**The Rescued Rightly Rejoice**

Text: Zechariah 9:9

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 21:1-11; Zechariah 9:9-13

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 269, 24, 118b, 331, 531+532

**Series:** Occasional (‘Palm Sunday’). 2nd week of national COVID -19 Alert Level 4

**Theme:** The prophet Zechariah predicts the coming of the Messiah who will be humble and righteous, mightily setting those who are imprisoned free.

**Proposition:** Rejoice because the Rescuer is a humble, righteous King who has salvation.

**Introduction**

As you are at home today, this is not difficult to imagine: You hear a knock on your front door. That’s strange you think, who would come visiting at time like this? As you cautiously open up to the person standing there you recognize that he is the one you had long hoped for and that you had been promised would come one day. You warmly welcome him in into your home because: He has a proven vaccine to prevent or cure the COVID-19 virus’, He has paid off all your debts and provides you with satisfying, productive and useful work for your entire life and He is the powerful ruler of the new government. You are guaranteed care and protection for your entire endless life, together with all the other citizens in his realm.

Clearly, he is a rescuer who has delivered you from your captivity at home. He gives you freedom, security, and every reason to warmly welcome him into your home as you rejoice over your rescue. As he comes and sits with you at your kitchen table, you see that even though he is a VIP, he’s not aloof, distant or condescending towards you. You know that he cares deeply for you, is interested in you and your life and is very gentle as he spends time with you in close fellowship. His words are wonderful to hear, and you hope that your conversation with him will never end.

How would you feel, what would be your response, if this happened to you today? Exceedingly joyful! You’d feel deeply happy and content. You’d be free from all your troubles. Isn’t that what everyone wants, and isn’t that what everybody in the past has wanted?

In the ancient world, besieged cities which had been liberated from oppression would welcome the King who conquered their enemies. Palm branches were a symbol back then of victory, triumph and peace. In more recent times, some countries have welcomed heads of state, veterans returning from war or sports heroes with ‘ticker-tape parades’ where lots of shredded paper or confetti is thrown down from the upper stories of buildings along the procession route whilst the crowds shout with joy at their heroes.

Our text is probably the best-known verse in the entire book of Zechariah: “*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*”. These Old Testament words of prophesy foretell the ‘triumphal entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem as described in all four of the New Testament gospels (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-38; John 12:12-15).

This prophecy in Zechariah is important because these words accurately predict the coming of the promised king, descended from David, who would reign as the Messiah. As you may well know, the word ‘messiah’ is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for ‘anointed one’. The Greek word is ‘Christos’. The Messiah, the Christ, is the most anticipated person in the Old Testament. He is ‘the seed of the woman’ (Gen 3:15). He is ‘of the tribe of Judah’ (Gen 49:10). He is Son of God (Psalm 2). He is the great descendant of David (2 Sam 7:12). He is the Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11). He is the Servant (Isaiah 42:1-16). He is the Branch (Zech 3:8). He is coming King who is humble, righteous and has salvation, as we see in our text from Zechariah 9:9.

1. **Your King is Humble**

On the first ‘Palm Sunday’ Jesus and his disciples were close to Jerusalem. Having travelled the road up from Jericho they came to Bethphage on the outskirts of the city near to the Mount of Olives. Jesus then instructed two of his disciples, saying to them, “*Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once.*" (Matt 21:2-3).

Gospel writer Matthew explains that these very specific directions by Jesus were to fulfil what had been prophesied by Zechariah: "*Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden*" (Matt 21:5). The disciples followed their Master’s directions and obtained the young animal, putting their cloaks on its back as a makeshift saddle. Matthew includes the detail that the mother donkey was also brought to Jesus – indicating the young age of the foal. Mark and Luke note that no one had ever ridden on this young donkey before (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30).

Once Jesus had sat on the colt He travelled into the city. Most of the crowd there spread their cloaks on the road and others cut branches from the trees to lay on the road. Many people went ahead of him and many followed behind shouting out “*Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"*” (Matt 21:9). The crowd were welcoming the Messiah, the anointed one, the long-awaited deliverer whom the Scriptures had foretold would rescue Israel from her enemies. Remember that the Jews were under Roman occupation in their own land. They desperately wanted to be rescued from the oppressive control of Caesar’s rule.

