this evening in His name by the power of His Spirit able to enter into Heaven's throne room. that day has come.
In Christ we are a new creation saved from the most terrible suffering. That is that day that has come that is what we know already but there is much that we are still looking forward to.
That is kind of the peak that has passed. what about the one that still lies ahead our second point this evening? The new creation that is to come. Perfection through purification.
Just rewind with me back to the opening verses of this chapter. We saw it a day of terrible suffering.
[15:50] We thought about what we have been saved from in Christ's first coming. There is a suffering we have been saved from but there is suffering still to come.

Our call to worship was from 1 Peter 1 where Peter writes of the joy we have because of our heavenly hope. But in that same chapter he goes on to say that while we rejoice in the hope of our heavenly home Christians now for a little while are grieved by various trials.
He says later on in his letter beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.
He warns that our adversary the devil prowls round like a roaring lion like an army laying siege to a city.
He is prowling round looking for someone to devour. But Paul similarly tells the church to put on the whole armour of God. Why?
[17:05] That you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Although the devil has been disarmed the sting of death has been removed although that day has come we are still in the midst of a war facing very real enemies.

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Just because spiritual warfare is not visible does not mean it is not there and it is a war. so don't be surprised if there is suffering.
Again just because spiritual suffering is not always tangible does not mean we are not in the midst of it. Now like explaining the internet to Shakespeare that might well leave us with a lot of questions a lot of thoughts that we aren't quite able to grapple with and wrap our heads around but even if we don't understand it is it not better to know that we should expect it because we all experience don't we this spiritual battle even when we forget the enemy the Christian life is hard very hard there is an enemy wanting us to give up on our faith desperate to see us turn our back on
Jesus there is a deceiver sowing seeds of doubt there is an accuser trying to get us to despair for every single believer there is a spiritual battle going on and so I think there should strangely perhaps be a measure of comfort here because what if Zechariah 14 said those who have repented and put their trust in God will never struggle with temptation but will never doubt God will never feel like giving up if that is what Zechariah 14 said would be the normal experience every one of us would despair wouldn't we because that is not our experience we would be wondering right is God failing us or perhaps do I not really trust
[19:54] Jesus enough that our experience is exactly what Zechariah is telling us to expect a painful war a serious struggle against strong opposition do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you but also do not think it will last forever for salvation is coming we heard earlier again in the call to worship there is a salvation ready to be revealed the new testament speaks simultaneously of a salvation that has happened and a salvation that is to come there is a day coming where we will be saved once and for all saved from the suffering the fiery trials the enemy who although disarmed continues to prowl seeking to devour there is a day coming when the

Lord will come once more and save his people we read about it earlier in revelation a day when he will come and wipe away every tear a day when death shall be no more a day when there will be never again any mourning not a tear shed in sorrow no more crying no more pain no more suffering no more struggling the daily battle that you are fighting through right now one day he will come and save us and all those things will have passed away that day is coming because there is a day to come when there will be a whole new creation not just those in
Christ made new but heaven and earth made new so that we who suffer now will never and can never suffer again a day is coming when every enemy who once threatened the security of God's people will be utterly defeated the language here in Zechariah is quite sobering but look there verse 12 this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem their flesh will rot while they are standing on their feet their eyes will rot in their sockets their tongues will rot in their mouths physical descriptions of a coming spiritual but feel once more that the weightiness of what is being described it is an all encompassing defeat for anything and everything that might threaten to bring a tear once more to the eyes of
God's people verse 15 a plague shall come on the horses the mules the camels the donkeys whatever beasts may be in those camps God doesn't have a thing against horses there's a picture of an army supply lines being completely wiped out that the enemies surrounding the walls will be defeated and so will everything behind them that could ever possibly lead to them waging war ever again it's not just a right it is a total eradication of all things evil again Beth read this for us from Revelation 21 as for the cowardly the faithless the detestable as for murderers the sexually immoral sorcerers idolaters and all liars their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death it is a somewhat sobering picture isn't it but it is the removing of everything unholy so that everything that remains is holy it's what we get in the last few verses of this book even the bells of the horses even the pots and pans holy to lord of hosts the day has come when we have been made holy there is a day coming when everything in all creation will be holy why does that matter
Revelation 21 again because everything is holy behold the dwelling place of god is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and god himself will be with them as their god if the whole new creation is holy then the holy god can come and dwell in it with his people now I think this really is like trying to describe electricity to an ancient Greek I don't think we can wrap our heads around all that is going on here we'll never be able to grasp truly how amazing this new creation is until we get there but if there's one thing I'm confident in it it'll be far more amazing than the best we can imagine that is the day that is to come that day and it is coming and both days are bad news for

