

Zechariah 9 (9) – What I Want or What I Need?

This verse of scripture is an Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah, the promised and prophesied deliverer of God's people. It points to the events of what we call Palm Sunday, which is the start of what we call the Holy Week, or Passion Week. And it pictures Jesus, as the Messiah, humbly entering Jerusalem, bringing salvation, and mounted on a donkey.

The gospel accounts of the New Testament describe how these events unfolded. So, let's turn to John chapter 12, and read vs.9-19.

It is six days before the Passover Feast, and Jerusalem was packed with people who had come to celebrate. Jesus was staying at Martha, Mary, and Lazarus' home in Bethany, outside of Jerusalem. And people were watching every move Jesus made. Why? Because he had been performing many miracles. And he had raised Lazarus from the dead. There were many witnesses of these things. And people believed that Jesus was the deliverer that they had been waiting for. And the religious leaders were afraid, because Jesus was upsetting their way of life, and threatening their power.

This is John 11:45-48 – *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."* And vs.53 says – *So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.* But they weren't sure where Jesus would be. Would he show up in Jerusalem for the Passover?

Palm Sunday gave them the answer. And here comes Jesus, riding in on a donkey, in what we call his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem. But what people were expecting Jesus to do in Jerusalem, this is why the title of our sermon is "*What I Want or What I Need?*" It was a triumph, but it was wrapped in a tragedy. And even the disciples of Jesus didn't understand it yet.

Why would the people think that Jesus was the Messiah, the deliverer? Well, for one thing, the famous John the Baptist had declared that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. And Jesus had been performing all those miracles, healing the wounded, making the blind to see, the lame to walk, calming the storms, walking on water, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons, and raising people from the dead. News of him spread far and wide. And he had been talking about salvation. And he spoke with authority. He wasn't like anyone else. And he challenged the religious establishment.

Here was someone the people could believe in, someone with power. And now here he was fulfilling a very specific prophecy about the Messiah from the scriptures. The people were desperate for the Messiah, and all these signs pointed to Jesus. It is no wonder the people thought that salvation was near. And it was. Imagine how their faith would be built up seeing Jesus, the miracle worker, the man with power and authority, coming in on the donkey, a visual declaration of the people's greatest hope. It was only natural that the people erupted in an explosive parade of praise to God!

This morning we read from Psalm 118. Vs.25-26 contain the phrase and the declaration that the people were shouting as Jesus entered Jerusalem. Our English word "hosanna" comes from a Hebrew phrase that means "save now." Basically, it can be said to be a cry of "Help!" In this Psalm it is answered with "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD." The people were shouting this out as Jesus made his way into Jerusalem on that donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9 and Psalm 118.

The palm branch is a symbol of victory and joy. It was used at the feast of tabernacles, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, as thanksgiving to God for the ingathered fruits. The waving of palm branches and crying of hosanna was a tradition which had its roots 200 years previously, following the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was prophesied about in the book of Daniel (7:8,20,24-25 / 8:9-12,23-25 / 9:26-27 / 11:21-39). He was a type of the Antichrist. He placed a statue of Zeus in the temple, and slaughtered a pig

in the Holy of Holies. Epiphanes beat the Jews into submission, but after several years of this, a man named Judas Maccabee, whose name meant “hammer,” and his brothers decided to stop Antiochus Epiphanes, so they launched a war against him. About nine years later, Maccabee and his band of renegades miraculously overcame and drove Epiphanies from Jerusalem. And the people spontaneously celebrated by waving palm branches.

Over the centuries “hosanna” stopped being merely a cry for help and now it also became a shout of hope and exultation. It used to mean, “Save us now!” but gradually, it also came to mean, “Salvation has come!” This is a plea and a praise, it is both “Help!” and “Hallelujah!” Hosanna is a cry for salvation (deliverance), while at the same time it is a declaration of praise.

Here in John’s account, 200 years after Maccabee, the Jews find themselves oppressed again, by the Romans. Consequently, what the people were essentially saying when they cried hosanna and waved palm branches as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, was, “Here is our deliverer.” And “Deliver us from the Romans.” The great crowd was publicly proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. It was a big deal. But the people believed that the deliverance Jesus would bring was about the overthrow of Roman rule and the establishment of an earthly kingdom, and this was going to be the start of it, right now. They were declaring Jesus to be the King of Israel.

And Jesus agreed with the crowd. He was the Messiah, the Christ, the King. Luke 19:38-40 says that the people were *saying*, “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*” And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “*Teacher, rebuke your disciples.*” He answered, “*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.*”

This was the promised and prophesied moment of the Messiah’s entry into Jerusalem. However, the celebration and coronation wouldn’t last. Just five days later, when the people realized Jesus had a different agenda than a political one, a different agenda than a national one, a different agenda than a material one – some changed their cry from “Hosanna!” to “Crucify him!”

