

The Triumphal Entry Guarantees the Triumphal Return

Pastor Chris Baker //04.02.23 // Centralia FBC

Good morning, church! Happy Palm Sunday. Jerry read to us from Matthew 21 earlier in the service about how Jesus entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover. John's gospel tells us the crowd laid down palm branches on the road as He entered the city, so the name Palm Sunday has stuck now for over 2,000 years.

We're going to read from the prophet Zechariah this morning. That can be a tough book to find. If you have one of the black pew Bibles, it's on page 845 in that one. If you don't, the easiest way to find Zechariah is to open to the first book New Testament, Matthew, and then just turn back a few pages. You'll see Malachi and then Zechariah.

While you're turning there I want to draw your attention back to a connection the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to make in chapter 21 of his gospel.

Based on the way Matthew tells the story of Jesus's life, we're pretty sure he's writing for a primarily Jewish audience. And so, when he's recording the story of Palm Sunday, he does something the other gospel writers don't do. You can find this story, what we call the Triumphal Entry, in all four gospels. It's in Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12. Reading all four accounts would be an awesome way to use your Sunday afternoon, by the way.

Matthew, knowing that his readers would be familiar with the prophet Zechariah, points them back to something very important. I want to read it again to you. It'll be on the screen so you can follow along:

Matthew 21:1-5

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, telling them, "Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once."

This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:

***Tell Daughter Zion,
"See, your King is coming to you,
gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt,
the foal of a donkey."***

Matthew had to have an 'aha' moment somewhere along the way. Maybe it was as these events were happening, maybe it was after, maybe it was right when sat down to write his gospel. We don't know that, but what we *do* know is that this wasn't an 'aha' moment for God. God is sovereign over ALL the events of the world and as He was speaking through the prophet Zechariah, He knew exactly how these words

would be fulfilled hundreds of years later when this roaming preacher from Galilee traipsed into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday.

We're going to read Zechariah 9:9-17 and try to wrap our minds around just how amazing our God is as He wove history together to save His people.

Read Zechariah 9:9-17

Pray

"I shall return." That is the iconic phrase uttered by General Douglas MacArthur to the assembled press in Australia some 81 years ago this month. MacArthur had to relocate his Pacific command from the Philippines to Australia due to the advance of Japanese troops. 'I shall return' became his refrain and as the tide turned in World War II, MacArthur pushed and pushed to reinvade the Philippines and fulfill his promise.

On Oct. 20th, 1944 he made good on his word. That day, he again addressed the media:

People of the Philippines: I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God our forces stand again on Philippine soil—soil consecrated in the blood of our two peoples. We have come dedicated and committed to the task of destroying every vestige of enemy control over your daily lives, and of restoring upon a foundation of indestructible strength, the liberties of your people.

(MacArthur, Douglas (1964). Reminiscences of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Annapolis: Bluejacket Books.)

I shall return became I have returned. MacArthur's promise came true. He was the first to admit, though, that it wasn't him. It wasn't his word or his willpower that made it happen. In fact, he was nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor three times before it was finally awarded to him. Even then, he said ""this award was intended not so much for me personally as it is a recognition of the indomitable courage of the gallant army which it was my honor to command."

(1975). Volume 2, 1941-1945. The Years of MacArthur. Boston: Houghton Mifflin)

Even though he was a man of great resources, MacArthur recognized there was much beyond his control in war and in life.

Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was more than just a declaration that He had arrived. It was Jesus Himself declaring I shall return. And there is no force beyond His control so we know that His promise will come to fruition.

The big picture truth we learn from setting Zechariah 9 beside Matthew 21 is this: ***The Triumphal Entry Guarantees the Triumphal Return***

Zechariah 9 is an incredible chapter and I wish we had time to study the whole thing.

God unfolds massive swaths of history in these 17 verses. The beginning of the chapter, most scholars think, lays out what Alexander the Great accomplished in the period between Zechariah and Jesus.

