

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Zechariah 9:9-10*

- 09** Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- 10** I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

PSALM FOR THE DAY: *Psalm 24*

- 01** Of David. A psalm. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
- 02** for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.
- 03** Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?
- 04** He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.
- 05** He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.
- 06** Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. *Selah*
- 07** Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
- 08** Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.
- 09** Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
- 10** Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory. *Selah*

EPISTLE LESSON: *Philippians 2:5-11*

- 05** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
- 06** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- 07** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- 08** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!
- 09** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Matthew 21:1-11*

- 01** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
- 02** saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.
- 03** If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."
- 04** This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:
- 05** "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"
- 06** The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.
- 07** They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.
- 08** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
- 09** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"
- 10** When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"
- 11** The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Dear fellow redeemed and fellow subjects of our gracious and victorious King:

What do you expect from a king? How would you expect a king to act? What would you expect a king to do? What would you expect a king to ride?

If Queen Elizabeth or President Clinton came to visit Milwaukee, we would expect a Boeing 747 with the appropriate markings to land at Mitchell Airport. We wouldn't expect them to arrive in a Piper Cub or in coach class on Budget Air. If they were to go from place to place in Milwaukee, we would anticipate them to ride in a bulletproof limousine, not on the city bus.

However, it appears that the King of kings operates differently. We see today how the heavenly King acts. **See, Your King Comes to You.** *He comes gently riding a donkey. And he comes to serve by dying as the sacrifice promised by God.*

Our account this morning begins with Jesus asking his disciples to get a donkey and her colt. Now, it might seem like Jesus has a lot of nerve asking his disciples to go to a stranger's house, take that person's personal property, and walk off with it. But what does Jesus say? "If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." Our Lord knew that he was borrowing these animals from a man of faith, one who knew Jesus is God (the Lord) and trusted that if the Lord had need of them, they would be alright or they would be replaced. What faith! How often would we be willing to lend our prized possessions to our Lord? Even, as in our text today, to those representing the Lord? Or even the talents and gifts which God has given us—are we willing to recognize what those are and lend those talents and gifts back to the Lord?

What happened, Matthew tells us, happened to fulfil what the prophet, in this case Zechariah, said: "*Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*" Now, what happened to cause Zechariah to say those words? Prophecy in the Old Testament often had some event that triggered God revealing another piece of information about the Messiah he was to send. So what happened in Zechariah's time that prompted this prophecy?

Zechariah was a prophet who prophesied after the return of the Jews from their Babylonian Captivity. The fact that Zechariah had to prophesy just 10-15 years after Cyrus decree that returned the Jews to their homeland tells us that obviously this people of God hadn't learned any lessons very well in their captivity. They had to be told again what the pre-exilic prophets said to their forefathers. The Jews had to be prompted to rebuild the temple—imagine, back in your homeland for ten years or more and you still haven't rebuilt the temple! One reason for this delay was that neighboring nations and tribes had made life difficult for the Jews with constant attacks and raids. Nehemiah himself urged his countrymen to have a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other as they rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

But God promised deliverance from Judah's neighbors. As we look through the 8 verses of Zechariah's prophecy just before our Old Testament lesson this morning, we see God proclaim judgment on Judah's enemies. Then comes verse nine, read earlier. With the condemnation of Judah's enemies one would anticipate a build-up to a climax as God tells what he will do—surely a knight in shining armor will ride to the scene on a white steed and save the day.

But God had Zechariah change the script. “See, your king comes to you riding on a donkey.” Not a compelling script, is it? But God wasn’t interested in having a good story or making an impression. He was concerned first and foremost with the salvation of mankind. Thus the king sent to save the day would be a king who serves rather than lord it over others. One who would be gentle, meek, but knowing he has the power and the victory and just ride right in and get the job done.

So, why do we need this king riding in on a donkey? What purpose does this king serve?

Like the people of Judah, returning from the exile, we soon forget God’s mercy and glory and providence and presence. And this condition exists throughout mankind. In the days of Noah, God was repulsed by how evil mankind had become, even though he had created mankind and given mankind life. Rather than strike down Cain for murdering his brother, God extended his time of grace. We never find out if Cain finally did come to faith and repent of his sins. The Jews didn’t like servitude in Egypt, but once out of Egypt they seemed to whine every mile and every year until they got to the Promised Land.

