

The Return of the King

Scripture Text: Zechariah 9:9–13

Introduction

We are continuing the season of Advent, a time for celebrating the first coming of the baby Jesus as well as His second coming as Lord and King. During Advent, we celebrate several aspects of Christmas: the Hope of eternal life we have in Christ; the Peace Jesus brings to those who accept Him; the Joy of salvation and being reconciled to God; the Love God demonstrated to us in sending His only begotten Son as our Savior. Advent is not only a time for us to remember the first coming of Christ, the birth of mankind's Savior, but it is also a time to remember and prepare ourselves for His second coming – a time when He will come to get His bride, the church.

During this season of Advent we are looking at several Old Testament prophecies that foretold the coming Savior, *the long expected Jesus*. Two weeks ago, we looked at the first announcement of the gospel in Genesis chapter three. After Adam and Eve rebelled against God, God being rich in mercy, promised a Savior who would bruise the head of Satan. Last week we looked at a passage from the prophet Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet.” Jeremiah prophesied that God would use the Babylonian Empire as His instrument of judgment on the people of Judah for their refusal to repent and return to Him. But, Jeremiah also prophesied of a “new covenant” and a “new King” who would be called the “Righteous Branch of David.” We also saw how our righteousness is being in Christ – there is nothing righteous about us, but it is only through Jesus that we are *declared* right with God.

Today's passage comes from the prophet Zechariah, roughly sixty years after the prophet Jeremiah. The people of God had spent time in exile in Babylon and were now returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple there. Zechariah encouraged the returning exiles to repent and renew their covenant with God. Such spiritual renewal would be necessary for the people to be ready to worship God once the temple was rebuilt. Zechariah reassured the people of Judah of God's abiding comfort and care. God would continue His covenant with Israel and there would be a glorious future that awaits the people of God. Zechariah told the people of Judah that its current circumstances were only temporary: God will bring judgment on those who oppress His people, and He will bring forth the promised king, the Messiah, who will rule Judah and the nations. The book ends with the promise that the Lord would establish His rule over all the earth.

The Return of the King

I titled this sermon, “The Return of the King.” Some of you may recognize that title. The third movie in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, tells of the return of a king. Middle Earth had gone for thousands of years without a king and suffered under the poor leadership of lesser rulers as well as the deadly forces of the evil Sauron, the primary adversary of the three movies. One character, Aragorn, though he was the rightful ruler of the people, was reluctant to become king. He was fearful that he would repeat the mistakes

of his predecessors. He finally accepted the calling to become king. He led an army to defeat the Sauron and heralded a new age of peace. In a ceremony at the end of the movie, the wizard Gandalf crowned Aragorn and said, "*Now come the days of the king. May they be blessed.*"

In some respects, that is part of the message of the book of Zechariah. In chapter one, God said, "I have returned." After a period of exile, God's people are back home and rebuilding their country, rebuilding the temple and rebuilding their way of life. It was a time of rebuilding. Does that sound familiar? In a sense, we are rebuilding. We are starting something new, something fresh and exciting, and I invite you all to join in the work God is calling us to do. One thing that was on the minds of the people of Judah was the kingdom. Who would be the king of God's people? Who would lead them? In chapter eight, the Lord stated the following:

Zechariah 8:1-3 And the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the Lord: *I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem*, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain."

God impressed upon Zechariah that He had returned. God was with His people. God was aware of the affliction of His people and He was going to act to deliver them. We, the church, God's people, can take comfort in this. When times are tough, when problems arise, or when the future seems just a bit uncertain, we can trust in the promises of God. He will act and He will deliver His people. What God requires of us, as with the people of Judah, is to remain faithful to Him. God had a specific plan to save the people of Judah. He was going to send them another king. The days of the King were coming. Therefore, the statement Gandalf made in the movie *The Return of the King* about the coming days of the king could have been from Zechariah. The days of the king were coming and they would be blessed!

A Call to Rejoice

So, the first thing God called His people to do was to rejoice. The King was not there yet. The promise had not been fulfilled yet. But God told them to rejoice and shout aloud.

Zechariah 9:9 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.

This was a time of glad tidings. The king was coming to them. He was not there yet, but it was going to happen, so, celebrate and shout aloud. It would be over five hundred years before the King finally arrived in a manger in a little town of Bethlehem; yet God told His people to "Rejoice." Salvation was coming. The days of their king were at hand. We can learn from this. We can rest assured that God's promises and blessings will happen. They may not happen when we want them, or when we expect them, but they will happen. God is

not in a hurry. Did not Jesus say He was coming back to get His church, and that was two thousand years ago? God is not in a hurry, but *He is faithful*.

There are several things to note about this future Savior, things that we see God revealed to His people about their promised King. He was not going to be like their other kings, the other shepherds of God's people. Remember, Judah had bad leaders. None of their previous kings were what the people needed. Let us look at some of the qualities of this future King.