Verse 9 is very clearly fulfilled in Jesus. Verse 10 on down through the beginning of verse 14 were probably fulfilled already in the history of Israel according to most Bible scholars. But the second half of verse 14 through the end of the chapter almost certainly deal with what we'll call the triumphal return, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

So that's how we'll approach the text today. We'll see the triumphal entry as cause for rejoicing and the triumphal return as cause for reflection. And because God's Word is true, the triumphal entry guarantees the triumphal return. Because God *has been* true to His Word, we know God *will be* true to His word. The triumphal entry is historical fact. The triumphal return is just as certain. It's just as certain that it will happen in the future as it is that these other events happened in the past. God's promises are facts. That wasn't true of General MacArthur's promise. He relied on others to bring it to reality. God relies on no one else.

Both comings of Christ—the first that has happened and the second that is yet to come—teach us much about God and about ourselves. We'll see a little bit of both reflected in this text.

God's promises are facts, and the fact of God's Word is that for His people, the triumphal entry is cause for celebration. That's what we learn in verse 9, look at it again:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem!

Look, your King is coming to you;

he is righteous and victorious,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The Triumphal Entry is cause for Celebration

Rejoice!

The first command of this passage is to rejoice. God saved me when I was in eighth grade and we started attending a little Baptist church near where I grew up. On Sunday evenings, we had youth choir practice and there's a song we sang based on Philippians 4. *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.*

Our choir director, who was the mom of one of the other students, would get onto us just about every time we sang that song because, according to her, we were saying rejoice with our mouths but not with our faces.

We do that, don't we? We sing about joy, but a lot of us are not really emotional people. As Baptists, our worship style doesn't try to create an emotional experience like some other denominations do. But, church, we can't let the joy that the gospel should generate in us go unexpressed.

The command in the original language here is to get ecstatic. It's to flip out. It's not 'yay, Jesus.' It's a whole body response. And don't miss this. Rejoicing is not a suggestion, it's a command.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Become mature, be encouraged, be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.

1 Peter 4:13

Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed.

1 Thessalonians 5:

15 See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray constantly, 18 give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Church, we have reason for joy because our king has come. Joy to the world, we sing at Christmas, the Lord is come. That song is actually more about the second coming than the first one and it really would be just as appropriate as an Easter song.

Zechariah includes four reasons we can rejoice at the coming of Jesus today as we remember his triumphal entry in to Jerusalem.

Number one, the First Coming reveals a Royal Jesus

Royal

Look, your King is coming to you. After Jesus came into Jerusalem, it would only be five short days later that He is crucified under a placard that read Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. That was a mocking title in the minds of Pilate and the Romans, but it couldn't be more true.

The people of Zechariah's day needed a king to come. He wrote around 20 years after God's people returned from exile in Babylon. They had hoped for revival. They had hoped for things to get better, but they simply didn't. They were no better off morally or as a nation than they were during the exile. Their time is called the 'day of small things' in Zechariah 4. They desperately needed a king to lead them. They had to wait 500 more years.

Church, we need the same King. And we're blessed to know Him in a way the people of Zechariah's day never did.

In Revelation 19:16 Jesus is given the full title "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." That's the highest position possible. It means He has absolute power over all creation.

There is no power, no king, and no lord who can oppose Him and win. We give Satan too much credit sometimes. Sure, he's much more powerful than you or I or any other person. But when it comes to his conflict with Jesus, it's Creator versus creation. Satan has no chance against Jesus. Nor does any other ruler.

The writer of Hebrews says this about Jesus: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Hebrews 1:3).

He sustains all things by His powerful word. His rule over creation is absolute.

And we need to be reminded, church, that His rule over us is absolute as well. He is our King and He demands our allegiance, He demands our obedience, He demands our worship. Because as King, He is everything that we need and everything we cannot be. That's why Zechariah reveals that this royal Jesus is also a righteous Jesus.

Righteous

That means He deals justly, He deals righteously. He will do what is right.

Righteousness is behavior that is morally justifiable. We just saw the standard for moral righteousness if you were here as we finished the Exodus series. It looks like upholding God's Law in your thoughts, words, and actions.

It's what the people of Zechariah's day needed the most. It's what we need, too. The bad news is righteousness is not possible for man to attain on his own; the standard is simply too high. The good news is that righteousness is possible through the cleansing of sin by Jesus Christ.

