

Joy To The World

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 ESV)*

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

Let Earth Receive Her King

December 11th, 2022

Zechariah 9:9-10

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Zechariah 9:9-10; that’s on page 797 in the pew Bibles. I mentioned last week that we were going to do something a little bit different for Advent this year. With Christmas falling on a Sunday and the following Sunday falling on New Years’ Day it seemed to make sense to set aside 4 Sundays in total to talk about the coming of Christ. That’s what the word “Advent” means – it means “coming” and it has always been the tradition of the church to focus on BOTH the FIRST and SECOND comings of Christ during this season. That may feel weird to you if you are new to Christianity, but the more you read the Bible the more natural that approach is likely to feel. The Old Testament – which makes up about 3/4 of your Bible, is filled with promises, pictures and expectations about a future KING who will do a variety of things that will bring this present world order to an end and that will usher in the eternal Kingdom of Almighty God. Each of those promises is like a coloured thread and if you trace them out as you move forward in your Bible you discover that all of those threads LAND in some way on the person and work of Christ – and they land specifically in terms of events associated with either his first or second comings. So Old Testament scholar Barry Webb for example says here:

“all the Old Testament promises about the coming kingdom of God find their fulfilment (ultimate meaning) in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they are not fulfilled in some very general way (i.e. the

fulfilment is ‘somehow’ related to Jesus Christ), but in the very specific *events* of his birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and coming again. This means (among other things) that the fulfilment does not come all at once, but in two major phases.”¹

So over the course of these TWO MAJOR PHASES – these TWO COMINGS OF THE KING – everything that needs to be done to heal humanity, to restore creation, to inaugurate and consummate the eternal kingdom HAS and WILL be done. And that’s worth talking about – and that’s worth singing about and historically it has been the focus of the worship of the church, particularly during the Christmas season. You will notice that over the next 4 weeks we will be singing that famous Christmas Carol “Joy To The World” at each service – and we will be taking our cue from the successive verses of the song. This morning we will be taking our cue from verse 1 which says:

“Joy to the world! The Lord is come; **let earth receive her King.**”

Hopefully you have your Bible open by now to Zechariah 9:9-10. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9–10 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

There are three distinctive SCENES or MOVEMENTS in this beautiful picture. There is an invitation extended, a limitation imposed and a glorious future promised. We’ll walk through the text according to those divisions. We see first of all then an invitation extended.

¹ Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, ed. J. A. Motyer, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 172.

An invitation extended

That's the part of the picture that most of us will have seen before – because we often read this text on Palm Sunday morning – or at least we read the echo of this text in Matthew 21. In Matthew 21 Jesus engages in a prophetic theatre – do you remember that? He tells his disciples to go on ahead of him into the village they are about to enter and to take custody of a donkey. If anyone asks them why they are taking this particular donkey, they are to say that Jesus has need of it, and the owner will release it – so obviously this is something Jesus has prepared in advance. He wants to make his approach to Jerusalem in a particular way so as to cause people to reflect upon his coming through the lens of this Old Testament passage.

And it works! Matthew tells us:

This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” (Matthew 21:4–5 ESV)

So people were connecting the dots. They understood that Jesus was stepping into the prophecy of Zechariah 9 and saying: “THIS IS THAT”. My coming NOW is the coming foretold in that passage.

So let's look at it. The passage says that the Coming of the King will be cause for great JOY because of the manner of his approach. He will not come riding on a White War Horse – with sword unsheathed and armour on and blood lust in his eyes – rather he will come, humble and riding on a donkey – even the foal of a donkey.

Now in case that symbolism doesn't make sense to you – this is Jesus communicating very clearly that he comes in peace. Nobody goes to war on a donkey – particularly the foal of a donkey. The foal of a donkey is a particularly wonky donkey – if you try to swing a sword from

the back of a wonkey donkey you are likely to end up face down in the ditch like a drunk Honkey Tonkey. ☺

The point is – a donkey was middle class civilian transport in those days. It was a Honda Civic not an M1 Abrams tank. So Jesus is saying: I come in peace. I come offering a truce. You have been rebelling against your Creator – and that cannot stand. That won't be allowed to persist. But rather than coming to crush you, I have come to heal you and to restore you if you will let me.

That was the manner of Christ's approach. We see it in this story – but we see it everywhere in the Gospels. Jesus says:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28–30 ESV)

This is what the Apostles found so INCREDIBLE about Christ. Because there are several strands of anticipation in the Old Testament that depict the coming of Christ in far more violent imagery. The Apostles were originally expecting the King on the Horse – they expected violent overthrow, they expected harsh, exacting punishment. They expected unapologetic, uncontested RULE.

And what they got was a King on a donkey; humbly offering peace and reconciliation – in his own blood.

