

God's Grace Reverses Our Place

6) From Silence in Prison to Shouting in Paradise

Zechariah 9:9-17 • 2021-03-28 • Series for Lent



I've seen a number of energy shots and not a few energy booster commercials. I occasionally grab a coffee when I need an extra boost or have a long drive down the road. But when you see those products don't you sometimes wonder: which is going to give more energy: good diet exercise and proper sleep or something I quickly ingest? I think we all know the answer. Yet we still turn to the temporary solutions because we still run out of energy. Where do we draw energy for our worship and praise? Not just temporary energy for praise, but lasting and real praise? Our bodies grow tired and have many different issues that leave us tired and worn. We face many things that can sap our spirits of joy. Today we take one more look at how God in his grace reverses our place. He calls on us to rejoice and shout aloud with joy. But it's not a quick-fix surge of joy. It is a powerful and lasting joy. What is it that could make us so full of joy that we would shout aloud? We see the answer in Zechariah 9 today.

Usually, people are filled with joy when their situation changes for the better. For example, right now there are people who are cautiously saying they are excited for life to get back to normal. After a full year of having their lives disrupted by pandemic issues, they can't wait to get things back to the way they used to be. But there is still some uncertainty which mutes the joy. Picture how much harder and uncertain it must have been for the people during the time of Zechariah the prophet. They weren't hoping things would return to normal after a year or two. They were returning to their land after 70 years of exile and loss. Now Zechariah and a host of others have returned. And they returned with a purpose: to live once again as God's chosen people in the promised land.

You'd think there would be a lot of rejoicing and exuberant songs of praise. But in Zechariah's time you'd see prophets like Haggai and Zechariah exposing the truth, the way things really were. The temple had been leveled flat by the Babylonians. Its treasures and riches were gone. Add onto all that the fear that the nations around them were richer and more powerful. And the spiritual state of the people seemed to be terribly similar. Instead of shouts of joy the people's spirits were stifled. Instead of rejoicing there was apathy. If you were to travel to that time of return you wouldn't see people gathering at the temple for praise. You'd see long years of delay at the restoration of God's temple. You'd see people fearful that things wouldn't improve much at all. God said to them, "*Rejoice Greatly daughter of Zion! Shout aloud daughter of Jerusalem!*" But the people thought, "Shouts of joy? No. There was only more poverty and loss on the way." And along with that mindset the spiritual poverty came too. They had much to squelch their joy.

What about you? How much would it take to stifle your shouts of joy? You're not facing the same flattened temple. You're not facing a multi-year delay building project. You're not surrounded by richer and more powerful enemies. In fact, you might be thinking, "Of course I rejoice and sing for joy. I'm here this morning. Aren't I?" And you're right. We are all gathered here to rejoice in the Lord and praise him. Yet Zechariah doesn't say, "Open your mouth and follow the weekly routine." And doesn't say, "Go through the motions and make the sounds" either. He says, "rejoice greatly." Maybe you've been able to do that this morning. But is that what you and I always do? Do we always rejoice greatly with shouts of joy?

Please don't misunderstand. Not everyone can sing, of course. I've met a number of people in my life who simply can't. I had a classmate at the seminary who couldn't sing. He'd still sing, and no one ever bothered him about it. We loved him for it. We knew it was just the way he sang with the voice God gave him. My wife and I occasionally spend some evening time watching our WELS Seminary chapel services. Sometimes they forget to turn the mic down during the hymns. It soon becomes obvious when the student leading worship loves his Lord -even if he wouldn't be winning American idol anytime soon. Rejoicing doesn't always happen in tune. God doesn't care, he looks at the heart.

Again, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that we lack real problems from day to day or season to season. There are times when I just don't feel like signing something to the tune of "joy to the world." The Scripture says there is a time for everything, including weeping and laughing, morning and dancing. Sometimes our songs or the occasion don't call for songs of joy.

But when we are rightly invited to sing and shout aloud for joy, how much should it take to stifle us? There might be times when the spiritual song is not your favorite, tune, tempo, style, rhythm, traditional, familiar, contemporary, dynamic, new, or personal style. Do you still have reason to shout aloud? Just imagine how silly it would be for the people in Zechariah's day to be silenced by such trivial preferences. "Oh, great they're going to use the sackbut and shofar today. Berekiah just blasts that shofar too loud, and I don't like it. I prefer the trumpet and cymbals." Or how ridiculous if they complained, "Not another Psalm by the Sons of Korah to the tune of 'Lilies' we sang that last Sabbath!" Or silent in apathy, "I don't feel like singing praise today with the flute and cymbal -I was working late on the harvesting last night."