What the people wanted was deliverance from the bondage of Rome. What the people needed was deliverance from the bondage of sin. They wanted political freedom and prosperity. But Jesus did not come to save us from our social situation. He came to save us from our sinful situation.

Just as it was then, so it is today. People have these expectations about Jesus. And when their felt needs aren't met, they'll turn from Jesus. Some won't turn from Jesus outright. But they will look for a church and a message that suits their desires. It's what they want, but it's not what they need. And the modern man and the modern machine are just as determined to put a stop to the true message today as they were back then.

You know, it is one thing to shout at a parade, and something else altogether to stand at the foot of the Cross. And it is one thing to cry out against the sins of others, but quite another to suffer the death of your own self and your sin.

People can have all sorts of redemptive things happen in their lives, and seem to believe in Jesus for a while. But then, life gets in the way, and people fall away. Because people want to see Jesus through the lens of life instead of seeing life through the lens of Jesus. Times get tough, and Jesus doesn't seem to be helping in the same way he seemed like he was doing before. And so, they seem to lose their faith. It's just like some of those who followed Jesus after he raised Lazarus. They came into Jerusalem shouting "Hosanna!" and just five days later they were shouting "Crucify him!" The fickleness of our faith. The stubbornness of our sin. And the great need we have is for Jesus. Not to simply show us signs, but to change our hearts.

In the search for deliverance, many seemingly turn to "God," but unless they are born again by faith in Christ, they are just seeking peace of mind, happiness, relief from guilt, significance, success, and fulfillment in their lives. Now those things aren't bad in and of themselves, but there are always people who want Jesus only for those benefits. And there are always people who try and "sell" a Jesus that does all that, without any real cost. People are all too eager to have their ears tickled, instead of their hearts changed.

There are certainly benefits that we get from being children of God in this life (Romans 15:13 / 1 Timothy 4:8). But to seek those things as our primary motivation means that we are not actually seeking God, we are just seeking benefits. And that is why we have so many who seem to be Christians but are actually not Christians, they aren't actually born again. And when they find that Christ is about death to self and living for God, even if there is no worldly success, and when persecution and affliction and suffering come, then THIS is the Jesus that people reject.

Too often, people aren't looking for God, they are looking for a hiding place from God, so they can rest assured in their own achievements and be satisfied with their own success, and not have to dwell on the thoughts of their own sin and true misery. Instead of crying "save us from our sin and ourselves," they are crying "save us so we can live by ourselves." People are looking for someone to give them power, not to the One who IS power. What we want is what Jesus can give us. But what we need is Jesus himself, no matter what he gives us.

I want to make sure you understand something. Listen carefully. This is not about having to choose between want and need. Like you'll either get what you want, or what you need. Or that God won't give you what you want, but that whatever happens is what you need. Or as if God is only going to give you what you need, and never what you want. Or that if you strive for what you want, God will never give you what you need.

What you want and what you need don't have to be mutually exclusive things. And the sanctified life isn't just a game of whatever will be will be. This is not about having to choose between want and need. This is about what you really need becoming what you really want.

You see, what you need is Jesus, whether he gives you what you want or what you feel like you need. Jesus in the center. Jesus as the aim. Jesus as the focus. Jesus as the goal. Whatever else is going on. It is not, "Jesus give me this," but "Jesus give me you, as I go for this, or go through this." And "Jesus,

if you're not in it, I don't want it." That is how you can discern the times of your life. That is how you can have spiritual stability in rough and uncertain waters. That is how you won't miss what Jesus is doing, through all the ups and downs and all arounds. That is how you learn to trust him.

The people wanted a deliverer. And Jesus was and is that deliverer. But he was bringing them the deliverance they needed most first. But they were blinded by their wants, their felt needs, not their most important needs. And they wanted Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom. And he will do just that. But in his own timing. Not our felt needs for timing.

Even after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples misunderstood this. In Acts 1:6-8, *when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

They were waving palm branches. It had been done before, and it will be done again, in heaven. Revelation 7:9-10 says – *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, And crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* These are the saints who die in the tribulation, as well as all the dead saints of the past, just before Jesus comes again to take possession of his kingdom.

Jesus has an agenda, and he will do everything he says he is going to do. But you won't always know exactly how it's going to go moment by moment. You need to keep your eyes on him, and not your idea of his agenda. This is true for the big picture of the body of Christ, and the return of Jesus. And it's also true for our own personal lives. What you need is Jesus, whether he gives you whatever else you feel like you need. That's when your hosanna's ring most true, when what you really need becomes what you really want.