However, Jesus did not enter the city as a military conquering commander with a mighty army, he was in the words of Zechariah’s prophesy ‘humble’. The Hebrew word ‘ani’ is translated ‘humble’ in the ESV. It literally means ‘*bent over – due to the pressure of circumstances*’. ‘Ani’ can also be accurately rendered as ‘afflicted’. This word is widely used in the Old Testament of suffering endured (e.g. Job 24:14; 29:12; 36:13; Isa 51:21; 54:11; Jer 22:16; Eze 16:49). ‘Afflicted’ is a peculiar word to apply to a mighty king who is coming to rescue His people from oppression. Zechariah’s prophesy points to the affliction that Jesus would suffer in Jerusalem in the week following this first ‘Palm Sunday’: “*because of the blood of my covenant with you I will set the prisoners free*” (Zech 9:11).

‘Ani’ also has the meaning ‘poor’. ‘Poor’ is a peculiar word to apply to a mighty king who is coming to rescue His people from oppression. Yet, in worldly terms, Jesus was poor: He had been raised in the ‘backwater village of Nazareth in Galilee (by human birth a ‘nobody from nowhere’). As an adult, He had no home of his own (Matt 8:20). He lacked the lands, palaces and possessions which royalty usually enjoy. He did not even own his own transport! The young donkey he rode into Jerusalem that day was borrowed, not owned by Him!

‘Ani’ also does have the meaning ‘humble’ as it is translated in the ESV. ‘Humble’ is a peculiar word to apply to a mighty king who is coming to rescue His people from oppression. Before Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, His humility was demonstrated in His public works as He met with, and ministered to, lower socio-economic people and those outcast from the community. He touched and healed lepers, dined with tax collectors and did not practice ‘social distancing’ from prostitutes.

Some people have suggested that the humility of Christ is demonstrated by the fact that he rode a young donkey and not a horse. This seems plausible to us today, when donkeys are not generally highly regarded. However, it’s helpful to know that in the Ancient Near East, the donkey was not thought of as a lowly beast. Important, powerful men rode these animals (e.g. Jud 10:4; 12:14; Ki 1:33; 2 Sam 13:29; 18:9). Whilst a horse or chariot would have been the norm for a king in a military victory procession. What sets this king apart is not so much the type of animal that he rides, but that he comes not in worldly power or status, but in meekness and humility.

The Hebrew word “ani’ in Zechariah is translated into the Greek Old Testament by the word which Matthew also uses when he quotes Zechariah 9:9: "*Behold, your king is coming to you,* ***humble****, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden*" (Matt 21:5). This Greek word has a range of meanings including… humble (ESV), lowly (NKJ), gentle (NIV) and meek (KJV). It’s clear from Zechariah’s prophesy that this King, whilst being humble, lowly, gentle and meek, is **not** weak.

His peaceful reign will overcome the weapons of physical warfare. “*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*” (Zech 9:10). His gentle, humble peace bringing power will be in His potent spoken word.

The words of our text are addressed to the ‘*daughter of Zion*’. This is a title used in the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 1:8; Zeph 3:14) for Jerusalem, and refers to God’s people. Brothers and sisters in Christ, in New Testament terms ‘daughter of Zion’ refers to us!

We are called, in the words of our text to “Rejoice greatly”. ‘Greatly’ is a strong word meaning “abundantly, exceedingly, with force”. Today we can and we should rejoice greatly because Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah has come. Just as He did enter on back of a young donkey about 2,000 years ago the holy city of Jerusalem, the symbol of God’s presence on earth. So **too** Brothers and sisters. He has entered into our midst by His Spirit, both as individual believers and as a body. This is a reason to rejoice greatly!

Friend – anyone who is as yet without saving faith – this Jesus is humble and gentle. Whilst He is supremely powerful, He does not come in force today, but gently offers you His potent word of life and peace so that you also can rejoice greatly in this coming King. This is what He says as He speaks peace to the nations: “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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*” (Matt 11:28-29. He is humble **and** He is righteous.

1. **Your King is Righteous**

As you know, for my health I’ve taken a particular interest in physical fitness in recent years; especially running. I’ve found that when I compare myself to others of a similar age and stage, I’m not too bad at getting my legs to carry me forward at a reasonable pace. However, if I measure myself against those who really are fit and who win races, then I’m a very slow runner.

