

“Your King Is Coming!”

Zechariah 9:9-10

Palm Sunday

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Introduction

Palm Sunday is a time of joyful celebration! We remember Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, the wall-to-wall crowds lining the roadway shouting, singing, welcoming Him, proclaiming Him their King. We remember and celebrate.

This day also begins what is often called *Holy Week*, moving toward and through Good Friday, then culminating with Easter’s grand celebration. As we think and walk through the week there is that nagging realization and feeling that all was not as it should have been on that first Palm Sunday.

Then, we can and should ask,

- “What difference does it make to us?”
- “What difference should the events and message of Palm Sunday make to how we think, worship and live?”
- “Is it for us, perhaps, just a *nice celebration*?”

To gain perspective and answer some of these questions, look with me at three views of Palm Sunday. First, the view in the prophet Zechariah’s day, 500 years before Christ came. Then the view in Jesus’ day, on that first Palm Sunday. Finally, the view in our day.

The View Of Palm Sunday In Zechariah’s Day.

Let’s begin with a brief historical clip so we can understand something of the people in that time. The city of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. The people were taken captive to Babylon. God told them they would be captives there for seventy years.

In 546 B.C. Cyrus, the king of Media and Persia, conquered Babylon. In 537 he allowed some of the Jews to go back to start rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. The work started, sputtered, and stalled. God used the prophets Haggai and Zachariah and others to challenge and encourage the people. Some of that process is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Then, in 516 B.C., the temple was completed and dedicated, exactly seventy years after it had been destroyed.

Zechariah played a critical role in the temple’s completion. To understand the scope and fullness of our text and the whole book, we need to see its time and circumstances. The first eight chapters are precisely dated, with the three sections having been written in 520, 519 and 518 B.C. Chapters 9-14 are not precisely dated. Zechariah most likely wrote them a few years later.

The central purpose of the book was to urge the people to complete the temple and to teach them some things about the future, specifically, the times of the Messiah. Yes, their world was shaky and scary with others still dominating them, but it will not always be so. Why not? Because the Messiah *is* coming!

The verses preceding our text describe God bringing judgment and destruction to His and His people's enemies, beginning north of Israel until He comes to Jerusalem where He "will camp around [His] house" (8). God camping around His house, with the reality of His presence, glory, protection and rule is what leads to the shout of joy in verse 9 in our text:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Let's unpack this statement a bit as we try to understand God's message to those people living 500 years before Christ. God told them to rejoice greatly and shout in triumph because their king, the Messiah *is* coming! These *pioneers*, trying to fend off enemies, rebuild Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, build homes, business and farms, had been distracted and discouraged.

Zechariah brings God's message of hope — certain hope based on God's certain word that the Messiah will come. "So, people," Zechariah would say, "Get your priorities straight! Step out in faith! Be God's people in this place! Fulfill your mission... *because... Your King is coming!*" "He is just and endowed with salvation." "Yes, the Messiah, God's Servant, your king, will be all the earlier prophets have said, and all for which you dream and hope."

Then there is that last part, "...humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." His humility is the point, although sometimes more is said about his riding on a donkey. The reality is that kings in Israel did ride on donkeys and, yes, horses were more popular for kings leading their troops into battle. Different roles, different messages, different modes of transport.

We have that today. I don't know what kind of vehicle Stephen Harper drove before he became Prime Minister. Now he usually rides in an armored long-wheel based Cadillac limousine. When Barak Obama was a U. S. Senator, he drove a Chrysler 300 with a high performance hemi engine. When he was running for President his vehicle was a Ford Escape Hybrid. Now he is driven around in the brand new "Cadillac One," a presidential limousine built on a truck frame, highly armored, with its design elements classified. When he leaves the White House on his helicopter to catch a ride on Air Force One, the car is loaded onto an Air Force Globemaster transport plane and sent ahead. No going down to the local *Rent an Armored Limo* shop for the President. Then, if he decides to take a trip to the Camp David Presidential retreat for a weekend, he will move around in electric golf carts.

The mode of transportation has to do with position, message and location.