Now, that isn't to say that those Old Testament threads about the Conquering King were inaccurate – it is just to say that they are temporarily deferred. The mystery of the Gospel is that before he comes to crush, he comes to comfort. Before he comes to rule, he comes to reconcile. Before he imposes Dominion, he invites surrender.

He makes his FIRST approach to the city and to the world – humble, lowly, and riding on a donkey. He comes offering peace. He comes inviting surrender – thanks be to God!

The second thing we see in this story is:

A limitation imposed

Many of us are only familiar with verse 9 because it is verse 9 that is cited in Matthew 21 – but there is a verse 10 and verse 10 is important as well. Let’s look at it again. The King is depicted as making his approach in peace. He is humble and lowly and riding on a donkey – even the foal of a donkey. Verse 10:

“I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations” (Zechariah 9:10 ESV)

The “I” in that passage is God. God is saying that when the Messiah comes, HE – GOD – will cut off from the covenant community all recourse to the weapons of war. He shall speak peace to the nations – that is Messiah shall speak peace to the nations – and those who follow him and support him must conduct themselves in line with his example. Thomas McComiskey, commenting on this picture says here:

“So it has always been that the church does not effectively spread the gospel by sword or by arrogance, but by mirroring the humble spirit of its king and saviour.”²

You can’t convert people by the sword – right? Not in any real sense. You can’t COERCE people to love Jesus. You can’t use POWER to compel people to worship God. It is human nature to think that is the case, but I think we know in our heart of hearts that it is ultimately a fool’s errand. It took the disciples a while to get there. When the guards came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples asked Jesus if they should protect him by the means of the sword – do you remember that? Luke 22:49-51 says:

And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

² Thomas E. McComiskey, *Zechariah* in *The Minor Prophets Volume Three* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 1166.

⁵¹ But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. (Luke 22:49–51 ESV)

No more of this. NO MORE OF THIS - what does that sound like?

It sounds like Zechariah 9:10. The King forbids his people the use of the sword for the expansion of his Kingdom. That isn't the way forward – and the Apostles came to understand that, so for example the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 says:

For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4–5 NKJV)

The CARNAL sword – the physical sword – is DENIED to the people of Christ FOR the extension of his rule and reign. There is a sword that is legitimate – that sword is currently in the hands of the magistrate for the purpose of restraining evil and promoting good in human society. The Apostle Paul says that in Romans 13; speaking about the earthly king or the civil magistrate there he says:

“he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.” (Romans 13:4–5 ESV)

So FORCE and VIOLENCE are permitted to the CIVIL magistrate to restrain evil and to promote good – but such things are expressly forbidden to the people of God for the purpose of extending Christ’s kingdom.

Practically speaking, that means that you can serve as a police officer or as a soldier – and you can use force in the execution of your lawfully assigned duties – but you can't use those same weapons to promote the cause of Christ. Jesus forbids you to have those tools in your hands when you have his name on your lips.

Does that make sense? It hasn't always.

John Bunyan – the old Baptist Pastor from the 17th century found it necessary to remind his people about the danger of coveting the TOOLS of the STATE for the purpose of advancing the Gospel. He said:

“The church therefore, as a church, must use such weapons as are proper to her as such; and the magistrate, as a magistrate, must use such weapons as are proper to him as such.”³

Bunyan was aware that in seasons of strength Christians might be tempted to seize the power of the state to put their foot on the scale, as it were, in favour of the cause of Christ. Don't do that, he says. Peter wasn't allowed to do that in the garden, and we aren't allowed to do it now in contemporary society. The concern I have today, is actually the exact opposite of John Bunyan's. Bunyan was worried about what Christians might do in a position of power – I'm worried about what they might do in a position of weakness. Might we at some point attempt to use what influence and means remain to us to seize the power of the state to arrest our decline in the culture?

Either way, that is not the weapon that was assigned to us. We were given the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and we must wield THAT WEAPON if we are to receive our eternal reward.

I know we want the warhorse, but our way is the way of the donkey.

WE SPEAK PEACE from a POSTURE OF HUMILITY – that is what our Master did, and that is what the Apostles did and that is what we must DO and CAN DO because we have been promised that our efforts will be successful. Old Testament and New this assurance has been given to us. The prophet Isaiah said:

³ John Bunyan, *Of Antichrist And His Ruin* (Bolton: First Rate Publishers, 2022), 47.

¹⁰ “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10–11 ESV)

The Word of God – like Head and Shoulders Shampoo – is never not working! Do you know that commercial? They play it during football games because the star of the commercial is Troy Palumalo who use to play for Pittsburgh. He’s got fabulous hair and in the commercial he’s the never not working guy – he works at the car wash, he works at the golf course, he works at the dentist office – he’s NEVER NOT WORKING – just like head and shoulders shampoo – go and buy some today – that’s the commercial – and that’s also the promise of Isaiah 55:10-11. Every time you use the weapon that God has put in your hands and that the King has promised to bless – it is never not working! Every time you let it out – it accomplishes the purpose for which it has been sent! When you teach it around your dinner table – IT IS NEVER NOT WORKING! When you preach it from the pulpit of your church – IT IS NEVER NOT WORKING! When you send it out over the airwaves or upon the internet – IT IS NEVER NOT WORKING!