Righteousness is a bit like that. Just as running fast for long distances can be one of the evidences, or out-workings, of physical fitness, so righteousness is the evidence or outworking of spiritual ‘fitness’. God Himself is righteous in all that He does in fulfilling the covenant that He has made with His people. For human beings, righteousness is evidenced by obedience to the Law of God. This is the law which forms the standard of our human moral consciousness (Rom 2:15), although that ‘moral compass’ is distorted to a greater or lesser degree as a result of our sinful nature. This law is also the basis for the covenant agreement which God has made with His people.

Many unrighteous kings had already entered into Jerusalem when Zechariah first prophesied about One who would be ‘righteous’. We know that David, though accomplished in many ways, was an adulterer and a murderer. We know that Solomon, though blessed with great wisdom, ‘*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord*’ (1 Kings 11:6). We know that Asa, though he restored true worship in Israel (2 Chron 15), later did not rely on the Lord, but trusted in the King of Syria for aid (1 Chron 16:7). Even the best of Israel’s former kings was not ‘spiritually fit’ like the Champion about whom Zechariah prophesies. Whilst they were better than the worst kings we read about in Scripture, but they were not keepers of God’s law.

One word in Zechariah’s prophesy says so much! “*behold, your king is coming to you;* ***righteous***”. This king would be unlike the unrighteous rulers who have entered this city in the past. He alone, would be a covenant-keeper. His ‘moral compass’ clearly and perfectly aligned to true righteousness. There’s only one human being who naturally fits this description of being ‘righteous’. He is the One of whom God the righteous Creator said, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*." (Matt 3:17; 17:5). He is perfect human being who as He grew up into adulthood: “*increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man*” (Luke 2:52). He is the One whose righteousness was seen as He ministered to many. Gospel writer Mark says of those who saw His work “*He has done all things well*” (Mark 7:37). He is the One whose righteousness would lead to His death on the day that we plan to especially remember on this coming ‘Good Friday’.

Imagine that I was so annoyed by someone who was a really fast and fit runner that I decided to harm them in such a way that they would never run again because their physical fitness showed up just how unfit I really was. That is how those who plotted to have this righteous man killed acted. His righteousness showed up their unrighteousness and they hated him for it. Before Jesus came into their lives, they had thought of themselves as being more than sufficiently righteous. His presence amongst them showed them up to be ‘spiritually unfit’ people that they really were. They accused Him of blasphemy, yet His claim to be divine was true. They acted unrighteously in judging that he deserved death (Matt 26:66).

After examining this King, Governor Pontius Pilate said, ‘*I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him*’ (Luke 23:14). Pilate’s wife sent had sent word to him ‘*have nothing to do with that righteous man*’ (Matt 27:9). Yet despite the evident righteousness of this accused man, Pilate acted unrighteously and delivered Him over to be crucified.

By his side at Calvary was an unrighteous criminal who understood that he deserved death but said ‘*this man has done nothing wrong*’ (Luke 23:41). A centurion who watched Him die said “*certainly this man was innocent*’ (Luke 23:47). Jesus Christ is the truly righteous, perfectly ‘spiritually fit’ King.

Brother and sisters in the Lord. He is your King! He is your Rescuer; He is your Saviour! He is the powerful ruler of a new world government. As the humble, powerful, righteous King He is your Wonderful Counsellor, Your Mighty God, the Prince of your Peace (from Isaiah 9:7). You are guaranteed care and protection for your entire endless life, together with all the other citizens in his realm. This is a reason to rejoice greatly with force today! He is the One who comes to rescue naturally unrighteous people like you and me, which brings us to our last point:

1. **Your King has Salvation**

As you may well know, all languages have nouns (‘naming words’) and verbs (‘doing words’). Many languages also have both an active and a passive ‘voice’. The ‘active’ voice is used where the ‘subject’ is acted upon by the verb: for example: “*Harry ate the fish for lunch*”. The ‘passive’ voice is used when the ‘object’ is acted on by the verb. For example: for lunch, “*the fish was eaten by Harry*”. Or in the case of Jonah “*the prophet was swallowed by the fish”!*

What, you might well ask, has all this got to do with our text? Look closely at the third characteristic of the coming king in Zechariah’s prophecy. He is described as ‘*having salvation*’. In the original Hebrew, this verb (Jasha – from which the name Jashua/Joshua is derived) is in the passive voice. So, this King has **been saved**. A more accurate translation of Him would be ‘righteous and saved’.

