

RIDING CHRIST'S COATTAILS

Today's Text: Zechariah Chap. 8

Extracts:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord; and seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go also.' Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." Thus says the Lord of hosts, "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you'" [Zech. 8: 20-23]

In 1980, the Democratic Party controlled the United States Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) as well as the Presidency (Jimmy Carter). In the Senate, for example, the opposition Republican Party, faced a 41-59 deficit in the number of seats controlled.¹ Elections were looming in November of that year at a time that the Democrats had a bad brand name as a result of local (economic) and international (political) developments. The Republican candidate for President was Ronald Reagan, a former Hollywood star and Governor of California. Voters liked him and his message of change. In the election that followed, he carried 44 out of the 50 states (a landslide) and the Democrats lost twelve Senate seats, giving the Republicans control of Congress for the first time since 1954!

When a person of a lower level or less celebrity status hangs on to another person to forge ahead, without effort from the hanger-on, the lesser person is said to be riding coattails.² The Republican Party's landslide victory, especially in the Senate races, was attributed to Reagan's coattails.³

We are approaching end-times when Christ will return to judge the world. Some of us may be called home before He comes back. No matter when we die, we shall sooner than later face the judgment of God. Whose coattails would you like to ride as your Day of Judgment approaches? That is the subject of today's study.

¹ Steve Komacki, 'Obama's Coattails and the Senate Majority,' www.observer.com/2008/obama-coattails-and-senate-majority, June 27, 2008

² 'Riding coattails,' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riding_coattails

³ Steve Kornacki, *Op. Cit.*

1. Coattails at a glance

Somehow, most of us are coattails riders. We like to tag on to successful people with the hope that they can lead us to our own success. For example, some of us are rich by virtue of inheritance, even when we are contributing nothing. Some of us do well in business because of family or social or other connections. Some relatively unknown professionals come into limelight each time there is a change of government after elections. They are all riding other people's coattails. But are all coattails positive or beneficial? Let us examine a few situations:

a) *Coattails may not be all positive!*

When you win where you are supposed to lose, it can be attributed to someone else's coattails, *provided* that person is also a winner. This is evident where a weak (opposition) candidate in a constituency dominated by the party currently in power wins on account of the national mood for change. In that case, the weak candidate has ridden the coattails of the winning party and its national leader to victory.

Any time we back winners, we become winners when they win. We call such *positive coattails*. However, we can also lose by backing those who ultimately lose. In this case, we have ridden *negative coattails*.

A good illustration of both situations can be seen in the contest to succeed David as king of Israel. Adonijah, the fourth son of David [2Sam. 3: 4], exalted himself as successor to his father's throne with the support of Joab, David's army commander and Abiathar the priest [1 Kgs 1: 5-7]. His younger half-brother, Solomon, had the backing of Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest and top military rulers [vv. 8]. In the end, David anointed Solomon king in succession to himself, in accordance with what the Lord had said through Prophet Nathan [vv. 11-39]. As soon as Adonijah knew that he had lost, he was afraid and "went and took hold of the horns of the altar" while "all the guests who were with (him). arose and each one went his way" [vv. 49-50]. Those who backed Solomon rode positive coattails to key positions in his administration while those that supported Adonijah rode negative coattails to death or demotion.

That is a clear warning to us to know the horses that we back. The psalmist says, "Blessed is the man who *walks* not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor *stands* in the path of sinners, nor *sits* in the seat of the scornful; but his *delight* is in the law of the Lord.... He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water" [Ps. 1: 1-3]. Many innocent unsuspecting young people have found themselves in gangs, doing drugs or practising sexual promiscuity because they succumbed to peer pressure to follow or imitate bad leaders. Some children have been led astray by following their

parents' wayward lifestyles. There are positive coattails. There are also negative coattails.

b) *Coattails may not always work!*

When you lose where your coattails have won or conversely, when you win where they have lost, then you have not ridden anybody's coattails at all. You have won or lost on your own merit. That is why you may hear some people boast that they are self-made! For example, the rich son of poor parents or the virtuous daughter of a prostitute can make such claims. But the prodigal son of a frugal father cannot make the same claim. The athlete who loses the baton in the last leg of a gold-winning relay race cannot make the same claim.

Human coattails may in deed exist but we cannot ride them for long. they cannot take us to eternity. That is why the Preacher says, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; *but time and chance happen to them all*" [Ecl. 9: 11]. Time and chance come from God who alone can exalt people or put them down [Ps. 75: 6-7]. Therefore, we have no other choice but to seek the only coattails that we can ride to salvation, Christ's coattails. Today's Bible text gives us a good lead to understanding the subject.

2. The Jewish man's coattails

You will recall that Zechariah and Haggai were the two prophets that God used to encourage the Jews, that had been set free after seventy years' exile in Babylon, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In spite of all odds, the people, led by their Governor, Zerubbabel, completed the reconstruction work and made the temple ready once again for worship. Today's text is looking at a future Israel that would be restored. Again, we shall not look at the broader picture – that is left for Bible scholars on prophesy. Instead, we shall pay attention to principles for our day-to-day struggles with salvation questions.

The last verse of Chapter 8 says [Zech. 8: 23]:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you.'"

