

*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.*

<sup>10</sup> *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. (Zechariah 9:9-10)*

### What Kind of King Do We See?

People often see what they want to see. Have you ever tried to talk someone out of a relationship? You could see that this man or this woman just wasn't right for your friend or your sibling or your child. Because you loved them, you tried to make them see it. Did that person thank you? Or did they get mad at you? You probably didn't get much appreciation for your efforts. It didn't matter that your eyes were clearer because you were one step removed from what was happening. People see what they want to see and they act accordingly.

Just as that's true in many other areas of our lives, it's true in our spiritual life. When people look at Jesus, they often see what they want to see. Many people today see an example of what we should live like. Jesus certainly is the best example that we could ever find for living under God in this life. But is that really all that we see? Some people see in Jesus a cure for the ills of society – for racism and poverty and hate and war. But Jesus himself said that he did not come to bring peace but a sword. He said that he came to divide people. I could go on and on listing different ideas that people have about Jesus, but what do we see when we look at him? On Palm Sunday, we see a king like no other who ever lived. But what does that mean? **What kind of king do we see?**

#### I.

**We see a king who brings salvation.** That's the kind of king Zechariah the prophet saw, too. Chances are, you don't know much about Zechariah. He lived near the end of the Old Testament era. About 1500 years before Jesus was born, Moses led the children Israel out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai. About 1000 years before Jesus was born, King David ruled in Jerusalem. Just under six hundred years before Jesus was born, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the people into exile. Seventy years later, God allowed the people to return. Zechariah lived at the time of that return.

The Jews no longer were an independent kingdom. They were a minor ethnic group living in a distant province of the Persian Empire. But God said through Zechariah, **“See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation ...”** That was good news for the Jews of Zechariah's day. They remembered that God had once given them kings to rule them and protect them. But they also understood that God had made those ancient kings into living prophecies. The king of Israel – as an institution – was a living prophecy about Jesus. Already at the time of King David, centuries before, God promised to send them a greater king. He repeated that promise over and over again.

Jesus was the king God promised. God said that he would have salvation. What does salvation mean? Last winter, I took my family down to Belle Isle to look the Christmas display in the botanical garden. Afterwards, we walked on one the piers that sticks out into the river there. We watched the ice flows drift by and took pictures of the sky line. It was a nice day. But what would've happened if one of us had fallen into that ice cold water? We would've had maybe eight or ten minutes for someone to rescue us – to save us – before we died of exposure.

Jesus came to save us from the ultimate threat to our lives. That was an image of kings that the ancient world understood. We North Americans tend to think of European kings sitting in their palaces telling people

what to do. But in Zechariah's day, they thought of kings coming at the head of their army to save them from their enemies. The great King who was coming would save his people. What is the result? Peace. God said, **"I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken."** Ephraim and Jerusalem are parts of Israel. When the King came to defend them from their enemies, he would take away the weapons of his own people because they just wouldn't need them any more.

When I was in the army, I was stationed for a year in California on a base with service members from all four services. In the part of the barracks where the Marines lived, one of their sergeants had a sign on his door with a picture of an M-16 rifle. In big, bold letters it said, "Peace through superior fire power." In a way, that's the picture that Zechariah was using. The righteous King would come to save his people and bring peace by conquering all his enemies. In fact, Zechariah goes on to say, **"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."** The coming King would bring peace to the world by conquering it and making it all his.

All of that is picture of Jesus. That picture began to be fulfilled on the day he rode into Jerusalem. He was announcing to his people that the promises God had been giving them for a thousand years were now coming true. Jesus, the great king, gave his people peace through superior firepower. He's the Son of God who came into the world to meet the devil in single combat at the cross and defeat him. He came to rescue us from our greatest enemies: death and hell. He came to give us a far greater peace than any treaty or any political peace could ever achieve. Many people today imagine that Jesus came to teach us to live in harmony with one another and that it's our job as a church to work for an end to war. But Jesus himself said that there will always be wars. In fact, he warned us that the last times would be characterized by wars and rumors of war. Jesus did not come to bring political peace. He came to bring peace between us and God.

That's hard for people today to understand. How can God be at war with us? God is holy. He hates sin. The Bible even says that he hates sinners, which people today don't want to hear. The Bible teaches that God will punish sinners in hell forever. There is no more unpopular notion in America today than that. Recently, a woman whose name I don't even know heard me say that in a sermon. After the service she blew up at me. She stuck her finger in my face and bellowed, "My God forgives everyone! I don't know about your God, but my God does!" Needless to say, we didn't have a conversation. She shouted and stormed away. But her reaction was a classic example of seeing God and Christ the way we want to see him and not the way God reveals him. Jesus himself will be the judge at the end of the world. He himself will say to all those who didn't believe in him, "Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Sin puts us into a state of war with God and even with Jesus. No matter how many times we make excuses for our sin, no matter how many ways we come up with to downplay it and make it seem like it's not such big deal, all sin makes us God's enemies. It may be true that we don't sell drugs in schools or molest our children or steal from our work. But it's also true that we love ourselves first of all. The mere fact that we want to argue with God's definition of who and what we are shows the pride that lives inside us. That pride is sin. It makes us God's enemy.