This doesn’t seem to fit very well for a righteous king who does not need salvation from sin. One who, in the words of 1 Peter 2:22 “*Committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth*”. This is likely why our English translations use the somewhat odd phrase ‘having salvation’ and quite possibly why the four gospel writers do not quote this part of Zechariah’s prophesy. It’s very helpful to know that although the Bible often uses the word "save" to refer to salvation from sin, it also uses the term in a more general way to refer to any kind of deliverance. For example, when the psalmist praised God for bringing Israel out of Egypt, he said, "*He saved them for his name’s sake* " ([Psalm 106](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+106%3A1-106%3A48):8). The Exodus did not save the Israelites from their sins, but it was a great deliverance, a mighty act of salvation.

Zechariah’s prophesy points forward - beyond the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem – to His resurrection a week later. Jesus, the promised Messiah, would be saved by God the Father who would raise His Son to life again to rule His kingdom which would, in the words of Zech 9:10 “*be from sea to sea…to the ends of the earth*”. Jesus the Son would be ‘rescued’ from the grave, saved from destruction precisely because He is the righteous One, the Covenant Keeper.

Brothers and Sisters, Your King Jesus has been saved by His Heavenly Father – not because He had any sins to be saved from, but because He fully paid for the sins of all the people He died for and He the law abiding Covenant Keeper. At the cross, the full weight of God’s wrath came upon this humble, afflicted, righteous man and He paid the debt of sin for many. His perfect righteousness God then credits to the account of all who turn to this King in willing submission. This is the only way anybody can truly and lastingly be rescued.

Zechariah speaks of the coming King’s promise to “*set your prisoners free from the waterless pit*” (Zech 9:11). A waterless pit was a dry well in the ancient world – somewhere you could place a captive and leave them there until they died. The image of being delivered here recalls Joseph’s rescue from a well (Gen 37:23-28) and Jeremiah’s from a cistern (Jer 38:1-13 cf. Ps 30:3; 40:2; 103:4).

Whoever or wherever you are today, there’s a sense in which you are living in a ‘waterless pit’. I’m not trying to make a rude comment about your home here which is no doubt as cosy/gezellig as you can make it! The reality though is that all of humanity is trapped in this temporary life which will sooner or later end in death. We are all naturally confined in the ‘waterless pits’ of dying bodies. The current pandemic of COVID-19 brings this long-established universal truth home to everyone in a pressing and urgent way which understandably brings fear, anxiety and panic into the minds of many today.

When the crowds welcomed Jesus into the city of Jerusalem about 2,000 years ago, they shouted “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*” (Matt 21:9). Hosanna means “*save us, we pray*”. The people who called out to Jesus were most likely thinking of their current oppression under the occupying forces of the Roman Empire, not about their need to be rescued from the captivity of their sin which would lead to eternal death apart from a saviour.

Similarly, today, people throughout the world are calling for a ‘rescue package’ which includes things like a vaccine or cure for the virus, a guarantee of income and security as a nation. What every person on this planet really needs, even more than a vaccine or a cure for the virus, even more than complete provision for all their needs and a lifetime of meaningful employment, even more than a good government who will work for the well-being of all citizens is the King prophesied in Zechariah 9:9.

This victorious Ruler has already come. He did enter Jerusalem on a young donkey about 2,000 years ago in fulfilment of these words of Zechariah 9:9. He is humble and righteous. He has been saved from the grave. He is the Rescuer of all who will welcome Him into their hearts. He is the reason why you and I should rejoice greatly today. Rejoice exceedingly because He has come. Rejoice exceedingly because He is coming again. When He returns, He will enter into the New Jerusalem and we will see the humble, righteous King face to face (1 Cor 13:12). Then we shall know fully the reality of his humility and righteousness.

If you are living by faith under the rule of King Jesus today, your eternal future is bright and sure. So, rejoice greatly! If you have not as yet come to Christ for the rescue and ultimate healing which you need, then do not delay, turn to the One who says “*Behold, I am coming soon*” (Rev 22:7) before it is too late.

AMEN.