

Advertising God!

Zechariah 9⁹⁻¹²; Psalm 145⁸⁻¹⁵; Romans 7^{15-25a}; Matthew 11^{16-19,25-end}

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11³⁰)

If you were going to design an advert for God, what would it say; what would the USP be; what would you be getting people to do in response to God?

The Psalmist certainly seems to be having a go at the task:

- ✦ The writer obviously feels very good about God and sets out to use a series of words, all of which are positive: **gracious; merciful; long-suffering; loving; praiseworthy; powerful; sure; faithful; upholds; and lifts up.**
- ✦ This is the sort of God you would imagine being able to believe in - the Psalmist goes on to say: **The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.**

Zechariah, in the verses before our reading begins, has predicted the military campaigns of Alexander the Great accurately tracking the course he would take across the Middle East. Now he focuses his prophecy on the coming Messiah, a new King.

- ✦ The character of this kingly messiah is then outlined - **triumphant, victorious and humble.**
- ✦ The effectiveness of this kingly messiah is then stated - he will destroy the weapons that Alexander the Great found so effective: the **chariot**, the **war horse** and the **bow**. Then **he shall command peace to the nations.**
- ✦ The humans who have been the collateral of war become **prisoners of hope** and can trust God for their freedom and for the restoration of their previous dignity - **I will restore to you double.**

Another good contribution to preparing an advert for God!

Paul, as you might imagine, takes a different tack. Instead of talking about the greatness of God he focusses on the human need for God.

- ✦ He tells us that we are slaves to sin - **I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate** - so that just as a slave is compelled to do things they would not choose to do, so we are compelled by sin to do things we wouldn't want to choose.
- ✦ It is a mistake to think about battling individual sins - the things that we are aware of that we do - the problem is **sin**: sin separates us from God and the sins we do are only symptoms of the root cause.
- ✦ The **law** succeeds only in pointing out the wrong that we do and so it is limited. Paul hints at the way out - **Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

In any advert our USP is that God can change the things we can't!

Jesus then sounds very modern as he challenges the consumerist approach to religion:

- ✦ The people had been **comparing** John the Baptist with Jesus as if faith and who you follow is a personal choice.
- ✦ The fact is that because we don't have the resources to make that choice for ourselves Jesus says of his Father, **you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants.** Faith is always simple and child-like.
- ✦ Those who come to faith aren't making a choice but respond to an invitation: **Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.** We don't become independent - we change the heavy burden and then fall in with Jesus **for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**

The most effective advert for God is simply Christians living as forgiven people as disciples 'under the yoke of Christ'!