



Sermon – March 28, 2021  
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**Verses Covered This Week**

*Zechariah 9:9 – 11*

*John 12:12 - 16*

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Zechariah chapter 9. Zechariah 9. As we continue this Love Reigns series, we're working our way through Old Testament passages that point ahead to the coming of Christ at Easter. We're going to turn our attention to a familiar text. This prophecy of Palm Sunday; this time of celebration that marks the entry point into the holy week. And I want you to know as we begin our message this morning that during the response time, I'm going to invite many of you to come and join me at the steps to pray. What better way to set our hearts towards Christ this holy week than to do it on our knees side by side in response to the word of God. We're coming to this text now. If you remember, last week we were in Numbers 21. Tim Skaggs led us so well thinking about how the Old Testament anticipated a future deliverer. But what we're going to notice now in Zechariah 9 is that Zechariah 9 anticipates a future king. And I want you to see the way that he uses the language of this prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 to talk about the coming of Christ at Palm Sunday.

<sup>9</sup>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, humbled and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment, I pray that You would center our hearts on Jesus. That the world around us would fade, that we'd be fixated on Your Son. That You would fill us by Your Spirit and change us by Your word. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Have you ever heard the name Thomas Nast? He was the first well-known political cartoonist in American history. He wrote for Harper's Weekly in New York in the 1860's and 70's. And

even if you don't know his name, you know his work. Because in our modern depictions of Santa Claus, they came out of his drawings. Or maybe you think of Uncle Sam. He was the one to originate those. But every four years, we get reacquainted with his political cartoon work whenever we see the election cycle happening. He's the one that popularized the concept of Republicans being elephants and Democrats being donkeys. And when you think about donkeys in our culture, they don't have a high standing. We took our kids to the zoo over Spring Break and there was nobody flocking to the donkey exhibit. You're not going to find donkeys on the logos of shirts or donkeys as the mascots for teams that are trying to intimidate the others. In fact, we stayed with some friends with farm animals not long ago and there were donkeys on the property and they got no love. The chickens and everything else got all of the attention. It seems as if they're insignificant in our culture. And yet when we come to this text in Zechariah 9, we find something surprising. That a donkey is at the center of this promise of salvation. But the thing is, we shouldn't be surprised by it. Because when you start looking through the entire story of Scripture, what you find is that donkeys show up over and over again at these major moments of what God is doing in bringing about a Messiah. Can you think of some examples when donkeys show up? Of course, Palm Sunday, we know that one. But some of you might have thought of when Joseph and Mary are on their way to Bethlehem while she's pregnant for the census, in order to be counted in the census and she's carrying Jesus. Well, in fact, if you look at the gospels, it doesn't actually mention a donkey there. Traditionists told us that that's the case, but it's not there in the text. So where do donkeys actually show up in the Scripture? Think about Genesis 2. Adam is given the charge to tame and name all of the animals. This would have included the donkeys. Just a few chapters later in Genesis 6:2 as Noah was loading animals two-by-two, there would have been a pair of donkeys clip-clopping their way onto the ark. When you look ahead into the life of Abraham. When he is instructed by God to go and to sacrifice his son, Isaac, they head out to the mountain and he carries his supplies with what? A donkey. And then when Jacob gives his blessings to his sons, as Israel bestows his promises, his prophecy upon his children, he speaks to Judah about how a scepter will not depart from him, that the kingship will come through Judah. And he describes him as a donkey. Then fast forward to the book of Exodus. When Moses has gone off on his own and God speaks to him at the burning bush, raises him up to now head back into Egypt in order to lead his people in the promised deliverance. Moses loads his family on a donkey to return to Egypt so that out of Egypt he might bring God's son. And once they escaped from Egypt and they enter into Sinai and Moses goes up on the mountain in Exodus 20 in order to receive the word of God, the Ten Commandments. You remember what that ninth one is. You shall not covet your neighbor's possessions. And in that list of possessions, it lists your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife. But you know what else it lists? Your neighbor's donkey. And then there's this interesting moment in the book of Numbers in chapters 22 through 24 where this prophet of an enemy's tribe is brought out to try to bring a curse upon Israel. His name is Balaam and he's unable to do it. And he is at the point of facing judgment by God. He is sent an angel of the Lord to take out Balaam for his temptation towards false prophecy. He is riding upon his donkey. His donkey halts in the middle of the travelling that they are doing and in that moment, God gives words to that donkey and he speaks to this prophet. He opens the mouth of this animal. And then coming out of that, he opens the mouth of this prophet from another tribe to speak a word of promise about how a star will come from Israel who will save the people from their sins. And then you begin to fast-forward as Israel goes into the promised land and they win their first victory at Jericho. They are commanded to devote everything to destruction. And when Joshua 6 gives us a list of what they do, it speaks about how they defeat and take out, not just the men, the women,

