

April 13, 2025
Text: John 12:12-19

Palm Sunday

As John and the other disciples are reflecting back on the events of Palm Sunday, and the Holy Spirit giving them understanding of what happened, they see that it all took place to fulfill what had been written in the prophets. Especially, they are reminded of words spoken through the prophet Zechariah, who said, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!” Through these words and their fulfillment, God the Holy Spirit gave comfort to the disciples, and to those who first heard the words... and even to us today!

It truly is a miracle of divine inspiration that Zechariah foretold the events of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as he did. Much of Jerusalem – the daughter of Zion – beholds Jesus – the King – coming into the city. And He's riding a donkey, even the colt of a donkey! The prophet's words are clearly shown to be true that day.

But what about the people to whom Zechariah first spoke? He didn't give this prophecy a couple of days before Jesus entered into Jerusalem. No, Zechariah spoke these words a little over 500 years beforehand. It was a very different setting in Jerusalem then. The people had returned from exile not too many years earlier. The city they had returned to was likely still much the same as the Babylonians had left it decades before, namely, a burned-out pile of rubble.

Under the leadership of people like Nehemiah and Ezra, and encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews worked to rebuild the city and its walls, and especially the temple. When the new temple was dedicated, it was, for some, a wonderful day. The people once more had a house of worship, a place to offer sacrifices to the true God and sing His praises. But when others, especially the older generation, saw the temple, they wept, remembering the splendor of the one built by Solomon and how this new one paled in comparison.

The Jews have the temple, but no glory from above comes to fill it. Jerusalem has rebuilt walls, but much of the rest of it is still in shambles. They are back in the land God promised to their fathers, but they are still under the rule of the Persians.

It's to these people that Zechariah says, “Behold, your king is coming!” Note, the prophet doesn't say, “Your king will come,” as in “He'll head this way at some point in the future.” No, their king is coming, even then, even as the prophet speaks the words.

No doubt some of the people would've responded, “Where?” They could get up on those newly rebuilt walls and look, but there didn't seem to be anyone of royal appearance riding to Jerusalem on a donkey. How could the Lord declare that His chosen King was on the way even then? It sure didn't look that way!

Let me give an illustration to help explain this distinction. Let's say I call my wife and tell her I'm coming home. She then tells this to my youngest son, who runs to the dining room yelling, “Dadda! Dadda!”, climbs up on a chair and looks out the window... but he doesn't see me coming. He

might then turn around to my wife with a confused look on his face and say, “Dadda?” Now, because he can’t see me yet, does that mean I’m not actually coming home? Not at all! I’m coming, but he just can’t see me yet.

Through Zechariah, the Lord is reminding His people of this very important truth. His plan to save His people is always in motion. He wasn’t a God who remained far off in heaven and just popped in every now and again to visit and bless or punish or give some revelation and then leave again.

No, God was always at work, always guiding the events of history to bring about His good and gracious will. The King had been coming, so to speak, from the moment that Adam and Eve first fell into sin. He had brought their ancestors into the Promised Land the first time, preserved them through the punishment of the exile, and brought them back from exile to the land once more – all as part of His great plan to come and deliver them from their sins. Could the people in Jerusalem in Zechariah’s day see Him yet? Not yet, but He was coming nonetheless.

To bring His coming about, the Lord would drive the Persians out by the Greeks, and then the Greeks by the Jewish Hasmonians, who would then be overtaken by the Romans. The Lord would use the Roman emperor Augustus to issue a decree that would set in motion His birth in Bethlehem, which He had foretold by other prophets. God would work in glorious ways, sending archangels and angel choirs to proclaim His coming to priests and virgins and humble shepherds. He would work through seemingly tragic ways to bring about His prophesied flight to Egypt and return. God was continuously working to bring about the fulfillment of His promises.