That is interesting! The Jewish people had been conquered and carried into exile in Babylon for a period of seventy years. Here, we are being told that the time was coming when all other nations would grab the sleeve of a Jewish man and beg to go with him because they had heard that the Lord was with him. The Gentile nations wanted to ride the Jewish man's coattails, so to speak. But the Jewish man

himself was riding the Lord's coattails! The Gentiles came to the Jew because they had heard that the Lord was with him.

Here is what Israel (represented by the Jewish man) was getting for riding the Lord's coattails:

a) *Mount Zion returns as the Holy Mountain*

The Lord promised to return to Mount Zion and “dwell in the midst of Jerusalem” that would be called “the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts (and) the Holy Mountain” [v. 3]. To appreciate the significance of the Lord's return, recall what Jeremiah said while he lamented over the desolate city when the children of Israel were carried into exile seventy years earlier, “The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning; the crown has fallen from our head. . . because of Mount Zion which is desolate, with foxes walking about on it” [Lam. 5: 15-18]. In deed, the name of the Lord is a tower to which the righteous can run and be safe [Prov. 18: 10].. The Gentile nations would desire to ride the Jewish man's coattails to Jerusalem because the Lord had returned to Mount Zion!

b) *Material prosperity would also return*

Jerusalem would again be full of boys and girls “playing in the streets” with old men and women sitting and watching over them with delight “each one with his staff in his hand” [Zech. 8: 4-5]. Whereas before the restoration of the temple, there was an economic recession, in that “there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast,” and the people were harassed by their enemies, the Lord would restore their economic prosperity; He would save them and they would be a blessing [vv. 9-13]. Would you not want to live in such a place, given the current economic hardships you may be experiencing right now? Does that not suggest that there is a clear and direct relationship between human sin and economic hardship?

c) *They become God's people*

God would regard dwellers of Jerusalem as His people and He would be their God “in truth and righteousness” [v. 8]. God told the prophet Zechariah that just as He had determined to punish the children of Israel when their fathers provoked Him to wrath, He had “determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah” [vv. 14-15].

What did it entail for them to be God's people? They would no longer have anything to fear, *provided* that they spoke “each man the truth to his neighbour,” and gave judgments in their gates “for truth, justice, and peace.” In addition, none of them should think evil in their hearts

against their neighbours. They should avoid whatever God hates, such as loving a false oath [vv. 16-17]. Rituals, such as fasting, “shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts and occasions for the house of Judah to demonstrate “love truth and peace” [vv. 18-19].

It is not enough to repent our sinful past. We need to turn a new leaf to a life of holy conduct and transparency before God and man. It amounts to self-deceit to think that we can hide our sins from God or others. Sooner than later, our sins will bring us out and we could be disgraced. Once we become God’s people, let us remain God’s people so that He can remain our God.

d) *Jerusalem becomes the world’s city of refuge!*

God told the prophet Zechariah, “Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities, ... saying, ‘Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts.’.... Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord” [vv. 20-22]. People “from every language of the nations” would grasp the Jewish man so as to ride the Lord’s coattails to the end-time city of refuge [v. 23].

You may be the only Bible that people around you may ever read. They are watching what you say and do. They are looking at the fruits of your relationship with God. Do they see the carnal mind at work, characterized by adultery, fornication or homosexuality, idolatry, sorcery or heresies, envy, murders (especially by mouth) or drunkenness [Gal. 5: 19-21]? Or, do you exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit, manifested as “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (and) self-control [vv. 22-23]? If you have a carnal mind, you cannot ride the Jewish man’s coattails to the New Jerusalem [Rev. 21: 7-8].

3. Conclusion: Ride Christ’s coattails to salvation!

The world’s three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all believe in the hereafter. They believe that that hereafter has two parts, heaven and hell. They believe that good people go to heaven while bad people go to hell. Their main difference lies in the definition of ‘good’ or ‘bad.’

With the exception of Christianity, all other religions believe in human effort . Therefore, ‘good’ performance is measured by rituals and works. Unfortunately, that may breed mere mechanical compliance, that is, doing things to please those watching us; paying more attention to the outside rather than the state of the heart. However. God does not see as man sees. Man looks at outward appearance. God

sees the heart [1 Sam. 16:7] . God is Spirit and we must worship Him in spirit and in truth [Jn 4: 24].

Therefore, we cannot make heaven or salvation by human effort but only by God's grace which is a free gift [Eph. 2:8] . The apostle John has summarized it well when he wrote, "The law was given through Moses, but *grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*. No one has seen God at any time. *The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him*" [Jn 1: 17-18]. Only a person who has come to earth from heaven can show us the way there [Jn 3: 13]. Any other attempt is like rebuilding the Tower of Babel!

In today's study, people from every language of the nations of the world grasped the sleeve of the Jewish man because God was with him. Jesus Christ was a Jew. He is Immanuel ('God with us') [Matt. 1: 23]. Therefore, they were looking for Jesus when they grasped that Jewish man's sleeve!

Jesus is the *only way* to the Father [Jn 14: 6]. He has already taken away your sins by dying in your place on the cross. So, you only need to ride His coattails to salvation by:

- Confessing your sins right now
- Accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour
- Remaining in good standing with God by living a holy Christian life by Christ Jesus..

I wish you a happy and successful ride!