



BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU

Zechariah 9:9-17; John 12:12-19

David Sunday

March 20, 2016



We thank You, Father, for Your great plan of redemption. We thank You, Jesus, for Your willingness to come humbly, uniting Your eternal deity to our frail manhood. You walked those dusty streets, up the Hill of the Skull to the cross, where You were nailed to that tree, that plank of wood. Through Your shed blood You shielded us forever from the wrath of God and opened the temple veil, torn from top to bottom, so we could have access into the presence of a holy God.

We thank You that as Your Word is opened now we are hearing the voice of the living God. We pray that You would give us ears to hear, hearts to receive, wills transformed so we might obey and live in the light of what You reveal to us. We ask this in Your name and for Your glory, Lord Jesus. Amen.

We'll be reading today from Zechariah 9. Jesus went to great pains, as recorded in John 12, to demonstrate that this very text from Zechariah was being fulfilled in Him as He prepared to enter Jerusalem in that final week of His life on earth. John told us, "*And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written*" (John 12:14).

So turning to Zechariah 9:9-17, we read the holy Word of God—where it was written in the 5th century B.C. about the Savior and the work He would come to do centuries later:

⁹ Rejoice 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. ¹⁰ I 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. ¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. ¹³ For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your

sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.

¹⁴ Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. ¹⁵ The Lord of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.

¹⁶ On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.

¹⁷ For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.”

God's Word, through the prophet Zechariah, came to God's people after they had been in exile in Babylon. They were now returning slowly to Jerusalem—just a slow trickle of people—and as they came back, they found a new culture in place there, a new neighborhood, so to speak. The people who had remained in Jerusalem were not hospitable to the returning exiles and did not support the work of rebuilding the temple that God's people were coming back to do. It was so discouraging that the work stalled for about 18 years. So God sent prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to His people, to encourage them and stir them up to continue their work with hope, even though they seemed to be facing much opposition and were themselves a small flock.

In this passage God calls His people—the “daughters of Zion” and the “daughters of Jerusalem”—to rejoice greatly in Him. And God is calling you and me to rejoice greatly in Him for the same reason He called the children of Zion in Jerusalem through the prophet Zechariah to rejoice. Don't suppose this prophecy has only limited application to the people in Zechariah's day or to the Jewish people. We who are Gentiles can be encouraged as we read Paul telling us that Jerusalem above is our mother if we believe in Christ (Galatians 4:26).

So if we believe in Christ, we too are daughters of Zion and daughters of Jerusalem. In no way are we different from the Jewish people, but in Christ we are united as one body. Zechariah himself makes it clear that what he is speaking is not meant to be limited in its application merely to the Jewish people. Verse ten clearly tells us this is for all the nations. All the nations will come under the sovereign sway of this King Who will enter into Jerusalem. All the nations should rejoice.

So this is for us! It's a call to rejoice greatly at the coming of our King. As God's people, we are always to be rejoicing. Paul says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice*” (Philippians 4:4). Joy is supposed to be an undercurrent throughout our whole life. There should never be a time when we're not rejoicing—but there are times when that undercurrent

erupts and you can't hold it back! You have to rejoice greatly and shout aloud. And Easter Sunday should be one of those times. As we're captivated by the message of Zechariah, the effect on our lives should be a joy that cannot be muffled or restrained—a joy that is great in its intensity.

Why should our joy be so great? Zechariah gives us two reasons in this passage.

Rejoice Greatly Because Your King is Coming to You (Zechariah 9:9)

Jesus is the kind of King Who makes people happy, Who makes children glad, because—as verse nine tells us—He is righteous. “*Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous....*” That word “righteous” speaks not only of His moral purity and perfect character, but also of His ability to make right that which has been wronged. It speaks of God's heart of compassion for all who are oppressed, downtrodden, marginalized, poor and overlooked by the world's rulers. Here is a King Who comes to set wrongs right. Here is a King Who cares for the poor, Who isn't about building Himself up, but Who acts on behalf of the needy. So we rejoice in His righteousness.

