

Do we glorify Jesus appropriately?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 January 2018

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Well, when Adrian read from that Old Testament reading from Zechariah, you probably weren't that interested in it until the last bit, were you? Verse 1 of chapter 10, Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime. It is the Lord who sends the thunderstorms. He gives showers of rain to all people.

Really? We could do some of that, couldn't we? This week, after the announcements of the approaching of day zero, when our taps will be turned off and our toilets won't flush and we'll have to dig long drops in our back gardens.

It's all very terrifying. And so, these days we tend to pay attention to verses that say, Ask the Lord for rain and He will give. And this is not the only promise in Scripture like this, where the Lord promises to give rain to His people.

He promises to provide for their needs. And so, we pray and we pray and people organize prayer meetings and still no rain. And so, we ask ourselves, has God failed to keep His promises?

Is the Bible talking rubbish? If day zero arrives, does it mean that promises like these are false and not trustworthy? Well, no.

[1 : 1 7] For the simple reason that we take these verses out of context. People do that all the time with the Bible. They pluck verses out of the context without considering the larger section that these verses are in.

And that's what we've got to do. It takes a bit of work. And we're lazy. So, we like taking verses, sticking them up on our fridge and stuff without looking at their context. It's like, for example, taking a letter from your postbox, ripping it open, choosing some random sentence in the middle of it, not reading anything else, and thinking you know what the letter is talking about.

We wouldn't do that, would we? No, we'd read it from the beginning to the end. And so, if we don't do that with letters, why do it with the Bible? Well, we need to take time to read the context of verses such as the promises for rain, like in Zechariah.

Because when we do, in this case, we realize that this promise in Zechariah is actually part of something much bigger that God was revealing through the prophet Zechariah. If you go home and you read to the end of the prophecy, it turns out that God is promising much more than just a little bit of rain in season.

He's actually talking about a whole new world. He's talking about an age to come where all of God's enemies and the enemies of his people will be defeated and wiped out and everything in this world will start working the way it's meant to.

[2 : 3 9] And it'll be a perfect society with no crime, no suffering. It's something that the Bible refers to throughout the Old Testament and in the New as the kingdom of God.

A kingdom, a creation, but it is once more under its creator's rule rather than our rule because we tend to mess it up as our situation shows.

And a creation that enjoys God's blessing without limit. And where not even death is a threat anymore, as we learned last week.

When Jesus, in raising Lazarus, was actually giving us a foretaste of this kingdom of God to come, where death is no longer a threat. Nothing, we don't have to fear it. Because all of the enemies of God's people are destroyed, including death itself.

And you see, that world, that society that is spoken about throughout Scripture, is what God has always intended for his people. The question is, where is it?

[3 : 41] Why are we still here in this broken world, worrying about digging long drops in our gardens? Why hasn't God's kingdom come yet? Well, we learn why, incidentally, in the book of Zechariah.

Zechariah tells us. Because if you take time to read the whole book, the message of Zechariah is basically this. He's saying, in various ways, he's saying that for this great kingdom to come, that has been promised and promised through the prophets.

By the way, Zechariah wrote when the people came back from their Babylonian exile, and so they were busy rebuilding Jerusalem. And now they were going, well, now surely the kingdom is going to come. And so God sends them Zechariah saying, well, no, not yet, sorry.

And this is why. Because for this kingdom to come, we first need to become the types of people ready to participate in that kingdom. And that's what the book of Zechariah is really all about.

He's sent by God to show God's people Israel at the time that they are not yet ready to participate in the kingdom. They're not yet the type of people ready to be kingdom people.

[4 : 45] And the message of Zechariah to them and to us is about the need for people to change before we can have a world that functions like it's meant to.

And that is quite a useful thing to remember as we suffer a drought, isn't it? How can we expect the world to work like it's meant to if we're not interested in being the people that we're meant to be?

After all, we are part of God's creation. And if this part of God's creation is not functioning properly, how can we expect the rest to function properly? And so God uses droughts and crises in life to wake us up to that fact.

That he may not give us rain. Even if we pray in big stadiums, he may choose not to give us rain. He might. And we should pray for it because he is a merciful God.

And he gives us what we don't deserve. But he may well not. And no matter what happens, whether or not day zero arrives, it is more important for us to learn that this world will stay broken until God's kingdom comes.

