

Zechariah 9:9,10
Your King Comes!
Palm Sunday
March 20, 2016

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses 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 to the ends of the earth." (NIV84)

Yoenis Cespedes of the New York Mets recently arrived at spring training in a Ford F250 that had \$30,000 of customizations added to it. Two days later he showed up in a Polaris Slingshot, which looks sort of like something Batman would have driven. It had \$40,000 of customizations added to it. But Cespedes was just getting warmed up. The following day he showed up in a \$400,000 Lamborghini. But buying a standard Lamborghini is soooo borrrrring. So he'd also made \$80,000 of customizations. The following day was a \$250,000 Alfa Romeo.

Why? Because that is how you roll if you are one of the kings of sport. Because if you drive up in a 1997 Chevy Tahoe, people might not recognize you for who you are.

And it's true. If a baseball fan looked over at 1997 Chevy Tahoe sitting next to them at a stoplight and thought the driver looked like Yoenis Cespedes, they'd immediately know that it couldn't be him--because that's not the sort of transportation a superstar uses.

In the Old Testament the prophet Zechariah talked about the coming of a superstar, the coming of Israel's king, the coming of the long-awaited Messiah.

The Jews had pretty grand ideas about the Messiah--what he would like, how he would announce himself, and so on. You might remember that around 1000 B.C. the Jews were so enamored of the idea of royalty that they insisted that God give them a king. Now God was going to give them the king they had been waiting for!

But if they didn't know what to look for, God knew they would miss him. So he had Zechariah write, *"Your king comes to you...gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

In those days, if you wanted to make a grand entrance, if you wanted to let people know that you were someone, instead of driving up in a Lamborghini, you rode in on a horse. Horses were animals of power, a symbol of military, kingly strength.

A donkey, on the other hand--well, a donkey was hardly a glamorous animal. Granted, it was reliable, and you knew it would get the work done, but that didn't necessarily mean that a king wanted to be associated with one, did it? I mean, a Toyota Corolla might be a very reliable car--but wouldn't you really rather be seen driving a Lamborghini--something that says, "I am someone"?

We always picture Palm Sunday as a glorious scene--and it is, and we'll get to that in a moment--but it really didn't look as glorious as we might think. Picture the difference between Jesus riding in on a horse and Jesus riding in on a donkey. Remember the show "Happy Days?" How cool, how impressive would the Fonz have been if you took away his motorcycle and put him on a moped?

But Jesus was a different sort of king. He wasn't interested in dazzling people with his style, and his entrance into Jerusalem is another example of his humility. Jesus was always about substance rather than style.

That's shown in his agenda as well. Besides looking and traveling like a king, another thing you would generally expect from a king is that he would in some way make use of the military--either in

order to unseat unjust rulers, or else to keep just rulers in power. In some way he would use force to make it clear to people that he is not to be trifled with. If someone has wronged him, you would think that a king would declare war on those people.

Some people expected the Messiah to come in the same way. People expected him to build up an army of rebels to throw out the Romans. People thought that once Jesus had gotten enough support, he would proclaim war--and not peace--to the nations. The disciples continually misunderstood this, and by and large the rest of the Jews were no different. They figured that at some point the time for talking would have passed, and the time for forceful action would come.

Obviously, many of the Jews were treating Jesus as though he were going to have some sort of earthly kingdom.

How might their thinking have changed if they had realized that he was a heavenly king? How might they then have expected this king to take forceful action?

Well, if they'd looked deep within themselves, they would have realized that they hadn't been very faithful subjects. In fact, they would have realized that they had been rebellious subjects. They would have realized that they had sinned against their God and against his Son. They would have realized that there had been many times when they had worshiped him thoughtlessly for one hour a week and then lived ignoring him and even openly defying him the other 167 hours a week. They would have realized that they had been like the tenants in the parable that was our gospel reading last Sunday (cf. Luke 20:9-19), who had abused and even killed the king's servants. They would have been inclined to flee in terror at the approach of the king. It would have certainly made sense for this Messiah-king to come proclaiming war on those who had wronged him.

We should feel the same way. As the king approaches in humility, we recall the times when we were caught up in style over substance. We recall the times when we were more interested in making sure that people knew that we were someone, the times we took pride in ourselves, the times we were more interested in exalting ourselves in the presence of others instead of humbling ourselves before God and submitting to his commands. We recall the times when we used force--not to defend ourselves--but to make it clear to people that we didn't appreciate the way they were acting towards us, and that if they really wanted to start something, we would be more than happy to do whatever it took to finish it. We recall the times when we were so interested in looking stylish and in playing the part of an individual that we rebelled against our king just to show people that we while yes, we went to church, we weren't mindless fanatics who were unable to let our hair down a bit when we felt like it.

And here comes our king. Realizing that he perfectly understands our substance, realizing how great of a disparity there is between his humility and our pride, we feel like fleeing.

But again, Jesus reveals himself as a different sort of king. Zechariah says that this king will "*take away the chariots from Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel--the 10 tribes) and the war-horses from Jerusalem (the southern kingdom of Judah), and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations.*"

Zechariah portrays this king as bringing about peace between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The idea of this king bringing about peace between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdoms must have been a wonderful--but incomprehensible--concept to the people who heard this verse. It would have seemed as difficult as making peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis today.