We also rejoice because He is a King Who has salvation, as is mentioned in verse nine as well: “*...righteous and having salvation is he.*” That phrase —“having salvation”—is difficult to translate into English. Some translators hesitate to say it exactly the way it reads in Hebrew, in the passive voice, as it literally means “to be saved or vindicated.” The word is used in the same form in two other places in the Old Testament. One is Psalm 33:16, “*The king is not saved by his great army.*” It's God Who will deliver him. The other is in Deuteronomy 33:29, where we read, “*O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord.*”

But in this context, it seems strange to speak of this King Who is coming, Who is righteous. He is a King Who *is saved* by the Lord. He's the One Who's bringing salvation. But this is Zechariah's point: Here is a King coming into Jerusalem Who is going to get Himself into a predicament, an ordeal, from which He will need to experience salvation—the vindication of His God. And isn't that exactly what Jesus encountered as He came into Jerusalem? The crowd shouted, “Hosanna! Save us, O Lord,” but then on Friday, another crowd shouted, “Crucify Him!” He hung on the cross to save us from our sins, but He Himself needed to experience God's salvation as He died and was buried in the tomb.

That's exactly what God did for Him. God vindicated Him, raising Him from the dead. And because our King was saved by God through His death and raised from the dead, He is now a King Who is mighty to save all who put their trust in Him—all who find refuge in Him. So we rejoice that our King is coming, that He's a righteous King, and that He's a saved King Who brings salvation through His death and resurrection.

Thirdly, He's a humble King. We see this in verse nine as well. There are very few things Jesus tells us about His inner life, about His inner character. So when He says to us, "This is what My heart is like," He wants us to pay attention. He does this in Matthew 11:28-29. "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.*" Why? Because "*I am gentle and lowly in heart.*"

"This is what My heart is like," Jesus is saying. "I'm a humble King. You can approach Me. I will not crush you. You do not need to be afraid to get close to Me. I am humble. I am accessible. I'm approachable." He demonstrates His humility by riding "*a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,*" as we see in Zechariah 9:9.

I read a chapter in a little book by Carl Laferton, imagining some animals having a public relations department. He said lions obviously have a great PR department because they're the "king of beasts." Everyone respects lions. Then there are reindeer. They've got the corner on the Christmas market. They're very respectable animals. What about bears? They're ferocious, but why is it that bears have gotten marketed so well that we put them in cute cuddly packages and give them to our little kids to comfort them. How did teddy bears come about? Bears really have a great PR campaign going for them.

But on the other end of the spectrum, there are cockroaches. Cockroaches actually have some redeeming qualities. They are so quick to reproduce, so resilient; they can even survive a nuclear holocaust. But no one gives their kid a little plastic cockroach for a gift.

Then somewhere between lions and cockroaches we have the donkey—this kind of dull, nondescript, not very spectacular, plodding beast. Not the most impressive animal.

And here's our King riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Actually, kings in Israel did ride donkeys. In the time of the judges, they road on donkeys. David rode on a donkey. Solomon rode on a donkey. So Jesus is showing us something about His regal quality, His royalty. He's coming into Jerusalem on a donkey. But kings never rode donkeys when they were going out to war or when they were coming back from war. That required a stallion, a great horse, a victor kind of animal. Not a donkey.

The donkey is a beast of burden. It's a useful work animal. Jesus comes into Jerusalem on a beast of burden because He's coming to bear our burdens. He's coming not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom. He's coming to work for our salvation. He's coming in humility. I love how Martin Luther reflects on this:

We see that Christ comes not to terrify, to drive and oppress, but to help and to take for himself our heavy load. He comes. You do not seek Him; He seeks you. You do not find Him; He finds you. [His] preachers come from Him, not from you, and their preaching comes

from Him and not from you. Your faith comes, not from you, but from Him.

He comes to us—righteous, saved and having salvation. He comes humble, mounted on a donkey. Zechariah says to a people who are very discouraged, “This should flood your heart with joy—the King is coming!” Rejoice in that truth.