The message in the prophecy, again, is that the mighty Messiah will also be humble. We can't say how the people in Zechariah's day responded to this. Some may have accepted it based on earlier truth in Isaiah and the Psalms. Others may have been puzzled by it. Many may have glossed over it.

God wanted the people to have comfort, hope and joy based on His promises to them. He also wanted them to use this truth as a base for living by faith, for being faithful, for following Him, for fulfilling His purposes not only for rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem, but in every aspect of their lives. Now let's move forward to...

The View Of Palm Sunday In Jesus' Day.

Here we need to start by reviewing the very familiar scene. A huge overflow crowd of people was at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, that special time God set aside to remember how He delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

Jesus came to Jerusalem from Bethany, a distance of over three kilometers on a winding road. People heard that this teacher and worker of miracles was coming. So, thousands, tens of thousands of people lined that road on both sides, behind and ahead of Him. There was festive shouting, singing, pushing, shoving, paving the way with their coats and palm branches. Matthew tells us,

“Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!’” (21:8-9)

When Jesus finally entered the city, those who had not been part of this asked, “What's going on?” When the palm branch waving and singing people told them that Jesus had come, the whole city was stirred with excitement.

Now let's turn to what the people saw and did not see. Look at Zechariah's words again in verses 9-10,

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

What they *did see* from this prophecy was Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Jesus, they hoped, bringing justice to right all the wrongs and salvation from the Romans. Jesus, they dreamed, bringing peace with the nations around them and extending Israel to occupy all the land God promised them. Some of them, perhaps with delight, later saw Jesus drive

the profiteering entrepreneurs out of the temple.

But we know they did not see everything in this prophecy. In fact, they did not see the heart of Jesus nor the mission on this His last trip to Jerusalem. Few if any heard, and none would have understood one part of the *Triumphal Entry*. Luke tells us,

“When [Jesus] approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.’” (Luke 19:41-44)

Nor did they see Him, the next morning, curse a fig tree without fruit as a picture of Israel which did not bear the fruit of accepting Him. So now, as the tree withered, they would wither under God’s judgment (*cf.* Matthew 21:18-19).

They did not see Isaiah’s prophecies of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, nor the Psalmists’ descriptions of His sufferings. They did not see His face set not only toward Jerusalem, but toward His cross outside of the city walls.

I wonder, if we were there, would we have seen any more than they did?

All of our actions and choices have results. Part of the results of their view are described in Matthew 27. After Pilate had talked with Jesus, and found no fault in Him, Matthew writes,

“... when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.”
(17-18)

Then Matthew continues,

“... the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. But the governor said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ And they said, ‘Barabbas.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’ They all said, ‘Crucify Him!’ And he said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they kept shouting all the more, saying, ‘Crucify Him!’ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.’ And all the people said, ‘His blood shall be on us and on our children!’ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having

Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.” (20-26)

Let's move on... up to the present and...

The View Of Palm Sunday In Our Day.

Start with the truth God wants you to see in this prophecy. Jesus entering Jerusalem on that day was the direct, deliberate fulfillment of God's word, His promise, His prophecy through Zechariah over 500 years earlier. Jesus Christ is the King, the Messiah. He came into this world to die on that cross, to give His life for us so that our sins could be forgiven and His everlasting life could be given to us.

Jesus knew all of this. He told His disciples about it. Mark 8:31,

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

And again, just a bit later, Mark 9:31,

“For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, ‘The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.’ But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.” (31-32)

Then once more in chapter 10,

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again.” (33-34)

d) God, who is Truth, and so is always true, kept His word. And He wants you to know that just as He kept His word on this, He will keep His word, all His promises to you.

“But,” you may ask, “what about verse 10, what about ‘I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth’”? What the people in Zechariah's and Jesus' day did not see is that Jesus came first to die as the Suffering King to be our Savior, and He is coming again as the Conquering King to be our Ruler.

In the familiar opening verses of John 14 Jesus said,

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and

prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (1-3).

After Jesus rose from the dead and then had invested forty days with His disciples, He ascended back to heaven. Luke records in Acts 1,

“... He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’”
(9b-11)

Almost twenty years later believers in Thessalonica had some questions about all of this. So Paul wrote in his first letter to them, chapter 4,

“... the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (16-17).

