

**2023-05-07 ... 6.30pm Evensong Sermon ... Canon William Price**  
**Zechariah 4: 1 – 10; Revelation 21: 1 – 14**

If the first lesson this evening (**Zechariah, chapter 4, verses 1-10**) left you none the wiser, join the club! It seemed to me to be a very odd passage for reading in public, and indeed it's not easy to understand if one reads it slowly at one's desk. The gist was a call to build a new temple in Jerusalem. The Jews had returned to Jerusalem after a long exile, but they were slow to rebuild the temple which had been destroyed. The Governor of Judah at that time was Zerubbabel, and the prophet Zechariah gave the people hope that the temple would be complete in Zerubbabel's time, and so it was. So the message is to be hopeful even when things look bleak.

The second lesson came from the Book of Revelation (**Revelation, chapter 21, verses 1-14**), the last book in the Bible. It is a strange book, full of bizarre visions. Indeed there was for a time doubt as to whether it should be included in the New Testament at all. That reminds us that the New Testament didn't come down from heaven as a complete collection of writings. The New Testament was created by the Church and many writings were not included. I do wonder sometimes if it might have been better to have left the Book of Revelation out of the New Testament because it has provided fertile ground for fanatics in, for example, trying to predict the end of the world. Nonetheless it has some beautiful passages.

The book records visions of a man called John on the island of Patmos off the Turkish coast. It was written at a time when the Christian Church was being persecuted, either in the time of Emperor Nero in the 60s or in the time of Emperor Domitian in the 90s.

The Book of Revelation begins with seven letters to the churches and then there is a wonderful picture of worship in heaven, which has inspired many hymn writers. But then follows a nightmare of disasters inflicted on the world by God, before the final chapters 21 and 22. Our lesson tonight is the beginning of chapter 21, a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. In a new dimension, beyond space and time, John pictures the perfect fellowship of the people of God with the Creator. Suffering, sin, and death are past, and in the heavenly new Jerusalem those who have been faithful to God live for ever in his presence. Note that even the sea is no more – a comfort to Jewish Christians, for the Jews dreaded the sea.

John's prediction of the immediate end of the world has obviously not come true, but he was correct in maintaining that somehow God would rescue his people. After all, in spite of persecution the Christian Church did survive and indeed has long outlived the Roman Empire.

In fact John's world view was that beyond the rise and fall of empires, the afflictions of the righteous, and the chances and changes of fortune – beyond these lies the purpose of God, a good purpose, which will in the end prevail. The war between good and evil is never ceasing, but in the end, says John, the outcome is sure. We live in a planned universe, he maintains, not in a mad chaos, and the plan is the vindication of goodness and the punishment of evil. What Zechariah in the Old Testament and John in the New Testament share is hope, hope for the future, however bad things might look in the present.

In the words of the collect of today in the Book of Common Prayer (today is the fourth Sunday after Easter in the Book of Common Prayer, but the fifth Sunday of Easter in Common Worship) we pray that 'among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found', that is in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

William Price