What stifles our shouting out loud and rejoicing? You may say it is preference of music or style. We could argue that we just don't feel like singing. We could say it is too difficult. We could say it is too easy and beneath us to sing certain songs. But what is really behind any stifling of shouts of joy from God's people?

The real stifling of our shouts of joy come when we get too focused on the prison of sin and what we suffer. We focus on the cause of our pain and imprisonment. We might even be tempted to think the only way to relieve our suffering under the prison of sin is to put on a false display of worship and joy. If that happens, we are in danger of losing the core truth of our faith. We are in danger of missing what our King has done. And our joy is not only diminished but can be forever lost. What cause would we have for any joy and praise if our release from sin's curse depended on us?

Zechariah chapter 9 records the source of joy that causes us to sing and shout aloud. God doesn't say, "You better be happy!" He gives us the reason for our shouts of joy. He says, "Behold!" And he announces the coming of our joy, our King: "Rejoice greatly! Your King comes to you!" Jesus comes to us to bring us peace. That includes peace between us and our God. Peace between each other. This peace is our reason for rejoicing!

Our King comes gentle, humble, and having salvation. All four gospel writers echo the fulfillment of this prophecy for us! Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The style of his coming is significant. He didn't come on a high war horse to conquer. He came on a young donkey! And a borrowed one at that. The crowd and the children there were shouting aloud, "Hosanna!" They shouted praise of joy because he came for them. Jesus was born to come and bring peace.

Jesus marched into Jerusalem for the purpose of marching out of that same city on Good Friday with the weight of our sins on his shoulders. He came righteous without his own sin. His righteousness is given to us. And he came having salvation. We rejoice today for the same reason the children and the crowds honored Jesus. They spoke praises to the God who loved them so much he came to save them by atoning for their sin. Rejoice greatly because of this king!

He also comes humbly still today in his Word to save. Jesus comes to you as you listen to his Word. In his Word we hear how he came and won peace for us by his death and resurrection. He took your place to rescue you from the pits of sin and hell. When we hear in his Word what our king has done. What great reason to rejoice and shout aloud!

Jesus humbly comes to save with his presence as we worship. He promises to be with us always. He makes the special assurance that wherever two or three people gather in his name there he is with them. Jesus is present now. Imagine the most famous person on earth walked into this room. Would that change your mood for the day? Wouldn't you excitedly tell all your friends who you saw at church? The Lord is present with us now, and he promises to always be.

And our King gently and humbly comes to us also in his supper having salvation. God says in Zechariah 9 that he comes to save us "because of the blood of his covenant." This covenant is what Jesus promises is ours. With his body and blood received with the bread and wine, he comes in a special way to his people. His body and blood is given for you for the forgiveness of sins. Rejoice at this! Receive it with joy.

And though this prophecy was first fulfilled as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the greatest coming will be when he casts aside his gently and humble coming for his powerful and glorious return. Jesus will come to us again in glory to restore us! Will we be refusing to sing on that day because we've lost sight of why we sing? I pray we all will remain in faith and be rejoicing greatly on that day when he comes again in glory.

Look at the amazing pictures Zechariah shares that happen as our King comes to us. We were once prisoners of war, but we will be shinning in paradise with Jesus! Our king says he will take away the chariots and the horses. War and fears will cease. The people who saw a flattened temple and powerful enemies would no longer see these things which gave concern. The battle bow would be rendered useless. We will eat and drink and rejoice in our King, Jesus. Because when the king comes to bring peace, nothing in this world can rob us of his peace.

And the result of his coming is that he will rule without end. That is why this message is also a call for you to rejoice. When the king comes to Jerusalem, he will establish a kingdom not just over Jerusalem and Zechariah's countrymen. He will proclaim peace over the nations, over you, over me, "*to the ends of the earth.*" There will be no end to our King's reign. The picture of prosperity and peace at his final coming is what drives us to shout to him today. He frees us from our silent suffering in the prison of sin to shouting and shinning in paradise with him. Zechariah goes so far as to say God's people will shout as if drunk with wine. They will shine like a jewel in God's crown. We will live forever with our living Lord Jesus and shout his praise.

That's a far greater booster than a return from exile. It is a far greater cause for joy than a start to return to normal after a pandemic. It is far more energizing than the temporary boost of a cup of coffee. It is more meaningful than the most emotional tune of music. It is the boisterous shout of those who have been fully satisfied by the Lord's coming as their King. We hear his good news, and we are free. We gather to reflect our shared joy and honor our king who has come to us for peace. That is what the people did as this king first came. That is what we will do when he comes again. That is what we do here and now. Our king comes to reverse our place. In grace he comes to us. And he takes us from suffering in prison to shining in paradise. That is reason to shout his praise now and forever!