But Jesus came to defeat sin – even the sin in our hearts. He did that by living a righteous life. Not just a good life. Not even just an exemplary life. He lived a perfect life for you and for me. It counts in our place. Then Jesus died and paid for all that we're guilty of. He paid for the pride and sin that lives in our hearts. And he paid for every sin we ever committed – the ones we don't think are such a big deal and the ones that torment us and make us feel guilty. He died and he washed them all away. Then he rose and God declared that we are now at peace with him, even though we still struggle with our sin. And we will live with him forever.

Through Jesus, we have peace with God. In that peace with God, we find peace for our own hearts. Whether it's guilt that torments us or something else, like fear or anxiety or sadness, Jesus conquered all that sin does to us. He comforts and strengthens us while we wrestle with those things here. And soon he will return and spread peace throughout the world. On that day, all sin will end. All strife and warfare will end. He will rule over a perfect world forever. We will live in peace for endless days.

## II.

That's the king Zechariah promised. And it was a remarkable departure from the picture that people had who remembered the good old days when Israel had their own kings because all of them were sinful human beings. As nice as it was to be independent, the unfaithfulness of those kings had a great deal to do with the terrible things Israel suffered. Zechariah pointed to a new kind of king, a spiritual king who would bring them

salvation. On Palm Sunday, the King who rode into Jerusalem did everything to demonstrate that he was a totally different kind of king. **What kind of king do we see? We see a king who comes in humility.**

The ancient world liked to celebrate kings. They invented the parade as a means of honoring a triumphant king when he returned from war. The king would ride on a stallion or in a chariot pulled by a team of chargers. He would have an honor guard, with their armor polished and shining in the sun. The army would march behind him, sometimes taking hours to pass. At the end of the parade, prisoners of war would come in chains, on their way to death or slavery. That's the kind of procession the ancient world expected of kings.

But God said this king would be different. He would come on donkey. Kings didn't ride donkeys. Peasants did. Country bumpkins who couldn't afford anything better and who wouldn't know how to ride a horse came to town on donkeys. But God told his people that his king would because he would come in humility. Jesus' honor guard was a bunch of fishermen who were used to sleeping by the side of the rode and instead of armor probably wore the same shabby clothes day after day. No army followed him.

This may have been the humblest parade any king ever had. The irony is that no king deserved a parade more than Jesus. Most kings get their jobs either by being blood thirsty or by inheriting. Very few are truly worthy of the job. But Jesus is the Son of God. He rules the universe. Yet he hid his Godhood in real human flesh and blood and he came into Jerusalem in way that would've seemed laughable to any self-respecting Roman king or governor. By a miracle of God, the crowds recognized him and welcomed him as their king. Because Jesus did enter Jerusalem to claim his kingdom.

Jesus came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday so that he could die on Friday. Make no mistake about it, he knew exactly what was going to happen to him. He wanted it to happen to him. Palm Sunday is the beginning of the last act of Jesus' life. But the battle he came to fight was different than any other battle ever fought because the winner of this battle was the one who gave his life. The one who suffered hell. The one who was arrested and bound and mocked and ridiculed, the one who was nailed to cross and hung there to die, that was the winner. On that cross, Jesus destroyed the work of the devil. That's what he came here to do.

Jesus died and he paid for all the sins of every sinner who ever has lived or ever will live. He paid for you and for me. When he rose, the devil's kingdom fell. Since that day, the gospel has been moving forward through history, giving peace to people from every nation under heaven. It has reached this far. And it will continue to surge forward throughout the world until our Savior returns to claim that which is his. He will return to claim us. Then we will see a King who sits in real glory. We will see that the greatest pomp and circumstance of the wealthiest king who ever lived is nothing compared to the glory of Jesus.

All that began when he rode into Jerusalem. Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem mocks the parades of generals and kings and presidents of every age because no matter how hard they try, no matter how much they spend, no matter what they choose to see in the cheering of the crowds, they can never come close to the glory of that humble teacher riding on a donkey accompanied by fishermen. My friends, see that King for who he is: the Son of God come to win eternal life for us. Worship him now because you will worship him in heaven forever. Amen.