We learn about an exchange that takes place on the cross in the New Testament. Paul writes this:

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

He never broke the Law, He never did anything unrighteous. So there's this beautiful exchange that takes place at the moment of salvation in which our guilt is transferred to Jesus and His righteousness is transferred to us. Jesus came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday righteous. He went to the cross righteous, He rose from the dead righteous, He ascended back to the Father righteous, and now He sits at the Father's right Hand offering His righteousness to all who believe.

He's a royal Jesus, a righteous Jesus, and a victorious Jesus—according to Zechariah. He comes in righteousness and victory.

Victorious

Your King is coming to you, writes Zechariah, he is righteous and victorious.

Jesus is the one who has overcome the world. He is royal, righteous, and victorious. He said as much Himself in John 16.

John 16:33

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."

We still battle, but Jesus has overcome. We live in a fallen world, so we battle with sin and darkness. Our own and that of the world around us. We have sin in us, darkness in us that we're constantly fighting to overcome. And we battled the darkness around us, too. We saw it just this week. Human evil in a school shooting in Tennessee. The natural effects of a broken world in a tornado outbreak across multiple states on Friday.

All that is an outgrowth of sin. The fallenness of the world around us each and every day. Listen to 1 John 2:

16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

No matter how ugly things get in our own heart or in the world around us, we can draw strength and encouragement from God's Word, knowing that the ultimate, eternal victory has already been accomplished in Jesus.

As we overcome our own sin, as we see lost people saved, as we see saved people grow in their faith those are all wins. Those are all victories over the darkness that Jesus's victory on the cross made possible.

Our King overcomes what we can't overcome. He's victorious and the triumphal entry is a powerful reminder of that. But even though He possesses all the power, he doesn't wield it like a dictator. We learn He wields it with humility. He comes humble, not in a presidential motorcade or with the pomp and circumstance of a visiting dignitary. He comes on a donkey's colt.

Humble

Meek is the word the New Testament applies to this idea. Lowly, humble, quite different from other kings familiar either to Zechariah or those first century Jews who lined the road to Jerusalem.

The Hebrew word in Zechariah means "poor." That sounds like Jesus, doesn't it? You know, when they crucified Him, they took all of His belongings. You know what they had? One robe, that was it.

Matthew 8:20 Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Jesus is a humble King, so when we come to Him as sinners, we must come in humility. We acknowledge that we are beggars who come with nothing to offer Him but our sin and our need for salvation.

DT Niles, a Methodist pastor who was around several decades ago, captured it well when he said "Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find the bread."

When Jesus offers what we need—grace—accept it and then we devote ourselves to living out the humility we first experienced in Jesus.

He's our model. Jesus was not ashamed to humble Himself as a servant, even to death on the cross. In His humility, He was always obedient to the Father. Just like Him, we should be willing to put aside all selfishness and submit in obedience to God and His Word.

God has promised to give grace to the humble, while He opposes the proud. We see that in Proverbs 3.

The triumphal entry is cause for rejoicing at the arrival of a royal, righteous, victorious, and humble Jesus whom we imitate in our everyday lives. But this passage also reminds us of the triumphal return. Jesus's second coming will be very unlike the first. Look at verse 14:

The Triumphal Return is Cause for Reflection

Then the Lord will appear over them,

and his arrow will fly like lightning.

The Lord God will sound the ram's horn

and advance with the southern storms.

The Lord of Armies will defend them.

They will consume and conquer with slingstones;

they will drink and be rowdy as if with wine.

They will be as full as the sprinkling basin,

like those at the corners of the altar.

The Lord their God will save them on that day

as the flock of his people;

for they are like jewels in a crown,

sparkling over his land.

How lovely and beautiful!

Grain will make the young men flourish,

and new wine, the young women.

Two truths for reflection from these verses. First, the returning Jesus will defend His people.

Defend His People

Jesus's actions that final week in Jerusalem culminated in the sacrifice that secured His people for all eternity. The Lord *will* save His people on the day of His return, Zechariah writes. Knowing that truth should change the way we face so many of our battles. From persecution to abuse to physical pain, we can rest, church, in the truth of God's final protection.

