

The Humble King

March 24th, 2013

Zechariah 9:9-10 (Palm Sunday)

"⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

Over the past few weeks I have been corresponding with a girl from high school about the Christian faith, and her basic conviction about Jesus is that He "was probably closer to a prophet and was really trying to get Judaism back to its roots." But she struggles to believe that Jesus is God, or the Son of God. In other words, she has the same conviction that is very prevalent in our society: that Jesus was a good teacher who had a great deal of wisdom to impart about what it means to love, but let's leave this claim to divinity aside.

Now Jesus does something on Palm Sunday that reveals how unlikely this sentiment is. From the passage Jeff read (Matthew 21:1-11), and the other accounts of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, it is clear that Jesus is consciously, deliberately orchestrating this event. What is with this donkey? Jesus had never done such a thing before. And it's not as though His disciples just happen to bring one to Him, and He decides to get on and ride into Jerusalem. No, He's sending them to fetch a donkey, giving them particular instructions. He clearly has a purpose in mind in coming into Jerusalem this way.

And Matthew tells us the purpose: "⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying..." and he quotes from the words of Zechariah 9, which I just read. In orchestrating this event as He did, Jesus is very consciously declaring Himself to be the fulfillment of Zechariah 9, the promise of a coming King who would rule from sea to sea. So He's saying very clearly that He is *not* just a good teacher, a

religious reformer. He's proclaiming, "I am the King, who has come to rule and reign over all."

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, knowing that the events of what we call Holy Week were upon Him, Zechariah 9 was on His mind. As we prepare to celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday this week, this is what Jesus wants us to know about Him. So let's give it some consideration this morning.

Jesus is King

First, let's consider the basic (but wonderful) truth, that Jesus is King. That's what Palm Sunday is all about: in riding into Jerusalem, in fulfillment of God's word through Zechariah, Jesus is declaring His Kingship. "9Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, **your king is coming to you...**" He's a King of righteousness ("righteous, and having salvation is He"), and as King, He is coming to bring peace. "10I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

All weapons of war will be destroyed, because there no longer be any need for them. His rule of peace and righteousness will stretch from sea to sea, that is, encompassing the entirety of creation. The word for peace is, as I often point out, the word *shalom*, the way things ought to be: human crookedness being straightened out, the deserts flowering and the end of all weeping, people being able to go to sleep without weapons on their lap, lambs laying down with lions, and all humans looking to God, walking with God, leaning towards God and delighting in God. Universal flourishing, wholeness and delight.

I'm not sure if you ever get tired of hearing me talk about *shalom*, but I never grow weary of telling you, because my heart so aches for it! The whole creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth, waiting for its

liberation from bondage to corruption, and we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for that redemption. What we long for is *shalom*, the universal reign of Jesus described in 9:10. That's why my high-school friend is longing for too, though she doesn't know it.

Jesus' Kingship Comes in Stages

Now that brings up a question: where then is this wonderful reign of peace? As I've talked to this girl from high school, her biggest barrier to faith seems to be that this world is broken and full of injustice and pain and corruption. You say Jesus is King, and Jesus brings peace, that justice will reign and sorrows will cease. So where is it?

This struggle helps us to reckon with something very important about the kingship of Jesus: that a day is coming in which the Kingship of Jesus will look very different from what it does right now. Jesus is indeed King right now, today, but we are currently in a season of Jesus' Kingship that will one day give way to another triumphal entry:

"¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse (not a donkey)! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness (cf. Zech. 9:9) he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood (not His own, but that of His enemies), and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

This is what the Kingship of Jesus will one day look like! That is the final and eternal way in which He will bring peace: by obliterating all rebel powers under His righteous rule. Every knee will bow, and every

tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Many will bow joyfully as citizens of His Kingdom. And many will bow in terror and glorify Him unwittingly in their damnation, screaming that boulders would fall on them rather than bear the wrath and indignation of the King of kings. And on that day, when the Kingship of Jesus appears in the skies like that, it will be too late to switch sides.