He Will Be Righteous

Zechariah prophesied that the then future King of Judah would be "righteous." This is similar to Jeremiah's prophecy that we saw last week. If you recall, Jeremiah said the following:

Jeremiah 23:5 Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a *righteous Branch*, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and *righteousness* in the land.

Righteousness is a hallmark of King Jesus. Like His Father, everything Jesus does is right and just. And not only is He a righteous king, but our righteousness is found *only in Christ*.

He Will Have Salvation

Zechariah also wrote that the coming king would have salvation. Some translations render this verse as the coming king being *victorious* while others translate it as the coming king *having salvation*. So which is it? Does the coming king have salvation or is He victorious. The answer I believe is both. Certainly, Jesus is the victorious King. We have already read that He would crush the head of Satan, the Adversary of mankind. Jesus was certainly victorious in defeating death and purchasing forgiveness for us. But the Hebrew word here carries the meaning of *receiving salvation* from God rather than offering it to others. This raises a question: How can King Jesus, who came to save the world, receive salvation from God? How can the Savior receive salvation?

Some scholars argue that this verse teaches that the Messiah would be saved from some terrible ordeal by God. The Messiah, the future king, would experience God's help in time of trouble and emerge successful from that difficulty. If this is this case, Jesus received salvation and was victorious in the end. Is there a sense in which this is true for Jesus? I believe there is. One pastor explained it this way: Jesus was going to be bruised by the Serpent, meaning He was going to die. But, He would be saved from death and God would raise Him on the third day, thus being victorious. So, King Jesus received the salvation of God and by doing so, we all now have the promise of forgiveness and a similar resurrection.

He Will Be Humble

Another characteristic of the future king of Judah was that He would be humble. In verse nine, the Righteous King would be "humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of

a donkey.” Humility is not typically a quality we assign to kings, but it is the quality of a servant leader. A king who sees his role as leading his people out of love, a king who views his role as serving the people he is called to lead will be humble. This is the kind of king the Messiah would be. This verse may sound familiar, as both Matthew and John quoted it to some extent. It is in reference to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when He confirmed to the people of Jerusalem that He was the long awaited Messiah and king.

One might ask why would the Messiah of God's people, the long awaited king of the Jews, arrive on a donkey? That doesn't seem very kingly. Kings usually displayed their power and glory by riding on a war-horse. But, it was not unusual for kings in the biblical era to ride on donkeys. In fact David rode on a donkey. The ancient people of that time did not view donkeys as dishonorable animals. The future king who is the Messiah will show his humility by riding a donkey. In the context of Zechariah, the king's humility refers to his “gentleness of heart.” This may sound like another familiar saying from Matthew:

Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all who labor 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.

He Will Be about Peace

The new Messiah riding a donkey, not an animal known for its military value, underscores the last item I would like to mention about this future king. It signals the peaceable kingdom over which the future Messiah will rule. The symbolism of riding a donkey emphasizes the Messiah's mission of peace. In verse ten, Zechariah wrote that the future King of Judah “shall speak peace to the nations.” His kingdom would result in peace for all creation. Peace is a hallmark of the Messiah and the future king. In fact, the prophet Isaiah called Him the “Prince of Peace.” The future king would not come with an army riding on a war horse of power. He would come humbly on a donkey.

This is how Jesus came to earth! Humbly and lowly in a manger in Bethlehem. This is how He entered Jerusalem – humbly and peaceful on a donkey. Many of the Jews of Jesus' time misunderstood this. They expected the Messiah and new king would remove Judah's enemies by power and force. That was not Jesus' mission when He came to earth. Jesus came to usher peace on earth. He came to save that which was lost. He came so that we might have life. Jesus' first coming and His subsequent ministry was about saving mankind from the deadly results of sin to which mankind has been enslaved since the Garden of Eden. The plan of God to rescue mankind was not by force, but by love. Because He loved the world so much, He sent His only begotten Son to save a people who were lost and unable to save themselves. This is good news!

Conclusion

Like Zechariah wrote, we can say, “Rejoice greatly, Good Hope! Shout aloud, people of God!” Behold, your King has come; righteous and having salvation, and “His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” Rejoice that we have been reconciled by

the Righteous King of Judah. This should strengthen our faith and motivate us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The world is full of people who do not know that God loves them. They do not know the salvation of God. They do not know the peace that surpasses all understanding, the peace the Jesus brought to earth and gives to those who trust in Him as Lord and Savior. But they can!

God uses His people, the church, to proclaim the good news that He loved the world in such a way that He sent His one and only Son to pay the debt of sin that we all owe. Since Adam and Eve's rebellion to God in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been under a curse of sin. We cannot possibly save ourselves from this curse. We are all destined to death and eternal separation from God. But, the baby Jesus is fulfillment of God's promise to us. As the angels told the shepherds that night, it is *good news of great joy*. The Righteous Branch of David has been born. Our King has come...and will come again to get His church. As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us remember this great promise of God. There is a Savior. Victory is in Jesus. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!