Rejoice Greatly Because of What Your King is Coming to Do (Zechariah 9:11-17)

The second reason Zechariah calls the people to rejoice is because of what their king is coming to do. It’s all through the blood of His covenant, as we see in verse 11: “*As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you...*” I think that phrase modifies what’s said in verses ten and following. None of this would be possible if it were not for the blood of the covenant. We read in Colossians 1:20 that Jesus made “*peace by the blood of his cross.*”

That’s the first thing we see Jesus coming to do in Zechariah 9:10. He’s coming to cut off chariots, war horses and battle bows, “*and he shall speak peace to the nations.*” It was always God’s will that His people would not rely on their weapons and their chariots to get victory, but that they would trust in God to fight their battles for them. As it says in Deuteronomy 20:3-4, “*Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.*”

We see that when the King comes, He’s going to give that victory to His people—not through the chariots of Ephraim or the war horses of Jerusalem. It would be through the people’s trust in Him that they would gain the victory. And His victory will bring peace to all the nations, and He will rule from sea to shining sea. This is not the Atlantic to the Pacific; this is worldwide dominion that Zechariah is talking about here. From the River Euphrates to the ends of the earth, He will rule over all the nations. His glory will cover all the earth as the waters cover the sea and it will be a reign of peace.

We also see He comes to set prisoners free. I just love the end of verse 11: “*I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*” There were two great servants of God in the Old Testament who were thrown into waterless pits. Do you remember who they were? Joseph was the first, thrown in there by his brothers who wanted him dead and they left him to die. The second was the prophet Jeremiah. What a cost Jeremiah paid to proclaim God’s Word to the people!

I was reading through Jeremiah this past week and came to Jeremiah 38. Zedekiah was the king. People were really tired of what Jeremiah was speaking to them, so some officials went

to Zedekiah and said, “We’ve got to get rid of Jeremiah.” Zedekiah said, “Do to him whatever you please”—just like Pilate said about Jesus. Just let what Jeremiah went through get into your imagination. Verse 36, *“So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king’s son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.”*

Dark. Narrow. Confined. Deep. No water. No food. Just mud, day after day, sinking deeper and deeper. Finally it took four men to come with rags to get him out. An emaciated Jeremiah had to hold on to those rags, because his skin was too sore to just be pulled out.

God says, “Through the coming of the King, that’s what I want to do for you.” Some of us are living in waterless pits. Life without the gospel is a waterless pit. Religion without the gospel is a waterless pit. Without grace, religion just runs you dry. You lose all appetite and go thirsty. Jesus says, “Come to Me and drink, and out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water. I’ve come to set you free from waterless pits.” And when that happens, we say, in the words of Psalm 40:1-3:

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.*

That’s what our King Jesus comes to do, and He comes to restore us—double! Look at Zechariah 9:12: *“Return to your stronghold,”* that’s Jerusalem, *“O prisoners of hope.”* You were prisoners in the waterless pit—now you’re going to become prisoners of hope, because you realize God’s purposes are going to be fulfilled in and through you. A King is coming Who’s going to do all these things. So hope now rules your life. Hope holds you in its gracious bondage. You’re in bondage now to hope. *“Today,”* God says, *“I declare that I will restore to you double.”* In other words, “Whatever sin has cost, I’m going to pay you back double for all your sins. I’m going to lavish you with grace.” He comes to restore us.

Verses 13-15 talk about God fighting for us and through us. Using Judah as His bow, Ephraim as His arrow, He’s going to work in and through His people in a warfare that will be intense. There will be blood. There will be enemies slain. But it’s going to result in a victory that’s joyous and glorious, as the Lord appears over His people like He did in the Exodus. *“His arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet...”* (verse 14). He’s

going to give His people the victory, but we're going to be engaged in a warfare that will be fierce and intense.

Then finally, verse 16, we're going to experience His wondrous care over our lives. He will save us. We will be His flock. We will be like jewels in His crown. We will shine on His land, and we will say, like Zechariah, "*How great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!*" as He lavishes us with all the good things of His new creation: grain, new wine. We will flourish. This is just a wonderful prophetic picture of what our King comes to do. Zechariah says when this captures your imagination, you will shout for joy. You will rejoice greatly.

How to Rejoice Greatly

So how do we work this into our lives? How do we massage this into our minds and let it capture our imagination? I have just two words of application for us.

Number one, a passage like this is calling each and every one of us to experience the good of the King's mission. He came to bring you peace with God. He came to set you free from the fear of guilt and shame. He came to erase the condemnation of your sins, "shielding sinners from God's wrath," as the song says.

