

## **Zechariah 9:9-12**

<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. <sup>11</sup> As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, You prisoners who have hope; this very day I declare that I will restore double to you.

Sermon for March 28, 2021, Palm Sunday; St. Paul's, Green Garden.

Text: Zechariah 9:9-12

Theme: "Rejoice at the Arrival of Your King!"

In the name of Jesus, King of all,

Public worship is a very important expression of our faith for us who are Lutheran Christians.

When we worship God our worshiping says that we hold our God in higher regard, we love him more than anything or anyone in the entire world. It also says that we depend on him for everything, for food, clothing, home, spouse and children, even our health.

Centuries ago, when kings and princes marched in procession their presence meant their subjects were obligated to bow down before them in a worship sort of posture, if not actually worshiping them. We know that Egyptian Kings considered themselves gods and Roman emperors often petitioned the Roman Senate to declare that they were gods, some even before they died. As Christians we reserve true acts of worship such as confession and absolution, prayer, singing of hymns, and so forth for our true King, our God and Savior, Jesus Christ along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. So when we dedicate church buildings, church furnishings, even hymnals to the worship and glory of God, we do so because we use them in our worship of God. On this Palm Sunday we also take great joy in worshiping Jesus because he is our King who rules the universe for us and has won for us peace with God through his death, and life forever with our God.

The prophet Zechariah lived during a time when the people of Israel did not have their own earthly King. They were very discouraged because they were looking forward to the king, the son of David, whose kingdom would last forever.

But it seemed as if God had made an empty promise. Zechariah knew how discouraged they were. At the inspiration of God he urged them to set aside their disappointment. Don't despair of God's promise. Rather, "Rejoice at the Arrival of Your King!" 1. He comes to establish his kingdom 2. He comes to rescue his people.

Zechariah prophesied about 500 years before the birth of Christ. 85 years before Zechariah, God had really chastised his chosen people with his iron rod. He had brought the Babylonian empire to power. Its relentless, unstoppable army had ransacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple of God and without mercy had uprooted and transplanted God's people into a land and culture that were unfamiliar to them. God allowed them to languish in captivity for seventy years. They were far away from the land God had promised to give their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When the Medes and Persians replaced Babylon as the dominant world power the Jews had been allowed to return to Palestine.

Once they returned many expected to quickly rebuild the temple and that in time they would again ascend to the position of greatness they had held in the world when David and Solomon were kings. But in the 15 years since God had moved King Cyrus to allow them to return God's people had not been able to achieve those expectations. In fact, the restoration of the temple was hardly off the ground. They had laid a foundation and dedicated it, but that was all. The city walls of Jerusalem still lay in ruins. While the books of Ezra and Nehemiah give no reasons it seems pretty certain that they had allowed God's enemies to delay them. They themselves, had dragged their own feet in completing those projects. In addition, they saw the freedom and relative strength of the nations around them. Most of the Jewish exiles who returned must have wondered whether God would ever keep his Messiah-promises. Then God commissioned Zechariah to speak his word to his lowly people, the remnant that returned to Judah. Zechariah told them to stop wallowing in their self-pity.

Instead he urged them to rejoice at the arrival of the true, eternal king whom God would send. In effect he tells them to forget about all the outward appearances that would seem to indicate Israel is small, could be overpowered by enemies and will never amount to anything. It may look as if God will never send the Savior but you children of God, jump for joy your King is Coming just as God promised.

When this King arrived they would see the difference. He would not be like the kings of Babylon or Persia whom they had seen before. This King did not intend to demand respect. He would not overpower and dominate them and crush them into submission. These facts would be clear for when he arrived he would not march in on a mighty war horse the kind of animal usually reserved for Kings.

He would come to them on an ordinary animal used by everyday people to carry their simple goods to and from the fields or the market. This king would ride nothing more than a common donkey. What a joy it would be to see a king who cared about each of them personally rather than to cower before a king who could have them killed with a word. Here was a gentle king.

Another characteristic that would set this gentle heavenly king apart from every earthly king is that he is righteous. Since he loves his people, every judgment he makes is right and just. And even more than that, all the words of this prophecy show us that this gentle king will have the help and deliverance of God the Father in all his earthly dealings. During his earthly life Jesus depended on his Father to help him. Even though he was forsaken by God for a little while on the cross, the Father finally exalted him to his former position of honor and glory. So Zechariah's prophecy even gives a little clue to the events of Holy Week and the Savior's resurrection.

And when this king comes to establish his kingdom he will not do it with the weapons of battle and war. God's speaks in the first person, as though he is speaking directly to his Son in our hearing: "**I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be . He will be taken away and he will proclaim peace to the nations.**" The peace this king will proclaim is the peace that he will win for all people through his death and resurrection. In his greatest battle on the cross he won peace with God, peace that he can proclaim to all nations because God punished him in our place. He bore the punishment of our sins.