Palm Sunday: Jesus is a *Meek and Lowly King*

We need to grasp this future declaration of Jesus' Kingship so that we'll treasure the season of His Kingship that we are in right now, the season of His Kingship that is specifically being declared as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday declares that Jesus is King, and as King He will one day strike down every hint of rebellion and treachery that defiles His creation. But in orchestrating His Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem this way (in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9), what He wants us to hear and see is that today His Kingship is meek, lowly, patient, welcoming, forgiving. As King He has come to provide amnesty to all treasonous rebels to His throne.

That much is conveyed in the words of Zechariah 9:9, "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Now this is not the way you expect a King to travel. It's as though, in riding into Jerusalem on this donkey, He is saying, "I am King, but I am a meek, gentle, lowly, humble King. I am not (in this coming) on a white war-horse with a sword and a rod of iron." He is not coming to slay us, but to save us. He is not coming to bring judgment on His enemies, but to bear judgment in the place of His enemies.

This is the only way that Jesus can come the second time to end all evil, without ending you and me. By nature, we have made ourselves enemies of His royal throne. We have all been guilty of cosmic treason. Every sin you have ever committed -- even the most

seemingly tiny act of disobedience -- is a vote of "No confidence" to God's rule over you, an attempt to overthrow Him as Lord of all, a declaration of independence from Him, a choice for self-rule over humble submission to His rule. That's the essence of sin.

So we have all justly merited to face Jesus' Kingship as it will be manifested on that coming day. We deserve to be trodden under the winepress of the fury of His almighty wrath. But when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, "humble, and mounted on a donkey", He is coming to rule, not by taking power and killing, but by losing power and dying. It is not a time of judgment, but a time of salvation.

This is what we remember on Friday: that only a few days after this triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, beaten, mocked, flogged and crucified, shedding His blood to save all who would receive His free gift of amnesty. That word comes from two Greek words, "not remembering". It is what the New Covenant, purchased by the shed blood of Jesus, accomplishes for all of His people: "¹²For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins (treason) no more." And next Sunday, that in rising, we have proof that His payment has been accepted.

Two Responses: Repent, and Rejoice

In light of the majestic, merciful rule of King Jesus, there are two fitting responses for those who are gathered here today. For those who have not yet bowed the knee to King Jesus, the fitting response to Him today is that you repent. In a gathering size, surely there must be some here who have never surrendered to King Jesus. You don't love the thought that your life, and all of creation, exists to make God look glorious. You hate it. You live for you. Something, or someone, is still reigning over your life. King in your life is money, food, success, looks, family, career, health, or fame. But as different as all those things may appear, underneath them all is still the same king: *you*.

But you can change that today by repenting; that is, to hear Jesus say to you, "I am your King, I am humble and mounted on a donkey for you, on my way to shed My blood so that your sins might be forgiven and your treason be forgotten, confess your rebellion and come to me, and I will rescue you and declare you righteous and make you a citizen of my Kingdom, and you'll live forever with ever-increasing joy." And you turn from being ruled by you, and you say, "Yes, Jesus, I believe you are my King, and my Savior. I don't want to live my life for me anymore, but I want to live my life for you."

There is a day coming when Jesus will return as King, not on a donkey, but on a white warhorse. His arms will not be outstretched in mercy and tenderness, and the blood on His hands will not be His own blood, but it will be the blood of His enemies. It will be the end of the day of salvation. But today, right now, there is time. The offer of mercy still stands; we don't know for how long. Don't risk meeting King Jesus on the white horse, having rejected Him on a donkey.

But for those of you who have embraced Jesus as King, the fitting response to Him on Palm Sunday is to rejoice: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!" This is not mild encouragement. This is wild, jubilant, ecstatic, passionate delight! This is King Jesus' goal for you. He is not a gloomy, downcast, King. He aims, in everything, at your fullest and forever joy.

There is a lot of pain, heartache and tribulation for the children of Zion. We're not home yet. But is there not cause for celebration for each and every one of you who has embraced Jesus' terms of peace and received amnesty for our treason? Once we were enemies of God because of our sin and rebellion, deserving His wrath. Because He came humbly the first time, we need not fear His entry on a warhorse the second time. May the circumstances of His sinless life, substitutionary death and victorious resurrection season your sorrows today. Our King made

Himself a servant and suffered hell in our place, so that we could joyfully share in His rule and reign forever, from sea to sea. Rejoice!