the children, but also the donkeys. And then once the people are settled in that promised land, we see the time of the judges come. This cycle of rejecting God, repenting, and being delivered by God. And God raises up this man named Samson who, on behalf of the people, goes out to fight against the Philistines. And in one episode, he picks up the jawbone of what? A donkey. And he takes out 1,000 of them through the bone of this farm animal. But perhaps most significantly for our text today, when you look at the anointing of David, when Samuel comes to him and announces to him that the kingship will come through him, that he is the chosen one, the anointed, the Messiah, the coming king; immediately following that in chapter 16, he is sent to the front lines of Israel to bring supplies. He later one defeats Goliath at that exact battle. And the way that he travels to get there, the way that he moves from his anointing to his victory is on a donkey. So why would we be surprised that when Zechariah speaks here of the promise of a deliverer, he comes and speaks of him as one who is riding on a donkey.

Now I want you to think about what's happening in this time of the writing of the prophet Zechariah. In fact, Zechariah has made headline news this month because archaeologists have just found for the first time in 60 years, new fragments, new dead sea scrolls. And these fragments happen to include Greek versions of this exact book of the Bible that we're looking at today. Zechariah is writing in a time after Israel's exile. Some of the people have come back. And yet it is hundreds of years before the coming of the Messiah he speaks about today. And it's in a time that is similar to ours. There's a sense of brokenness, hostility from the culture around us, a resistance to all that God is doing in their midst. And yet in this moment, God brings light in the midst of darkness. He speaks a word of prophecy. And in Zechariah 9 what we're going to find this morning is that Palm Sunday celebrates the promise of a future king.

So notice how that begins, looking back at verse 9 where we see how Palm Sunday celebrates the character of the King. Zechariah begins by describing the celebration that will come to all Israel. They will be full of rejoicing. And why is that? Because they see the King coming and they have clarity on His character. Notice the type of character on display here. We see at the start of the verse that He is an intentional king. It says, behold your King is coming to you. It will be normal throughout history for kings to have others come to them. And yet, this one is on a mission with intentionality. He goes to them. He pursues those who should be pursuing Him instead. And isn't that how God works throughout the Scriptures? He pursues His people. He goes to them. We see that especially clear during this Palm Sunday celebration as Jesus enters Jerusalem one final time.

But He's not just an intentional king. Notice what it shows us next. He's a righteous king. It says that in verse 9, He has righteousness and having salvation is he. He's a perfect reflection of the exact expectations and specifications of who God has designed to be king. If you think about it, every other king in Israel up until this time has fallen short of that standard. From David to Solomon to Jeroboam to everyone right down the line. They fall short of this call to righteousness. And because they are not perfect in their righteousness, they cannot receive the promises of the covenant. But there is one coming, he tells us, a future king who will be righteous. And a king, as it says there in verse 9, who doesn't take things from his people, but gives things to his people. What is that gift? As it says there, having salvation. It's as if this coming king has salvation as a gift to bestow. Righteousness is not just who he is, but what he offers to his people. He is a king who is righteous. But don't miss the way that Zechariah upends our expectations. He speaks of him here, not just as a righteous king, but at the end of

the verse, as a humble king. Do you see it? He says, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. So this word in the original language, humble, would mean lowly, gentle, poor, afflicted. The exact opposite of the expectation that you would have of a high and exalted king. He speaks here of a humble king. One that will come on a donkey and you, like me, maybe wondering. Why? Of all of the possible ways that this king could travel, would he come on a donkey. Well, in that time period, that wasn't the unusual occurrence that it might seem like today. You see, a king might use different modes of transportation, depending on the situation. Perhaps if he was seeking to conquer an enemy he might go out upon a war horse so that he could accomplish the victory. But do you know when a king would ride on a donkey? When the victory had already been accomplished. Because the donkey comes, not in order to achieve the victory, but to display the victory. If the king could ride on this lowly beast of seeming insignificance, it was a signal to all those around them that they were coming in a posture of peace. And that's exactly what we see happening in the triumphal entry of Jesus. And so hold your spot here in Zechariah 9 and slide over with me to the book of John, chapter 12. I want you to see the way that John speaks about the triumphal entry in his gospel. Each of the gospels talk about this moment in different ways. But I want you to see the way that he speaks of how this prophecy is fulfilled. John 12, verses 12 through 16. Here's what it says.