[5 : 55] And before that happens, we need to be the types of people ready to participate in that kingdom. So let me ask you, are you? Are you the type of person that's ready to participate in God's promised kingdom?

And if not, how do you become that? It's probably one of the most important questions you can ask in your life. If this kingdom is coming, if God is going to recreate this world and remove the brokenness, then surely each of us must ask, am I ready to be part of that new kingdom?

Am I the type of person who is fit for that new kingdom? So how will you become the type of person fit for God's kingdom? Well, Zechariah goes on to explain that too in the passage that Adrian read.

Because he describes a king that's going to arrive to prepare God's people for the coming kingdom. But what's interesting, I wonder if you noticed, is how this king is going to arrive to his people.

From verse 9, he says, 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.

[7 : 17] Now that's very unexpected. That's not how you expect a king who's going to come and establish a kingdom to arrive. You expect a king who comes righteous and victorious to arrive on a war horse or a chariot, not a donkey.

Like every other king who's ever come to establish his rule, to establish a new kingdom, doesn't ride on a donkey. But this king, you see, this king is humble, lowly, we're told.

This king, in other words, won't force his people into his kingdom. That's what it indicates. He's not a king who's come to establish his kingdom with aggression or violence. Rather, he will come humbly riding on a donkey.

So much so that it's easy to miss that he's a king at all. Well, now we turn to John 12. And what do we find? We find Jesus riding into Jerusalem, Zion, on a donkey.

And that's no coincidence, right? It's a deliberate signal from Jesus that he is who Zechariah was talking about. He is the king who has come to make people ready for God's kingdom, for God's new world.

[8 : 32] The question, of course, remains, how is he going to do that? And that's really the tension that builds up in Scripture. You read in these Old Testament prophets. You read about this king that's coming, this kingdom that God is establishing. Then in the New Testament it's revealed that all of those prophecies are being fulfilled.

And yet, even now here in John we're going, well, how is that going to happen? How is God going to make people ready for his kingdom? How is he going to make you and I ready for his kingdom?

How do you make people ready for God's kingdom? I mean, if that was your job, how would you do it? Would you train them? Would you start courses in teaching them God's law?

Would you help them in their daily disciplines to be more sort of living kingdom lives, pattern their lives, change their lifestyle, some lifestyle advice, life coaches?

How would you make people ready for God's kingdom? Well, it turns out none of that. Because the way Jesus was going to make people fit for the kingdom was to die.

[9 : 34] And we see that in what happens next. Some Greeks come along after Jesus entered Jerusalem, right? And these Greeks, they're non-Jews. They're Greeks. In a way, they represent the world coming to look for Jesus.

And they ask after Jesus. They find some of his disciples. And they want to see him. They're looking for the king. Now, as Jesus came to Jerusalem, many people identified him as this prophesied king from Zechariah.

And these Greeks no doubt have heard that. And they want to see the king. They want to be part of the kingdom. They're probably at Jerusalem for the Passover, investigating Judaism, because they know this is the way to the kingdom.

They want to be part of the kingdom. They've heard the kings arrived. And the kingdom is not just for Jews. The kingdom is for the whole world. The Jews, the Jewish nation was just the means by which God used at a particular time in history to bring Jesus into the world.

And to speak to the whole world through his prophets. But the kingdom is not limited to the Jewish nation. It's for the whole world. But these Greeks then come along looking for the king to be part of the kingdom.

[10 : 43] And look how Jesus responds when he hears about them. From verse 22. Philip went to tell Andrew. And Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Okay, so interesting throughout John's gospel so far, if you've been with us.

Jesus has said over and over again, My hour has not yet come. My hour has not yet come. Remember? Remember? Now, this is the first time in the gospel that something triggers, something changes, and he says, My hour has come.

And the thing that triggers that is the arrival of these Greeks representing the world to come and be part of the kingdom. But they can't yet.

Something needs to happen first. The hour that Jesus has been talking about. The seed must fall to the ground and die first for new life to come.

[11 : 53] And it's a good illustration because a seed, if you've been gardening, if you've sown seeds and, you know, waited for plants to grow, a seed, of course, is what produces the plant.