There's a moment at the end of *The Return of the King* one of the books in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, that captures this idea well.

After the ring is destroyed at Mount Doom, Samwise Gamgee wakes up from his sleep surprised he is alive and surprised to see Gandalf. Then he says, "Is everything sad going to come untrue?"

When Zechariah the Lord their God will save them on that day, that's what he means. God will right every wrong. We trust that, but we don't live in that day yet, do we?

God's promise of protection doesn't guarantee we will never know pain or loss. Job's story shows us that. God is *able* to deliver us out of every struggle, but it may not be His will to do so. James 1 tells us God sometimes uses those difficulties to purify us. In fact, we learn there we can even count those difficulties as joy. Protecting us from trials is not always beneficial to us.

But we know there is a day coming when God will fully deliver His people. We still live in a world ruled by the brokenness that is a side effect of sin. Really, it's a world ruled by evil. So terrible things will continue. But there will come a day when all those things are a distant memory because God will save His people. He will rescue them from the hand of the evil one for good.

And speaking of evil, just as good as the second coming will be for the children of God, it will be a terrible thing for God's enemies.

Consume the Wicked

The Lord will consume and conquer, the text says, at the second coming. What is conquered? Evil. All the things we rightly understand to be evil in this world, sure, but it's not our standard of evil God uses. No, every person who does not cry out to Jesus Christ for salvation has rejected Him. They have declared themselves enemies of God. All of us, apart from salvation, are evil.

Romans 3:12 All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.

The Lord will consume and conquer those who have turned away. That's the truth of Zechariah 9 that will be revealed at the second coming.

We tend to see God as a kind, merciful Being whose love for us overrides and overshadows all His other attributes. Of course God is loving, kind, and merciful, but He is first and foremost holy and righteous.

He is so Holy that He cannot tolerate sin. In the very next chapter, Zechariah 10, God says His anger burns against those leaders who have been disobedient.

He is not only a loving God—He is love itself! But the Bible also tells us that He hates sin. Full stop. That might be an uncomfortable thought for you if you have a grandfatherly image of God floating around in your mind. But listen to Proverbs 6:16-19:

The Lord hates six things;

in fact, seven are detestable to him:

arrogant eyes, a lying tongue,

hands that shed innocent blood,

a heart that plots wicked schemes,

feet eager to run to evil,

*a lying witness who gives false testimony,
and one who stirs up trouble among brothers.*

The reality of hell is both absolute and abhorrent. Hell is real. Eternal punishment is the reality for those who reject Jesus. But the good news is that God doesn't want that for anyone. God's grace works in such a way that if any of us find God, if any of us make it to heaven, it is 100% by the God's grace in such a way that none of our works got us there. But if we reject God and are punished in hell it is 100% our fault because God desires—even commands—everyone to repent and turn to Him for salvation.

1 Timothy 2:3 This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Our sin has earned us a debt we can't pay. It has earned us death and the wrath of a Holy God.

But because He is merciful. Because He is loving, God provided His own payment for our sin. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross for us.

If we confess our sin and place our faith in Christ, asking for God's forgiveness based on Christ's sacrifice, we are saved. God loved us so much that He provided the means for our salvation, but make no mistake—if we reject His gift of eternal life, we will face the eternal consequences of that decision.

That's not what God wants for you, church. God wants to bring His people joy! Look at the end of our text.

Bring His People Joy

How lovely and beautiful!

*Grain will make the young men flourish,
and new wine, the young women.*

Everything you need for joy arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. God provides all we need for peace. He provided the sacrifice, He is the one who gives life. He's the one who throws the celebration for His children! He sends the food and he sends the drink—that's what verse 17 says. We have all we need for happiness in this life and in eternity because on Palm Sunday, the man Jesus Christ of Nazareth—who was much more than a man—rode a donkey into Jerusalem. Was obedient even unto death and we know that is historical fact. We know it is true.

And because the triumphal entry is true, the triumphal return is guaranteed.

There is coming a King. I hope you'll be a part of His Kingdom. Let's pray.