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[25:52] God's enemies but very good news for God's people perhaps the big question what do we do with all of that I'm sure just thinking about it dwelling on it is thought provoking perhaps in many ways I hope we want to give thanks to God and worship him even if we are left with plenty of questions at the same time but what does Zechariah want his audience to do with all this as we close I just want to pull back here for a minute and think about where all this lands it was five months ago now so I'll forgive you if you don't remember Ben's first sermon on the opening verses of Zechariah but what we saw right at the beginning of Zechariah was a problem that there was an empty throne in

Israel that the book is dated according by the king of Persia because there is no king in Israel but where does the book end is there a king on Israel's throne well sort of look there with me at verse 9 of Zechariah 14 the Lord will be king over all the earth Zechariah doesn't end with a king over Israel but a king over the whole world and verse 10 describes all the land except for Jerusalem completely flattened and the point is not that no one will ever have to cycle up a hill again the point is that there will be no other throne not just one throne above lots of other thrones no there will be one throne one king there will not be another molehill in all creation which will rise to challenge the authority of this king he will rule absolutely over everything and nothing will ever be able to stand against him that day is coming when the lord of hosts will rule unopposed over everything and
I think I think this last chapter of Zechariah is supposed to be kind of equal parts exciting and scary exciting for those who have as we were called to do at the beginning of the book returned to the lord of hosts who are bowing before king jesus and following him even in seasons where it seems to be a very difficult path to follow for those who have returned and keep on going even in difficult and discouraging This is the most amazing vision of the most glorious future!
But for those who have not returned or those tempted to give up to throw in the towel of those swithering on which king to serve there is something amazing that could be your future but there is also something quite terrifying that could be your future too on that day there will be a great salvation but there will also be a great judgment verse 2 warns us there are some who look like they belong but will be exiled cut off verse 12 a terrible judgment on those who reject the lord as king verse 19 warns of the punishment waiting those who refuse to come and worship some of this chapter is very exciting some of it is very very sobering
Zechariah is a book given to God's people who are teetering they have returned physically to Jerusalem but there is no king on their throne and there is a king on Persia's throne do we serve the king of the world or do we serve the king of heaven one path looks easier one is a day full of small things king this is a book giving to God's people who need encouraged and exhorted not to give up and give in in the day of small things and as part of that encouragement and exhortation we are given this chapter here at the end of the book a reminder that at the end of history there will only be one king one king over all the earth who will save his people and destroy his enemies the question [31:37] Zechariah leaves us with whatever today might hold for you whether it is a season of struggling or a season of joy what really matters is what that day will look like for you it might be the greatest day might be the very worst give up on God turn away from Jesus in the day of small things and you will face a frightful fate but press on press on keep going in seasons of doubt and discouragement keep trusting in Jesus in times of sadness and suffering hold on to him when you feel like running away keep on fighting the good fight even when it feels like every single day is an uphill battle return to the

Lord and keep on going and then this day is coming when the Lord of hosts will reign uncontested as king over all the earth and that will be a very very good day for you when every tear will be wiped away when death will be no more when there will be no more pain when there will be no more suffering when our God will come and dwell with us as his people in a perfect and pure new creation brothers and sisters that is what is waiting for you should you bow before king jesus return to him and press on for his kingdom even in the day of small things let us pray that will be every single one of us not only today but every day that we would press on for him father we do thank you that you are the king over heaven and earth that it is the lord jesus christ who has been given all authority and lord we thank you that there is a day coming when you will be revealed to be alone king of creation when the world will see that there is no other king but the lord of hosts lord as we look to that day we pray that you would help us to keep on going to return to jesus today and every day to press on for his kingdom even in seasons of discouragement and difficulty even when we feel like we are suffering more than we can be bare help us to run to jesus and keep on running to

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jesus so that that day that is to come will be one that we look forward to and rejoice in when everything will be made new when every tear will be wiped away when we will enjoy eternity dwelling with you as our gods and we as your people lord for any here this evening who have not turned to you or are tempted to run away lord bring them back bring them back to christ help them now to put their faith and trust in you alone so that day would not be one of fear but one full of joy so that we all together every one of us here this evening would be able to stand together as those declared righteous in your sight because our faith and trust is in the lord jesus christ who you have sent to save us and who will come again to save us forever!
in his name we pray!

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