You put it in the ground and a plant pops up eventually. In that tiny seed are all the nutrients that are needed to give life to this new plant. That's why, you know, seeds are so good as part of your diet.

And why birds eat seeds? Because they've got all these nutrients. Life is just concentrated and packed in the seed. But for that life to come out and create a plant, the seed must effectively be destroyed.

The seed must give itself up. And it's only when the seed dies that this new plant can grow and new life can come. Well, you see how Jesus is using that illustration of the seed?

He's describing himself. He's saying in him, in his body, is this concentrated life. Kingdom life. The life we need to live in eternity.

[12 : 55] The life we need to live in God's kingdom one day. But it's only when he dies that this life is made available to us. Why? Well, we learn in the rest of the New Testament because only the death of Jesus is able to pay for the sins of other people.

For you and me. The sins that keep us from God and the sins that keep us from being able to live in God's kingdom one day. Jesus, through all history, is the uniquely qualified person.

The son of God who is himself sinless and able, therefore, to be a representative for an unlimited amount of people and their sins on himself when he took the suffering for those sins.

That is what the gospel is. That is what Christianity is formed around. It's what the whole Bible talks about. And that is the hour that Jesus was talking about.

The hour when he will die. When he will pay for the sins of others. And new life will come. And so that's why it's only through his death that this kingdom that God has promised can arrive.

[14 : 06] Because if he didn't die, nobody would be fit for the kingdom. And therefore the kingdom wouldn't be empty, essentially. But God has always planned for his people to be part of the kingdom. And so Jesus had to die for the kingdom to happen at all.

And it's that fact which suddenly makes sense of the strange story that we kind of skipped over at the beginning of chapter 12 of John. Which I now turn to because once we've understood the context of what's going on.

And the need for Jesus to die for God's prophesied kingdom to come. Now we start to understand what was happening in this strange dinner that Jesus was at.

And it's in this story that we get to understand how this all applies to us in our lives today. And I want to warn you, things are going to get challenging. When we open it up and we see what it's really saying.

So, Jesus is at a dinner. And incidentally with Lazarus who he's just raised from the dead. Now that must have been weird. Imagine that. Maybe some of the food was even food that was planned for the funeral.

[15 : 11] Imagine eating your own funeral snacks. That would be quite weird. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, is so grateful for what Jesus did that she does something quite unexpected.

And quite controversial. She takes out a very expensive perfume from storage. It's a very expensive perfume. We're told it costs 300 denarii.

And a denarius was a day's wage. So, this bottle of perfume was equivalent to about a year's salary. Now you can work that out when you get home. But even at minimum wage, that is an immensely valuable possession.

That Mary has probably been hoarding and keeping secret and safe for a very special time. And then she takes it out.

And she doesn't just dab a little bit on Jesus. She uses up the whole thing on Jesus to anoint him. And the other gospels as well tell us about this event.

[16 : 16] It's an event that's mentioned through all the gospels. An event that Jesus, in one of the other gospels, said that wherever the gospel is preached, this event must be remembered. Why? Why is this so important?

What's happening here? Well, let's carry on reading. Judas then pipes up, of all people, saying what a waste of money this is. He says this could have been used for the poor.

In other words, it could have been used to line his own pockets. We found out later. The disciples didn't know then that Judas was a traitor and a thief. But it turns out, in hindsight, that he was. And yet, he makes a fair point.

Like anyone who's actually arguing for selfish reasons, they'll use a selfless argument. Kind of a good moral argument to make their point.

And he does that. He says, well, why not use the money for the poor? There are so many poor people in Jerusalem. And during the time of the Passover, they're all flocking there. This is very valuable. Why not use that to help those in need?

[17 : 17] Good question. Look what Jesus answers. Verse 7. Leave her alone. Then he goes on and says, It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.

You will always have the poor among you. But you will not always have me. So what Jesus is saying is that the action of Mary in giving up this perfume is actually an enacted parable of Jesus dying.

She's essentially anointing him for his burial. She is pointing to his death through this act. And she's glorifying that fact about him.

That he's going to die. And therefore it is more important than anything else that she could do with the money. Even helping the poor. Because of what it points to.

And that's the first major lesson we need to take from this story this morning. That recognizing the death of Jesus is more important than helping the poor. Or anything else. And that is the first real lesson that this story teaches us.

