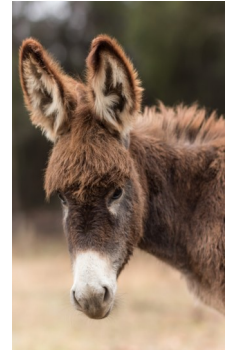


What Then?
Zechariah 8: 3-8; 9:9-10; Matthew 21:1-17
Palm Sunday, West Valley Presbyterian Church
April 2, 2023



Zechariah 8:3-8, 9:9-10

³This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

⁴This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. ⁵The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

⁶This is what the LORD Almighty says: "It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" declares the LORD Almighty.

⁷This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. ⁸I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses 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^[a] to the ends of the earth.

Matthew 21:1-17

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”^[a]

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna^[b] to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[c]

“Hosanna^[d] in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

¹²Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,^[e] but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’^[f]”

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

¹⁶“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise^[g]?”

¹⁷And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Here ends the reading of God’s Holy Word. Thanks be to God.

What Then?

Zechariah’s prophecies were made in about 500 BC, give or take a decade or two. And he does indeed predict a gentle king, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey rather than on a warhorse, with no chariots, no weapons. This king will rule by the power of God rather than by military power. We

know that because Zechariah says that his rule will extend throughout the whole earth, without a massive military, or indeed, without any military at all. If that's going to happen, then that has to be God, right?

And Jerusalem will be the center of this king's rule. The Almighty God will dwell there, and the city will be a place of truth and holiness. And joy. Playing children will fill the streets, and everyone will have a long and happy life. The people will be God's people, and God will live faithfully and righteously in their midst.

So. 500 years later, here comes Jesus, in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecies. Riding on a donkey rather than a warhorse. A gentle king. The people around him understood the meaning of what Jesus was doing. Matthew helpfully cites the Zechariah passage that Jesus is fulfilling, for the benefit of us later readers; but the people around him on that day didn't need a cheat sheet. They knew what Jesus was doing. And so they shouted things like, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" – the Messiah. And, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" – again, the Messiah. And, "Hosanna in the highest!" – thanking God for finally hearing their prayers and sending the Promised One.

But then what? Did Jesus ride over to the Antonia fortress, where the Roman soldiers were stationed? Which was nearly kitty-corner to the Temple itself, so that the soldiers could keep an eye on the crowds and see to it that there was no trouble? No, he did not. Did Jesus drive out the weapons bearers? No, he did not. Jesus went to the Temple, not the fortress. Right? He created a disturbance in the Temple, not in the fortress. Right? He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of the dove sellers. Right? He did not turn over the tables nor the benches of the Romans. What was that about? The Romans were the oppressors, right? Shouldn't he have gone after them?

Well, he didn't. History tells us that the Romans continued to rule in Jerusalem for the next 600 years: first with great brutality until about 136 AD, when the Jewish state ceased to exist as a political entity. Jerusalem was wiped off the map and renamed Aelia Capitolina, and most of the Jewish population killed or enslaved. Later Roman rule in the area was mostly a rule of neglect. Eventually the Persians conquered what was left of the Roman empire in 614 AD, including what had once been Judea.

Clearly, Jesus' fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy didn't have anything to do with a kingdom on earth. It had nothing to do with political victory at all. Jesus himself did not rule in Jerusalem for a single day. The Jewish people did not gain self-rule in Jerusalem; and they didn't even live there for very much longer. Their external circumstances didn't change as a result of Jesus' Messianic entry into Jerusalem. So what was that ride about?

It has been nearly 2000 years now since Jesus rode in Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a war horse, in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. I think we've figured out by now that Jesus wasn't about changing external circumstances; Jesus was about changing our relationship to God. He went to the Temple, remember, not the fortress. He was not, and is not, interested in changing the politics of his day.

And, Jesus still IS about changing our relationship to God. That's what he cared about back then. That's still what he cares about right now. Do you remember a time when Jesus came into your life? It might have happened more than once. Probably has! Perhaps there was a time in your life when you were converted. Perhaps you can remember how things were before Jesus, and you can point to things that are different now because of what he's done in your life. Or, perhaps you grew up knowing about Jesus; there was never a before-Jesus time that you can remember. In that case, you can look back and see where Jesus influenced a choice that you made, or answered a prayer in an unexpected way. Either way, whether you are a convert or whether you've always belonged to Jesus, it doesn't matter. What matters is that Jesus HAS ridden into your life.

If he has, your internal circumstances will change. There may also be external changes, like what we've heard about from Teen Challenge: getting off of drugs and alcohol, going back to school, learning how to minister to others. But all those externals? Those are not as important as the internals, because it's the internal change that drives external change that's needed. For instance, the Bible tells us that when Paul was converted, his entire theology was turned upside down. Instead of trying to defend God from this crazy-sounding teaching about Jesus as God's Son, Paul devoted the rest of his life to spreading teaching about Jesus that was both powerful and true. Yes, Paul's external life changed from being a zealous rabbi who persecuted Jewish Christians, to being instead a preacher of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. The external changes that people could see? Those were not as important as the internal changes, that people could not see. The internal changes that Jesus caused by blasting his way into Saul's life, not only changed Saul into Paul, but also changed history.

What kind of internal changes does Jesus bring about? Usually our situations, 2000 years later, are not quite so dramatic. But the changes are very real. For instance, Jesus teaches us to love one another as he loves us – even if we don't like the other person, as we have been reading in the Sermon on the Mount. Doesn't matter. Jesus makes it possible for us to love them anyway. He does that by increasing our thirst for God's Word, and our desire for prayer. He increases our tolerance for the people around us; he teaches us how to pray for them. For example: suppose you have an officemate who likes to wear lots of clanky jewelry. Or listen to rap. Or something else that really gets on your nerves after awhile! But what if you pray for the person, instead of griping about her? I can testify that if you do that, over time, you'll probably come to appreciate her good qualities and her value as a child of God. If you pray for her, she may or may not change; but you probably will.

Jesus didn't call down fire on the Antonia fortress 2000 years ago. And Jesus most likely won't destroy our enemies today, political or otherwise. But he will be delighted to enter more fully into your life, and transform you, so that you then can be a source of peace, and of love, and of joy. As we remember him riding into Jerusalem long ago, let's ask him to ride also into our souls, so that his reign of peace can come about through us, his people. Let's pray.