

*<sup>9</sup>Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion!  
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!  
Look! Your King is coming to you.  
He is righteous and brings salvation.  
He is humble and is riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
<sup>10</sup>I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the horse from Jerusalem.  
The battle bow will be taken away,  
and he will proclaim peace to the nations.  
His kingdom will extend from sea to sea,  
from the River to the ends of the earth.*

As Zechariah prophesied to God's people, they lived as little more than a remnant of Israel, waiting to build Jerusalem back up under threat of the Samaritans living around them. They wanted peace and stability. They wanted life to be what it was like seventy years earlier, before the city was sieged and destroyed. They were waiting on a king who really mattered, one who could really shift the events of history in their favor.

Palm Sunday shows us the King who matters, 500 years after Zechariah made this promise about God's King coming. Christ enters into the same city the Israelites a few hundred years earlier were hoping to rebuild. But he does not come with all the trappings of a king. Instead, he comes riding in on a baby donkey. While we often treat Palm Sunday as a victory procession, Zechariah shows us a King riding into the arena for battle.

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” There is a reason to rejoice. The King they have been waiting for has arrived. He is ready to go out to battle and win. But notice that even as Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he's already bloodied. No, not literally. The whips and thorns and nails won't come until later. But spiritually, he's not just starting the fight. He's already been at war. And his war has not been against the Roman oppressors, but against every temptation of sin and every demand of the law. And he has not cracked, not once. He has taken the slings and arrows of a life filled with struggle against sin, all the while marching forward.

But even as he comes into the city of promise, he doesn't look all that powerful. He looks like a tired rabbi on a barrowed animal. He looks worn, weak, and weary. Is this the King God

promised to the world? How pathetic! Yet behind that humility lies the power of the Almighty, a power that is just waiting to be unleashed.

Who does the King find as he enters into the royal city? He finds a people misaligned with the priorities of God. He finds a people who have more than a few misunderstandings about the Messiah. The many were not looking for a Savior from sin. That's why they had their religious leaders, to coach them into lives that were free from sin. What they were looking for was a pat on the back for what they had done for God. What they were looking for was a champion from God who would rescue them from their Roman oppressors so that they could live in power again.

God wished for his people to wait in hope for his appearing. But instead of waiting for salvation from God, he found them working on their own interests. He found them playing political games to win power. He found them elbowing each other to get to the front of the line that hands out status. And he found them ignorant to the fact that only God can save and instead living in self-righteousness.

I imagine the average citizen of Jerusalem lived a pretty quiet life. He worked hard at his job six days a week. She balanced taking care of the kids with running the family store in the marketplace. They had a few kids they were proud of and would do anything for, even if their kids constantly raised their stress level. They wished they had more money than they did. They wished their government would leave them alone more and tax them less. They worshipped every week then went on to their normal activities. But even though everything on the outside looked healthy and upright, there was still brokenness inside.

Deep down, their relationship with God felt like one of slavery. She tried to love her husband as best she could and he tried to love his wife. But their marriage was far from perfect. They raised their kids the best they could, but the kids had their own problems. They went to worship, but they didn't go with joy. They went with fear and trepidation. They went to learn how they could turn God's wrath away from them by fixing all the areas of life that just felt off.

So, when God took on flesh and marched into their city to save them, did he find people who were living with hope in his promises? No. He found people whose every inclination was to see themselves as nails trying to escape the wrathful hammer of God. He found people who had grown so fearful of God that they gave up on God altogether. As Jesus marched into Jerusalem, the people cheering him on were lost in the delusions of sin. They were not righteous. They were not deserving. They were miserable sinners that had tried every avenue to escape sin except the one that would do the trick: trusting in God to save instead of themselves, as God had instructed them in his word and showed them throughout their history.

Think about the people who cheered Jesus as he came into the city. It would only take five days for "Hosanna!" to turn to "Crucify!" These people were not seeking a Savior from sin.

They were caught up in their own problems, and worse, their own terrible solutions. Because of their sin, they had made themselves enemies to Jesus, whether they knew it or not. But Jesus did not come to destroy this rebellious people. He came to destroy their enemies and obliterate the things they were putting their trust in instead of him.

They put their trust in earthly power, and God says, “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem.” No, their salvation would not come in the form of a rebellion against the Romans, with King Jesus leading the charge from the back of his white stallion. It would come in the form of King Jesus riding into the city of his death on the back of a baby donkey, feet dragging along the ground. But their need to make war would be done away with, because he would turn them to the struggle that was more important, the struggle with Satan and sin; the struggle that he would put an end to by the end of the week: “The battle bow will be taken away, and he will proclaim peace to the nations.”

They had also put their trust in their own works. To this, God says, “Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation. He is humble and is riding on a donkey.” Sure, he’s humble. Though he had fed them and clothed them, showing his power was from God, they could not escape the thought that he did not look or sound very kingly. But as a moral example? Maybe he’d suffice. But look at what Zechariah’s prophecy says. Jesus doesn’t come to simply be a moral example – a mold that we must fit ourselves into. He comes with righteousness to bring salvation. No more living with fear toward God. No more failing as a spouse, parent, or follower of God and slumping their head in disappointment and the expectation of destruction. Jesus did not demand righteousness. He provided it.

For three years Jesus had been preaching about the kingdom of God to people. Read the gospels. You will find no sin from him. But it wasn’t just three years of perfection amidst struggles. For the thirty-three years of his life, he had battled temptation and won. And now, as he rides up the mountain – splitting the crowd of those who had lived anything but perfect lives – his spotless life would be given for their lives stained by sin. With the full power of the Godhead, he does not aim it at these deserving rebels. He aims it at the sin that had corrupted them. He aims it at the devil who had deceived them.

But let’s come down from the Palm Sunday mountain. Let’s stand here, roughly 1,993 Palm Sundays later. You and I don’t sound too different than the residents of Jerusalem, do we? We want Jesus to make war with those evils we find in the world too. We want Jesus to fight corrupt government officials at home and abroad. We want Jesus to fight the injustices we see in society and bring peace and fairness. But might we be missing the most important battles? Might we get confused into thinking what our kids need most is college scholarships and good paying jobs instead of a firm foundation in the old faith? Might believe that if an aging parent or spouse is dying in the hospital, what they need to hear most is how important they were and not

the reminder that heaven is theirs in Christ? Might we be deceived by Satan to place our hopes in our own works instead of the death and resurrection of Jesus, living with a fear of God instead of a true love and appreciation of him?

No, we are not that different from those with the palm branches. We're confused. Too often, Jesus finds us messing with the things we should not be. And there is no credit for trying. There's no A for effort. You do not get approval for being very devout to heresies. There is no righteousness found in committing yourself to a lie. What does Jesus find when he comes to us? He finds sinners. He finds people who are deserving of God's wrath.

And yet, you did not come into church this morning in fear (at least, I hope you didn't). You know where you stand with God and you know why you stand there. God loves you. He sees you as perfect. And he doesn't see you as perfect because you cracked the code and figured out how to be the perfect parent or friend. He sees you as perfect because he sent the one who is righteous and bringing salvation, humble and riding on a donkey. And he sent his Son not to fight you in your rebellion, but to fight the things that you run to in times of need instead of him: the idols, the secret sins, and the worldly trusts. Jesus rides into Jerusalem – and ultimately to the cross – to wage war for us, that we might be the recipients of his peace. Amen.