Then just a few years later Paul wrote in his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 15,

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (51-52)

God wants you to know that “*Your King Is Coming!*” Jesus is coming again!

As great as this is, it doesn’t stop here. There is more. In addition to what God wants us *to see* about this truth, there are some things He wants to see in you and me because of this truth. First, this certain hope is to be constantly in front of us. We are, as Paul wrote to Titus, to be “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (2:13). This is not escapism, as we will see shortly. Those who suggest that are missing one of God’s greatest truths for living and serving in the here and now.

Secondly, this truth, this certain hope will lead us not to dreaming about heaven, but to purifying our minds, speech and actions. 1 John 3:2-3 tells us,

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

How does that fit together? If we are fixing our hope on Christ and His return, if we are looking for His appearing, knowing that the time is coming when Christ will descend from heaven with a shout and take us up to be with Him, we will not procrastinate, we will not make excuses for being distracted or deceived by sin, and we will live and grow in purity. If you and I are not concerned about, or are not moving forward with Christ to be more like Him, our hope is not fixed on Christ and His return.

Thirdly, we like the believers in Thessalonica and Corinth have questions about death, about those we know and love who have died. Paul concluded his words about Christ's return to the people in the church at Thessalonica by writing, "Therefore *comfort one another* with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). The grave is not the end of life nor, for believers, of fellowship. We will all be reunited around the throne of God in heaven. "So, *comfort one another with [this truth].*"

And, finally, because *Our King Is Coming*, God wants to see stability and active, fruitful ministry in each of us. Paul finished his teaching on Christ's return in 1 Corinthians 15 by writing, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Because Christ is coming to take you to be with Him, your hard work, sacrifice, living with heaven's perspective rather than the ones of this world are worth it! So be strong and stable in Christ. Don't be distracted or discouraged. Rather, exceed the minimum, overflow with, have a bumper crop of God's work.

No, that does not mean you have to sacrifice your family and work, or go into full time vocational ministry. No. Be in *full time ministry* where you are, to and with your family, in your job, to and with your neighbors and friends, and, yes, also to strangers.

Conclusion.

Zechariah's prophecy had to do with the people in his day, the people in Jesus' day, and with us today. The people 500 years before Jesus did not see all the truth here, and neither did the people in Jesus' day.

What about us? The most basic question is "Do you know Jesus as *your* King, as *your* Savior?" He came into this world to die on the cross and be raised from the dead... for you. If you have not experienced His forgiveness, life and leading, talk with me or someone else here before you leave today.

And then for those of us who know Jesus as our Savior and King, and know He is coming again for us, is this truth shaping our lives, or have we become distracted, focused elsewhere? Pastor and author Max Lacado writes,

"The legends of the Taj Mahal, they all fascinate, but there is one that haunts. The favorite wife of the Mogul emperor Shah Jahan died. Devastated, he resolved to honor her by constructing a temple that would serve as her tomb. Her coffin was placed in the center of a large

parcel of land, and construction of the temple began around it. No expense would be spared to make her final resting place magnificent. But as the weeks turned into months, the Shah's grief was eclipsed by his passion for the project. He no longer mourned her absence. The construction consumed him. One day, while walking from one side of the construction site to the other, his leg bumped against a wooden box. The prince brushed the dust off his leg and ordered the worker to throw the box out. Shah Jahan didn't know he had ordered the disposal of the coffin, now forgotten, hidden beneath layers of dust and time. The one the temple was intended to honor was forgotten, but the temple was erected anyway. Difficult to believe? Perhaps. But eerie nonetheless. Could someone build a temple and forget why? Could someone construct a palace, yet forget the king? Could someone sculpt a tribute and forget the hero?" (*The Applause of Heaven*)

In these next moments, thank God that He sent Jesus into this world for you, and that He is coming again. Take an honest inventory of where your hope is fixed ... not where you know it should be, or want it to be, but where it really is fixed. As you remember Christ's passion and triumph over the next week, remember Him, *your King*, in all you think, dream, say and do, knowing that He is coming again.

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