[18 : 29] Because the truth is, what the poor need more than money is for the kingdom to come, isn't it? Because the poor are only suffering because the world is broken, because the kingdom hasn't arrived.

But we've seen the kingdom will only come through the death of Jesus. So people coming to put their faith in that death for their sins, that is what the world needs more than anything else.

This world has many needs. And there are many people suffering. There are many people in great want.

And of all the wants though, of all the needs of this world, this world more than anything needs people to put their faith in Jesus so that the new kingdom will come. And that is what you need more than anything else in your life.

You need to be made fit for the coming kingdom. Through putting your faith in Jesus and his death on your behalf. If you haven't done that yet, you need to.

[19 : 34] And you only have this small window of life on this earth to do that. And you don't know when it will end. So don't waste time. Because a new world is coming in deep, deep down inside.

You know that. Even if you're a skeptic to Christianity. Even if you've kind of just come here at an arm's length to hear about this. Deep down inside you know that this is not what the world is meant to be.

That there must be something better than this. Well there is. But it hasn't come here because Jesus first came to make you ready for it. So if you're not, you need to come and put your faith in his death more than anything else in your life.

That is your greatest need. So that you can be fit for the kingdom. It's what you need more than food or money or water even. But it also, this story and its implication also means that us doing evangelism as a church.

Us sharing the message of the death of Jesus and helping people to put their faith in it. People in Plumstead, people in Southfield. Which is what our job is as a church.

[20 : 43] Not just my job by the way. Our job. My job is just to spur you on to do it and to teach you the Bible so that you know what to say. But it's our job to do evangelism.

And of course, everybody fits into that task in a different way with the gifts that God has given them. But that job of us being involved in proclaiming the gospel to Plumstead and Southfield is more important than us alleviating the plight of the poor in Plumstead and Southfield.

According to what Jesus is saying here. Not to say that charity projects are wrong or social action is pointless. These are ways that we love our neighbors. It's ways that we point people to the kingdom to come as we tell them about Jesus.

But if we do those things, all that social action, without proclaiming the death of Jesus for sins, then all of that is pointless at the end of the day. And that's the first lesson of this passage.

That pointing to the death of Jesus and helping people to get that is the most important task in this age. But the second lesson is this.

[21 : 53] The second lesson is what it really looks like to be a follower of Jesus and that it involves sacrifice. And that comes out really through this whole passage this morning.

Jesus comes into Jerusalem as the prophesied king to make people ready for God's kingdom. And that will happen when he dies, when the seed falls into the ground and dies.

But what it requires of them, Jesus goes on to say after he talks about the seed. What it requires of those people is for them in a way to die as well.

Look again at what he says from verse 25. He says, Where I am, my servant will also be.

Where I am, my servant will also be. Where is Jesus? Where is he heading? To sacrifice, to the cross, to die. Where I am, my servant will also be. See, what he's saying is to be part of the kingdom.

[23 : 05] To enter this new life that he's come to prepare us for. We first need to die to our old life. The life in this world.

The life lived only for the priorities of this world. The life lived only to survive and get through the next day. And to establish a comfortable retirement. And to get enough savings that we won't run out of money. That life where all our energies are focused on this world needs to become a non-priority for Christians.

For followers of Christ. That needs to die. Jesus says we must hate it. It's quite stark language. What he means by that is we must put it aside for more important things.

We must make it of no priority. Of little consequence. Now, if you're a Christian and you've been studying the Bible for any length of time.

You'll know that that is what a Christian is called to do. A Christian is called to die to self. We often talk about dying to our old life as Christians. But we never really talk about what that means practically day to day.

[24 : 08] We say, yes, I must turn from my old life. I must die to my old life. I must live the new life in Christ. But what does that look like actually? Tomorrow. The next day.

This week. What does it look like to die to our old life? Well, Mary shows us, doesn't she? Mary shows us what it really looks like to die to the old life in her willingness to sacrifice her most valuable worldly possession for something far more important.

To glorify Jesus. To point to his death. To anticipate the coming kingdom and how we become part of that. To Mary, that is far more important than this hugely expensive possession she owns.

And she doesn't only sacrifice materially. She also sacrifices her reputation. Did you notice that? We're told she wiped Jesus' feet with her hair.