After around three years of preaching and healing and working great signs of God’s love, Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem for the final, great act of His earthly ministry. It was what He had come to earth for all along. It was the event that He’d been headed toward from the very beginning. And on that first Palm Sunday, the people can finally see Him coming.

Many have seen the great miracle He has worked in bringing Lazarus back to life – Lazarus, who had literally been decomposing in his tomb, and then been called out by the command of Jesus, fully restored. Right before then, Lazarus’s sister Martha had confessed Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Now, the crowds themselves proclaim Jesus to be the coming one. They hail Him as the Son of David, the King of Israel, the Messiah come to save His people. They wave palm branches and throw their cloaks onto the path. As Zechariah had foretold, here was their King coming, humble and riding upon a donkey.

Yet for all the excitement of that moment, Jesus’ triumphal entry wasn’t itself what He was coming for. His purpose wasn’t to receive the accolades and adoration of the crowds. Nor was He there to restore the earthly kingdom of David. He came into Jerusalem, but His ultimate destination would be outside the city on the hill of Golgotha. The King had come to conquer the true oppressor of the people – death – and would do so by dying Himself.

This was something that no one saw coming, despite it being foretold by the prophets and even Jesus Himself. But even though no one saw it coming, and even when many tried to stop Him, such as

the Pharisees at the end of our reading, the plan of God to save His people would not be stopped. The Son of God had been coming to the cross for thousands of years, and He would not stop now. He would die and rise again, so that all those crying out to Him to be saved would receive His salvation.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised that He would come again. And just like He told His ancient people that He was coming, even in the days of Zechariah, He tells us today that He is coming. The last quotation of Jesus in the Bible comes in the second-to-last verse of Revelation. There, He tells His Church, “Surely I am coming quickly.”

And again, as with the Old Testament prophecy, this isn’t just a far-off, future event. Just as the King was coming, even though many didn’t yet see Him until He rode into Jerusalem, Jesus is coming, even now. And just like how Jesus directed all things to bring about His first coming, He still guides all things to bring about His second coming. The Lord Jesus is not just sitting around idle in heaven, twiddling His thumbs while we wait to return. No, He is at the right hand of the Father, ruling and reigning over all things for the sake of His people.

Now, when you turn on the news or scroll through the feed on your phone, it might not seem like God is in control. You’re not alone in that feeling. For the ancient people of God, watching different empires rise and fall, waiting for another prophet to speak God’s word but hearing nothing, it may have seemed like God was no longer in control. Yet He was then, and He is now.

And so, when you see the economy go up and the economy go down, and all the different talking heads on TV tell you all manner of different reasons for why that is, you don’t have to worry, because God has promised to provide daily bread for you, and He will not fail to do so. Or when you hear about conflicts arising across the globe, or across the border, you don’t need to fear, because the Lord is and always will be the shield of His people. Or when it seems like churches everywhere are shrinking and people are desiring to compromise with the world more and more, you don’t need to be anxious. Jesus is always watching over His bride, the Church, and He will not let her fall before He comes to take her to Himself.

Even today, He comes to His Christians, speaking to them through His Word, giving them His body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins. God the Holy Spirit continues to call by the Gospel, enlighten with His gifts, and sanctify and keep Christians in the one true faith. Will it get harder to be a practicing Christian? Perhaps. Will more sacrifices be required of those who wish to follow Jesus? Likely so. But when our Lord sends a cross, He also gives the strength necessary to bear that cross, with the end result that faith is made even stronger.

Jesus tells us that He is coming. Do we yet see Him coming on the clouds in glory? No, not yet. But just like how Jesus was constantly watching over His people and arranging all things to bring about the day He rode into Jerusalem, He is watching over us and all His people still today. Nothing could stop His coming to die for the sins of the world, and nothing will stop His coming in glory to gather us to His side.

Like a toddler eagerly watching out the window, keep looking for the coming of Christ, for He is coming, and the day we finally see Him will bring joy beyond compare.

In the name of Jesus, amen.