But Jesus came proclaiming peace to the nations--all nations. And incredibly, he proclaims peace between us and God. Zechariah tells us that this king comes "having salvation." This was far more difficult than making peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

In order to bring about this peace, our king had to die. On Palm Sunday we see Jesus riding into

Jerusalem and being proclaimed the Messiah by the people. But why was he coming to Jerusalem? The hymn says, "Ride on, ride on in majesty. Ride on in lowly pomp, **to die.**"

And that's what Jesus did 5 days later. He could have gone on to triumph after triumph. Instead he took all those sins for which we deserved to be punished, all those sins which had separated us from our God, all those sins which should have eternally separated us from God in Hell, and he died for them. Now we have peace with God. Now not only do we not fear our king, but we don't fear death, either, for we know that through it God will take us to be with him.

That is our king--a surprising one, but one that we dare not fail to recognize. Because this king is also our Savior. We can identify him not by the majesty of his transportation here on earth, but by his humility and by the peace he brings to our hearts.

Zechariah has told us how to recognize our king. He also tells us how to respond to him. He says, "**Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!**"

That would pretty much seem to go without saying, wouldn't it--that the subjects of such a king would rejoice greatly?

They would rejoice greatly because they have been freed. If you've ever heard about armies coming into a city and freeing it from its oppressors, you know what the people of the city do, don't you? They line the streets and rejoice greatly, they shout, they are unrestrained in their great joy.

So were the people on Palm Sunday. It was a joyous procession that day as the word spread about this man who had raised Lazarus from the dead, this man who so obviously was someone sent from God, this man who must be the long-awaited Messiah. The people didn't merely say, "Wow, that's great--the Messiah."

Rather, they rejoiced greatly. They shouted. They were unable to restrain themselves. I pray that we have that same attitude that they did--an attitude that a Savior this great must be praised, and he must be praised loudly. We sing rejoicing--and we've got great hymns for loud singing today, for proclaiming the praises of our king.

While I pray that we have the same attitude today that the crowd did on Palm Sunday, I also pray that we would continue to have that attitude. I pray that we would continue to rejoice as the Hebrew of Zechariah says. For literally it means something like "rejoice continually very much."

Now that's not how we talk today, but we understand exactly what it means. In other words, we want that joy to be a lasting joy.

The joy of the people on Palm Sunday doesn't appear to have been a lasting joy. A few days later there weren't a whole lot of people singing praises--or even speaking up for--Jesus. Even one of his own disciples denied him, so great was the rush to jump off the bandwagon.

I don't know exactly where those Palm Sunday crowds were a few days later. I wouldn't go so far as to suggest that the same people who were once shouting, "Hail" and "Hosanna" were now shouting "Crucify him." But I do believe that they weren't shouting "Hail" and "Hosanna" anymore. They'd gone from rejoicing and shouting to moping and hanging their heads in silence and maybe even hiding out in fear.

And why? Jesus was still the king. He was still proclaiming peace to the nations. In fact, he was in the process of **winning** peace for the nations by taking away our sins. That's why we call it **Good Friday**. That never changes. Jesus is always the king. Rejoice continually very much!

And if others hear us rejoicing continually very much, so much the better. For then they can join in the procession of praise.

Others may hear us praising him loudly with words of thanks and praise which we may express when we say out loud exactly what our king has done for us. Or they may hear us praising him simply by watching the actions and the attitudes of our lives. They may hear us praising him simply by imitating

our king--his humility, his servant attitude. However they hear us, make sure that they hear it loud and clear--without any contradictions that could confuse them, as though Jesus is worth rejoicing about only sometimes, but not "continually very much."

That's not to say that we put on an act as though nothing in our life ever goes wrong, but that is to say that we always maintain an attitude of rejoicing about the one thing in our life that never changes, the one thing in our life that is always worth rejoicing about.

Make sure people hear your rejoicing loud and clear. Because although Jesus is hardly the sort of king they would be looking for, he is certainly the kind of king that they need. When they too recognize their king, they can join us in rejoicing greatly and shouting praises to God for the great things he has done and for the great king that he has sent.

Kawhi Leonard was the MVP of the NBA Finals in 2014, leading the San Antonio Spurs to a championship. Since that time, he has only improved his game, to the point where he's considered one of the very best players in the NBA.

Can you guess how he gets around? Yup, a 1997 Chevy Tahoe that's only 6 years younger than he is. His explanation? "It runs, and it's paid off."

I would not have expected that from Kawhi Leonard, but I expect that he doesn't much care what I think about his transportation. In fact, I don't think he cares what anyone thinks about his transportation. I think he's too focused on winning another NBA title to care about much else.

No, Jesus' Palm Sunday transportation isn't what people were expecting. In fact, he came humbly throughout his whole life. But he was too focused on his goal to care about/be distracted by "keeping up appearances."

And in accomplishing that goal, he became so much greater, so much kinglier than anything we could have expected. What he has accomplished is peace between us and God. Sons and daughters of Jerusalem, rejoice greatly and shout. For your king has come to you! Amen.