The Word of God is powerful and sufficient!

The Word of God DID IT ALL in the days of the early church; the Word of God did it all in the days of the reformation; and the Word of God will DO IT ALL again in our DAY if we will only continue to trust in it.

So we’ve seen an invitation extended, and a limitation imposed, and now in the final section of this passage we see a glorious future promised.

A glorious future promised

Look at the last part of verse 10. Despite making his approach in lowliness and humility; despite forbidding the weapons of war to his disciples and followers, nevertheless:

“his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”
(Zechariah 9:10 ESV)

This verse is actually a Messianic interpretation of Psalm 72:8 which says:

“May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!” (Psalm 72:8 ESV)

Psalm 72:8 was originally a prayer written for the coronation of Solomon. That’s why it says “MAY” instead of “SHALL” – and that prayer was PARTIALLY answered in the rule of Solomon. His dominion was MASSIVE! Under his kingship Israel became a legitimate Empire. They controlled territory in Egypt, Africa, and all the way into what is now Iraq and Syria. Under Solomon they controlled the centre of the geo-political board – but then as you know, at the end of Solomon’s reign, it all began to fall apart. Because Solomon was not Jesus.

We often say that David and Solomon together were like an arrow shot at the sun. They point us in the right direction before ultimately falling tragically short, and so this prayer for Solomon the Son of David, becomes a prophetic expectation – that one Greater than Solomon would come who would fulfil this promise perfectly. So even in the Old Testament we see prayers and prophecies about David and the son of David being pushed forward to land on Messiah. That’s what is happening in Zechariah 9! Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham says here, commenting on Zechariah’s use of Psalm 72:

“This quotation clearly shows that messianic interpretation of some psalms occurred long before the Christian era, because Zechariah is clearly prophesying a future ruler, not commenting on a past one.”⁴

Are you seeing that? So even in the Old Testament these threads are landing on Messiah. There was a hope – there was an expectation – that a Greater than Solomon would come and that his reign would EXCEED that of Solomon – that it would do MORE than fill the Middle East – that it would extend from the River to the ends of the earth.

⁴ Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 83.

And Jesus stepped into that line of anticipation – he referred to himself as the Greater than Solomon in Matthew 12:42; he said:

“behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:42 ESV)

He is the true Son of David. He is the King we have been waiting for. He is the one whose Dominion will spread from the River to the ends of the earth. That’s why Jesus said to his Apostles:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19–20 ESV)

Jesus compared his Kingdom to a tiny little mustard seed:

“which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” (Mark 4:30–32 ESV)

What is being pictured there is slow, gradual, inexorable ADVANCE – that expectation is rooted in prophecies such as this one we are looking at in Zechariah 9 and 10. Later in Zechariah’s depiction the prophet provides a snapshot of the nature and manner of this slow, gradual, inexorable advance; speaking of the King’s followers, he says:

“They shall be like mighty men in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets; they shall fight because the LORD is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses.” (Zechariah 10:5 ESV)

The prophecy says that the people of Messiah – though denied the traditional weapons of warfare – will advance like FOOT SOLDIERS who are strong enough to defeat MOUNTED CALVARY.

The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary says here:

“The simile is intended to describe triumphant conquest in the face of overwhelming odds, footmen against cavalry. The fact that they have fought at all and not fled in retreat admits of only one explanation, *the Lord is with them.*”⁵

It goes on to say:

“Those who in their submission to the Lord are like sheep become invincible as war-horses in his service.”⁶

That’s what is being depicted here: a powerful, resilient, Spirit-filled, Christ-imitating, opposition overcoming, **ADVANCING CHURCH** – praise the Lord!

The Lord has come – and the Lord is with his people. To them and **THROUGH THEM** he has extended his gracious invitation. He invites all people everywhere to be reconciled to their Creator through his own blood, shed on the cross for the remission of sins. He has **COME** to speak peace to the nations.

So come! Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing!

Come. Come unto Jesus in this season of **PEACE** and be reconciled to your Creator! The door is open. The offer is free and all are welcome. Come. Come today. There is water in that tank. There are T-shirts in the back – if you heard the invitation and you want to respond today, there is no one who will stand in your way.

Come.

The invitation of the King still stands – as do the restrictions he has imposed. Those of us who follow him must still seek to advance his cause in the authorized way. We may have to absorb

⁵ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 28 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 188.

⁶ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 28 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 187.

some punishment – it may feel like an uphill slog against superior forces, but rest assured brothers and sisters, the Lord is with us and he has promised us certain victory.

So trust your tools, watch your attitude, follow the man on the donkey and play the long game.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble
and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9 ESV)

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.