What about us. Do we soon forget God and his promises and his providence and the great price he paid for us? Do we forget that He gave His life to buy us back? Do we find ourselves going back to our pet sins, our addictions, and our cravings because they seem so comfortable even though we know the long-term results are disastrous for us? Do we find ourselves going back to our pet sins, our addictions, and our cravings even though we know they are wrong and God has repeatedly said they are wrong in His word? Do we blame our failures and our relapses on things or people that we feel God gave us, just as Adam blamed God for giving him Eve? Or are we like Eve and blame our shortcomings on events or circumstances that we find ourselves in?

Lest anyone feel that they are worse (or better) than anyone else, remember that by nature we are sinful. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit all mankind was plunged into sin. No one is perfect. Our enemies—sin, death, and the Devil—would constantly tempt us and remind us of our unworthy standing before God. And with such enemies attacking us each and every day, battering us with guilt, is it any wonder that we, like the Jews in Zechariah’s day, cannot repair our temples? Thus we, too, need a savior to ride in and save us and rescue us from this bloody battle.

Our king comes to us. See, he comes riding on a donkey. Our king comes to serve by dying in our place.

Since God demands perfection and since we cannot attain perfection—in fact we are already imperfect the moment we are conceived—God had to send in a king, His chosen one. This king would basically do two things: *Actively* obey His Father’s Laws so that He would be a sinless sacrifice for sins, and *passively* obey His Father by dying on the cross to pay for all of our sins. As part of His active obedience, He would perform miracles to demonstrate that He is God. Those of you that have been coming to Bible study on Sunday mornings and studying the “I Am” statements in John’s Gospel, we have looked closely at the reactions of people when Jesus performed a miracle. The reaction has usually been one of two things: either in disbelief a group would explain the miracle away with a ridiculous theory, such as Jesus being demon-possessed, or people would put their trust in Him and say, “He must be the Messiah, the Great Prophet.” Jesus also fulfilled all those prophecies written about him—and should that surprise us? For prophecy is nothing more than God saying, “I will send my servant, my chosen One. Here is what He will do and what will happen. See these things and you will see your Messiah.”

Many in our text today had recognized this in Jesus. As Jesus rides in, the chant goes up:

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

This hymn of praise, simple as it is, expresses the faith these people had in who Jesus is. “The Son of David” acknowledges that Jesus is the Promised One who would be a direct descendant of King David. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, the Chosen savior of the nations, which God had promised already all the way back to Eden right after Adam and Eve committed the first sin. It acknowledges that Jesus came from heaven and is true God. And by proclaiming Hosannas, they were giving Jesus the praise that was reserved for God only. These three simple verses formed a creed that these people proclaimed about who and what they believed Jesus to be.

Now, we suspect that many of these same people changed the “Hosannas” to “Crucify him” before the week was over. On Good Friday we will see how the words of the people dramatically change. But we will also see on Maundy Thursday that Jesus was in control of all these events. He laid down his life and he took it up again on Easter Sunday, which we celebrate next week. But should we be so hard to judge how fickle these people were? Do we retain the zeal and joy we receive here in God’s house every Sunday and put it into practice and be witnesses—both active and passive—throughout the week? Or do we also “let things go” and in the process deny Christ or call out “crucify him?”

The Good News in all this is that Jesus still rode on into Jerusalem. He rode on to his death. He rode on to suffering. You see, He knows each one of us better than we think we know ourselves—and if you don’t think He knows you better than you know yourself, remember what Jesus said to Peter when Peter boldly stated on Maundy Thursday that he, Peter, would never leave Jesus, even if it meant death? Jesus knows the sins each one of us has committed, is committing, and will commit. In fact, let’s take it back a step. He knew that mankind would rebel and that we would all be sinners before he even created the world! But what did God—and Jesus with him—do? They created the world. They created people. They created each of you and they created me. They knew the sins we would commit and our constant rebellion, but guess what? They created the world anyway. They created each one of us anyway. Jesus died to pay for all of our sins anyway.

See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey. Let him fight sin and Satan. Give him all those temptations and cravings and addictions. Let him take your guilt and restore it with peace in your heart, confident in knowing that no matter what, Jesus has paid for your sins. See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey to rule in your hearts and to work renewal in your hearts and lives. Remember the baptism within which you were made not only a citizen of heaven but also a child of God. Take to heart the words of Paul: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Behold, your king comes to you and rules within you and fights for you the forces of evil.

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

Amen