Now, a respectable Jewish woman would not even show her hair in public. You were only allowed to show your hair to your husband if you were a Jewish woman.

[25 : 17] Here's Mary not only showing her hair but wiping Jesus' feet with it. But she didn't care what people thought because Jesus deserved it. And she loved him. Well, I want to ask you this morning, if you call yourself a follower of Jesus.

If you don't, this question is not aimed primarily at you. But if you call yourself a follower of Christ this morning, I want to ask you, does Jesus deserve your material sacrifice?

Does he really deserve it? Does Jesus deserve the sacrifice of your reputation? Are you willing to give up those things for something much greater?

The glory of Christ and the kingdom? Are you willing to risk your reputation to talk about Jesus to your work colleagues? And are you willing to sacrifice your possessions, your money, for the gospel?

Do you use what you have? Because God has given all of us something. Possessions. Some money. Of course, some more than others.

[26 : 20] But whatever you might own. Whatever might be to your name. Do you use your possessions with the same attitude that Mary used her perfume?

To glorify Christ and to point people to the gospel? Is any of your money going towards that? Any of it? Or is all of your money being used for this life on earth?

Ask yourself. It's a sobering question we must look at. How we use our possessions. And if that's the case. If all of your money is just going to this life that is passing away.

Then I must ask you. Can you really call yourself a follower of Jesus? Because a follower is someone who goes to where he is and sacrifices. If you're not even willing to give up some of your money for his kingdom work on earth.

And I'm doubtful you'd be willing to make the greatest sacrifices that he calls his followers to make. And this church. Your church. Needs money to function.

[27 : 21] To do our kingdom work. And we're struggling at the moment. If you're at our most recent vestry meeting. And you look at our accounts. Which are available for anyone to see. You'll see we're struggling.

We have very little savings to grow and to do kingdom work in this community. And the reason is sadly because many of our congregation, our regulars, aren't giving anything.

And the accounts show that. Now I don't like asking for money. Who does? And I don't want to guilt you into giving. God loves a cheerful giver.

Not a reluctant giver. And I'm not saying that you must buy your salvation. No. Not at all. But giving is a response to salvation.

And I'm not saying that giving money is the only way to give. Some people literally have no money. And there are other ways to give. But as your pastor.

[28 : 17] I'm deeply concerned if you are not giving anything. Deeply concerned. And I don't know who gives what by the way. The treasurer keeps that information from me.

I've requested that they do. I don't know who gives what. But I know that some people give nothing. And I'm deeply concerned. As your pastor. As a person responsible for leading you to follow Christ.

It makes me wonder if you are giving nothing. Whether the death of Jesus has really changed you at all. Whether you're really living for Jesus or just for yourself. And so I leave you with two things this morning.

Firstly I leave you with the St. Mark's Guide to Giving. Which you would have received in your notices. If you didn't you can get one from the back. And it's available on our website. This guide will take you through what the Bible says about giving money towards the work of Christ.

Read it please. Prayerfully read it. And consider what it says. But there's something else I want to leave with you this morning. I also want to leave you with the example of Mary.

[29 : 21] Burned into your minds. As you go home and you consider your own pattern of living. And ask yourself what needs to change in light of this morning's passage. Remember Mary.

Remember Mary who out of gratitude to Jesus joyfully gave up what she had. Her most expensive possession to glorify him. Are you willing to do the same with what you have?

Well let's pray for God's help in this. Lord we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the way it rebukes us.

And I speak for myself as much as anyone else. We thank you for the example of Mary. Who was so taken with what you were about to do.

Who was so gracious and grateful for your giving life to her brother. And what it meant that you give life to all who come to you.

[30 : 23] We thank you for that. And we pray Lord that we would have the same response as Mary. As we consider the gospel. That we would be sacrificial. Lord that we would make a priority of pointing people to Jesus.

Of pointing people to the kingdom to come. Help us not to get distracted by the concerns of this life that is passing away. Help us to be kingdom people. Who have our minds set on the kingdom.

Who have our hearts and our wallets set on the kingdom. And people coming to the kingdom. And people knowing about the death of Jesus. Lord please help us as a church. To be effective in taking that message to others. We pray this all in Jesus name. Amen.