It is very easy to see that this prophecy finds its fulfillment in the Palm Sunday events when Jesus rode from Bethany on the Mt. of Olives into Jerusalem. Yet this prophecy speaks of more than King Jesus humbly riding a donkey. These words really mirror the humility of his entire life, how he dealt humbly and lovingly with people, healing them, calling them to repentance and announcing God's love and mercy to them. He proclaims his word of peace to all people because as he himself says, He was lifted up at his crucifixion to draw all people to himself through forgiveness and mercy. And through his Great Commission to the church to make disciples of all nations His kingdom really does, "**Extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.**"

Like the Jews of Zechariah's time we may be tempted to bemoan our situation. More and more we see Christians are looked down upon in this world. The book of Revelation tells us this will happen. Christian attitudes about sex and marriage, about honesty and integrity, about abortion and end of life issues are ridiculed as being hopelessly out of step with the times. We might wonder if God

really knows what's happening in the world when abortion is considered just one of several options for a woman to deal with her pregnancy. Add to that our own sins when we sometimes join the crowd and buy into worldly attitudes of eat drink and be merry, and self-indulgence. You can see how all this could cause even a Christian to want to crawl into a hole and pull it in after himself.

But friends, your eyes have seen the king. God's people five hundred years before Christ only had the prophecies. We have seen Jesus come in humility, we ourselves have been drawn to him because of the love he has poured out on us, forgiving our sins and bringing us under his gracious rule. We have seen his kingdom extend to nations like Malawi, Zambia and Nigeria in Africa ; Japan, Brazil, Colombia, Russia, Indonesia and many others. No, we have no need to worry. Jesus is still king! His kingdom IS established and will never fail.

God told King David that one of his descendants would rule on his throne forever. This king we know is Jesus. Since his authority and power are permanent he comes not only to establish his kingdom, he comes also to rescue his imprisoned people.

The Israelites living five centuries before Christ's birth were prisoners of discouragement and despair. Their hopes of rebuilding the temple and returning to their former greatness as a nation had not been realized. In a sense they were looking for outward glory as a sign of God's acceptance of them. It was as if they were imprisoned as the Lord says, in a "waterless pit." If the cistern or pit had water in it, of course, death would come quickly by drowning. But there it seems as if the Lord is indicating that if they remain imprisoned in their hopelessness and despair they will still die but it will be a much slower and more painful process of spiritual thirst and starvation. Our King comes to rescue us from the trap of spiritual despair in which Satan would love to imprison us.

Yet the Lord says, even though they were imprisoned in despair, they were prisoners of hope, that is prisoners with hope. You have hope, the Lord says because no matter how hopeless things may seem in your life, you have a fortress you can return to. Return to your king who loves you. He is your fortress because he is merciful and keeps all his promises. Whether it was God's people of old or you and me now, we find refuge in our Savior. We flee to his mercy and forgiveness for our sins. In him we find comfort for our disappointment and hope for happiness in heaven.

Along with his rescue God promised to prove to his people that they were members of his kingdom by giving them the inheritance of the firstborn: "**This very day I declare that I will restore double to you.**" This was assurance that they belonged to him. They and we are full-fledged heirs. No one can take away

the inheritance that God has given to his people. No one can take from us the assurance that God claims us for his own.

All these blessings, God says, belong to you, my people because of the blood of the covenant I have made with you. God had established his covenant on Mt. Sinai and sealed it by animal blood. In that covenant God said to Israel, "If you will obey me then I will be your God and you will be my people." In other words, he told them, you do your part and I will do mine. But as we know Israel could not keep God's covenant. They failed time after time. And many did not understand that they needed a new covenant, the covenant that God speaks of right here.

But it was through the humble king God sent his people that he would establish a new covenant by the blood, not of animals, but by the blood of this king himself, Jesus Christ. What great comfort this must have been for God's people who were down in the dumps. They did not have to remain imprisoned in self-pity. God said, "I have promised to send you your Savior and I will send him. I will rescue you from the despair of your sins.

God graciously says the same thing to you and me. All the promises He made to Israel and all people, he has fulfilled in Jesus for you and me. Some leaders in government may at times be guilty of corruption and dishonest dealing. When we hear those things we may wonder about their ability to run government effectively. Sometimes industry knowingly sells products that can harm people. We may wonder who goes to bat for you and me. But you never have to wonder about Jesus, his power for you and his love for you. He has come to rescue your soul from hell and sin. As he said to Israel he says also to you, "**Return to your stronghold, you prisoners who have hope.**" Though there sometimes seems to be little hope in this world filled with crime and corruption, Jesus is HOPE. Why? Because through his death and resurrection he guarantees you an inheritance in heaven. You are a true heir. Because of Jesus Christ God considers each of you his firstborn.

So no matter what trouble this world tries to throw at you, it cannot hurt you. King Jesus rescues you. He is your fortress in all trouble, your hope against all hope, and your inheritance in heaven. What better reason do you have to rejoice at the coming of your king? Amen.