This is what Jesus came to do and He's still doing that. One day He's going to come back on a great white horse—a mighty Warrior Who will destroy all His enemies (Revelation 19). But He is still a humble King today, full of mercy to save all who will come to Him. Even as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) on that first night of His triumphal entry (Luke 19:28-40), there are still tears in His eyes today for sinners. He's pleading with us to come to peace with God; to know the freedom of having your sins forgiven and your conscience cleansed. He wants you to experience what He came into the world to do.

We're going to be coming to the Lord's Table today as God's people, and if you're not experiencing that peace, if you're not trusting in Jesus to be your Savior, you shouldn't take the bread and cup today—because the bread and cup are symbols of the reality of what Jesus came to do. But instead you can bow right where you are and say, "Lord Jesus, my conscience is guilty and I'm not at peace with God. I know I'm a sinner. I need You to save me. I thank You that You died on the cross to wash me from my sins and to give me peace with God." He will do that. He will save you.

It might mean that some of you are in a waterless pit right now, not even sure how you got down there. But through your sin and self-absorption, you are not feeling nourishment from the Word. You're not finding joy in the gospel. Maybe you've just gotten so busy with pursuing all the things of this life that you've lost sight of the joy Zechariah is talking about. Maybe you have

been in a battle so long you've lost sight of the Spirit of God Who gives peace. Life's just like a waterless pit for you.

Jesus came to set you free and He wants you right now to experience His mission. How do you do that? You do what the crowd did on Palm Sunday. You cry, "Hosanna!" Hosanna is a combination of two words: *yasha*, which means deliver or save, and *na*, which means, "I beg you. I beseech you." When we say to the Lord, "Hosanna," we're saying, "I beg You to save me, Lord. I beseech You. I need You to lift me out of this waterless pit. I need You to set me free. I need You to make me a prisoner of hope, not of despair. Hosanna! Save me, Lord!"

When we say "Hosanna" today, we're not looking far off in the future at a God Who will come and save. We're looking at a God Who did come and save, a God Who is mighty to save, a God Who is present in our lives, ready to save all who come to God through Him. That's how we experience the good of His mission.

The second thing we do with this passage is we imitate the grace of the King's manner. We see the King has a mission, and we see the King has a particular manner about Him. What is the manner of the King? Humility and meekness. It's astounding to read all this warfare and victory language in this passage and realize it's coming from a King Who approaches us with humility—on a donkey. He's a King Who becomes vulnerable, dies on a cross and needs to experience God's rescue and vindication. But God gets His work done through humility and suffering.

There's an old hymn that says, "Not with sword's loud clashing, nor with clanging drums, but with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes" (Lead on, O King Eternal by Ernest W. Shurtleff, 1888). It's through a countercultural way—not the way of the world—that the Kingdom of God comes. Back at the end of the first century A.D. a man named Clement of Rome said it beautifully:

The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Scepter of God's Majesty, was in no pomp of pride and haughtiness—as it could so well have been—but in self-abasement... You see, dear friends, what an example we have been given. If the Lord humbled Himself in this way, what ought we to do who through Him have come under the yoke of His grace?

Oh, how we ought to humble ourselves when we behold the manner of our King. That means dying to my own rights, choking that sense of entitlement that can rise up in me. That means saying no to self-assertion: "I've got to get my point across! I've got to get my way here!" Instead, it means being willing to embrace the way of the cross, relinquishing my agenda and

desires in order to surrender to the will of the Father. That's the manner by which God's people advance Christ's Kingdom. Bryan Gregory describes it like this:

It is humility that will conquer the world for Christ. It is gentleness that will overcome the forces of evil. It is meekness that will triumph over the powers, authorities and principalities of this dark world. It is even weakness that will emerge as the possessor of true strength.

In the end, our King is going to come. He's not going to be on a donkey; He's going to be on a great white horse. He's going to be victorious and His reign is going to extend over all the earth. All the nations will fall under His rule and He will get the glory due His name. As we wait for the glorious coming of our King, He wants us to rejoice greatly in all that He is for us and all that He will do for us.

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