<sup>12</sup>The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>So they took branches of palm trees and went out to him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" <sup>14</sup>And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, <sup>15</sup>"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" <sup>16</sup>His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written down about him and had been done to him.

Can you sense the celebration all around Jesus as He makes His way in to the city at the center-place of the kingdom of God? The people celebrate. They wave the palm branches. They're showing, "Hosanna! Blessed are You. You're the king of Israel." They declare, "Fear not." Why? Because they recognize the coming of this future king that Zechariah 9 promised. But I don't want you to miss something that you might overlook in the text that we just read. Look back at verse 16. Notice the way it speaks about his disciples. His disciples did not understand these things at first. The crowd, even the disciples, got to celebration right, but the motivation wrong. They missed the mission of this king. They didn't recognize all that was happening. But notice how verse 16 goes on. It tells us that the resurrection then led to further reflection for the disciples. It says, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him. When Jesus was glorified in His resurrection, it changed the way they saw what took place. They understood the coming of the king, but they missed the character of the king. They thought that this was simply the beginning of the end. But in reality, did not recognize that it's the end of the beginning. That this king comes to bring peace and to do it in fulfilment of Zechariah 9. Just curious. By show of hands, were there any of you that have spent time in churches, like I did growing up, that had palm branches that you brought out on Palm Sunday? You kind of waved them around and had that celebration and ceremony. I see many of you did. And I loved that as a child. It was always fun to wave them in celebration. Although I noticed pretty quick after the service was over, celebration moved to confrontation. And the palm branches that we waved in celebration we were not instead acting out the lashes that Jesus got upon each other on Good Friday. And

it's amazing when you look at the holy week narrative in the gospels. How quickly the celebration of Palm Sunday leads to the confrontation that culminates on Good Friday. The people recognized their king was coming, but they missed the nature of His character. That He was intentional, that He was righteous, that He was humble. What does that mean for us, Central family? If the prophets hundreds of years before Jesus came, anticipated His coming, to the point that they even could tell you what type of animal he was coming on, doesn't that seem to suggest that they can give a pretty good picture of the nature of the character of that king? And if that's true, then the king, if the king is intentional, righteous, and humble, then shouldn't it be the case that the people of the king should do whatever it takes to pursue the same path? That we can be intentional towards one another in love. That we can pursue righteousness by the power of the Holy Spirit. That we could walk in humility. That's one of the reasons I love this weekend. Right now while we're gathered here, we have nearly 40 men from our church, from one of our life groups, out in East Texas for a men's retreat going deep in the word. And if you're one of their wives that are here surviving the weekend with their kids, there's an extra blessing for you when they get back later today. But while they're gathered there, they are pursuing Christ together. Longing to grow as men who are intentional, who are growing in righteousness, who are seeking humility just as Zechariah is modeling for us when it speaks about the character of the king.

But I want you to see the second half of this prophecy now as we turn our attention to verses 10 and 11. If you flip back to Zechariah 9, we'll notice that Palm Sunday also celebrates the covenant of the future king. Let's see how he speaks about it there in verses 10 and 11. The prophet doesn't just describe the character of the king, he also describes the covenant of the king. You're going to notice three different facets of this covenant that play out in verse 10 and 11. And the first one is right there in verse 10 when he shows us the peace of this future covenant. Notice how he says it. Start of verse 10:

<sup>10</sup>I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off,

So Palm Sunday is a celebration of a permanent peace. He speaks there of the chariot, the war horse, the battle bow. These would be three of the most essential weapons in an ancient army. And he says that they will be cut off. They will be no longer necessary. They will be destroyed. Why would military do that? The only reason that you would destroy your military equipment is if the victory had been won. If there was an ongoing threat from the enemy, you would preserve them in order to subdue them. But that's not what's happening here. It says that they have been cut off because the conquests of the future king will secure a lasting victory that will result in permanent peace. In the year before World War II, American car manufacturers created 3 million vehicles in one year. But once the war began, and the government converted normal consumer production into military production, that 3 million cars in one year stretched out over the next three plus years of the American military being in the battle, they only made approximately 150 cars during that time. It wasn't because gas prices were high. It wasn't because demand was low. It was because those factories were redeployed on a warfare footing. But once that victory was secured, once the war was over, the reverse happened. The military equipment that at one point was so important was salvaged for parts. Some of it was left off in mechanical graveyards. Others were melted down as scrap metal to be reused in other ways. In other words, it was cut off. The victory had been secured. The peace had been achieved. And

so the weapons of war were no longer needed. And that's what Zechariah speaks of here. That they are cut off. But you might miss this. When he speaks of this reality, he talks about it being true in Ephraim and Jerusalem. Why does he use those name? Well, because he is speaking of the northern and the southern kingdom of the people of God. If you remember, as you go through the Old Testament, there is division amongst them. Judah is separated out from the rest of Israel. They are eventually led into captivity in the exile and brought back. And when he speaks about how this is happening, both in Ephraim and in Jerusalem, he is talking about how through the victory of this coming king, it will not just bring peace, it will bring unity. That God will overcome the divisions that were there amongst his people. It will be a permanent peace.

But it's not just a permanent peace. Notice how verse 10 goes on. It's also a universal peace. That's why he says there, he shall speak peace to the nations. His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the rivers to the end of the earth. The peace that was shattered in Eden, the peace that was salvaged at the Exodus, the peace that was shaken by the exile, will now be restored. And it will not just be restored for God's people; it will be restored for all people. He speaks there of it being from sea to sea. And how does that happen? Well, Palm Sunday gives us a window into that. While the people are celebration of this king, we know what goes before him. That the road to peace is through agony. You remember Jesus on the cross, don't you? "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" The agony of the cross secures the peace of the covenant. The prophet speaks here about this peace that is universal in nature. And the way that we find that peace is not by pretending. It's not by ignoring. It's not by wishing. It's by submitting. We look to that king. We recognize that there is no peace on offer in this world and that instead God has given us a gift of His Son that He is our peace. And that's why we know that the church has been given a mission. That the universal peace that Zechariah 9:10 speaks about is what fuels the mission of the church. That's why if you remember in Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria." And even where? To the ends of the earth. The way that this peace goes forward is through the intentional and humble mission of the church. And that's why, Central family, we want to be a church committed to sending. That's why I love that a couple of weeks ago during Spring Break we had dozens of our students who were out on Jerusalem Project showing the love of Christ through service and sharing the love of Christ through evangelism. That's why you can walk on to A&M's campus every single week and find a group of our college students goes out to share the gospel. That's why in just a few minutes I'm going to share with you an Easter devotional that I'm going to invite you to participate in together with your family because we want to give you tools to have gospel conversations with your kids so that the Lord might use it to bring this peace, this universal peace into our hearts. Because the beauty of the gospel is that this peace that is promised to go out and cover every inch of this world, when we come to know Jesus and His Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, it covers every inch of our lives. That's the peace of the covenant that the prophet speaks of.

But he goes on there to speak next about the blood of the future covenant. And you'll see that there later on in the beginning of verse 11,

*As for you also, because of my covenant with you.*

So why will God rescue His people? Because of the blood of His covenant. And all the way from the beginning of the Bible, we see blood and covenant connected together at each step. So



when God speaks a word of covenant to Abraham in Genesis 15, it is sealed by blood. When God gives Moses instructions about how to live out the covenant he's given to his people, we see in Exodus 24 it is sealed by blood. When you come to the New Testament, on the night before Jesus is betrayed, as He is in that upper room having that last supper, He speaks about the bread and the cup. And do you remember what he says about the cup? This is the new covenant in my blood. There's this connection between covenant and blood. And when we come together on Palm Sunday, we are celebrating the blood of that covenant. That our King is headed to the cross to secure a new covenant for us. In which the promises of God will never fail because even though in the Old Testament the blood of those sacrifices was never enough, the blood of His Son is. That God has poured out His Son, He has given Him on our behalf to die in our place so that His might, His blood might be shed so that we might receive the forgiveness of sins. As Scripture tells us, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. He speaks there of the blood of the covenant. But then he brings it all together finally by showing us the freedom of this future covenant. You'll see it there at the end of the verse. He says:

*I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*

Now what type of prisoners is he speaking of? Well, look ahead to one verse in your Bible to 9:12 and look at the way that he describes the. He calls them prisoners of hope. Do you see it? Prisoners of hope. That's what kind of prisoners we are. The type of prisoners, look at this amazing picture of longing in the midst of languishing. Of contentment in the midst of confinement. Of hope in the midst of hardship. That's the picture that Zechariah's giving of the people of God. That we are prisoners and yet we are prisoners of hope. And why is that? Because we know that through the blood of that covenant we are set free. I don't know about your translation, but in mine it says, I will set your prisoners free. Do you see that word will? It's future in orientation. But if you look in the original language, it's actually the translation of a past tense verb. Now why would they do that? Why would you translate something that is speaking about the past as if it's something in the future? Well, it's speaking of things in such a way that this freedom that the covenant king will accomplish is so certain, so sure, it's a done deal. He's got it in the bag. There's no doubt that this will take place. And so the prophet can speak of something that will come in the future as if it's already been done now. What does he save us from? It tells us there; he saves us from this waterless pit. You remember how Joseph was cast into the waterless pit by his brothers in Genesis 37? Jeremiah the prophet was thrown into a waterless pit in Jeremiah 38. And in that time period, this would be one of the most dangerous circumstances to find yourself in. Why? Because you would have no way of escape and no way of sustaining yourself. He speaks there of the most tragic of circumstances. The place in which there would be the least amount of hope. That's where we find ourselves outside of Christ. And yet he is telling us that there is a freedom that will come through the future covenant accomplished by this king.

One of the world's biggest rescue missions is happening right now halfway around the world. And it's not happening in a waterless pit. In fact, might be more appropriate to say it's happening in a water-filled pit. The Suez Canal was constructed in the 1860's and for decades has served as a center point of commerce. They carved a water-filled pit between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea in order to transform the way that shipping happens around our globe. Rather than having to travel an additional 5,000 miles around the bottom of Africa, adding an extra 8 to 10 days to that shipping endeavor, instead you can cut across 120 miles and

be in the same spot. It's been a modern wonder that's transformed commerce. And it works very well most of the time. But maybe you've heard about the story of the Ever Given. This ship that is now stuck in the Suez Canal. This ship is so large, if you were to take the Empire State Building and set it on its side, that's the length of this ship. Four times Kyle Field in length. And as it was travelling down this channel, the reports indicate a wind and dust storm rose up and it began to get off course, blown by the winds until it ran aground into one of the banks. And then the momentum of the back of it carried it forward so that both the front and the back were now wedged, high-pointed. You can imagine the weight that this is carrying. They estimate it's over 40,000 tons. Blown off course by the wind. High-pointed by the banks. Weighted down by its cargo. Right now there's a rescue mission happening there. They're seeking to dredge out the ground. They're seeking to possibly unload the cargo. They're seeking to take advantage of high tides and use tugboats to pull it. And they have made little progress thus far. What we find this morning in Zechariah 9 is the prophet speaking of a much greater rescue. Every one of us spiritually find ourselves a part from Christ, blown off course by the sinful desires of the flesh. We look down one day and we recognize that we've been run aground. We've high-pointed ourselves by the pride that has driven our life. And we feel that crushing weight, not of steel but of sin. What Zechariah 9 is reminding us of this morning is the gift of salvation we've been offered in Christ. The rescue that we can experience, the freedom that we can find. Palm Sunday is the announcement of this coming king. That the prisoners of hope can experience the freedom of Christ. He can rescue us from the weight of sin because His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He can release us from the high-point of pride because He is gentle and lowly, just as Zechariah describes.

So as we prepare our hearts to pray this morning on this Palm Sunday, Central family, let's behold our King coming humble mounted on a donkey.

Let's pray together.

Father, we're coming to you this morning declaring that you are enough to meet all our needs, God. To set us free from the weight of guilt and shame that burdens us down, from the cares of this world and everyday life. We're asking this Palm Sunday that as we respond to You in hearts of celebration, that You will meet us in this moment by Your Spirit and make us more like Jesus. That You will conform us to His image. That we might be a people in this church intentional, righteous in Christ, humble, who live out the mission You've called us to, to see Your gospel go even to the ends of the earth. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.