

The Coming King & Fearless Followers

Palm Sunday 2022

This morning we are going to take a brief pause in our series through the Apostles' Creed because today is Palm Sunday. It is a good time for us to look once again at the event that Palm Sunday celebrates, an event that has historically been called the Triumphal Entry.

Last Sunday we looked at the trial of Jesus and his interaction with Pontius Pilate, which means we need to rewind the clock about a week to understand where Jesus is at this point of his life and ministry.

To do that, let me invite your attention to John chapter 12 this morning. We are going to look at John's account of the Triumphal Entry today, and we are going to look at, initially, John 12:12-19...

John 12:12-19

12 The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. **13** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" **14** And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, **15** "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" **16** His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. **17** The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. **18** The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. **19** So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Again, this is referred to as the Triumphal Entry of Jesus, that moment when Jesus, having come to the end of his earthly ministry, arrives in Jerusalem to begin his Passion Week, the week leading up to his arrest, crucifixion, and burial (which we commemorate on Good Friday) and his eventual resurrection on Easter Sunday.

As Jesus rides into town we see a "large crowd" of people rejoicing with a loud voice, shouting Hosanna, a celebration that means something like, "We are saved" or "Save us!" And they are waving palm branches which had, by this time, become the national symbol of Israel. In other words, they believed that the promised Messiah had come to finally reestablish Israel by overthrowing Roman rule.

And John explains for us that they were confident in Jesus because his reputation had spread throughout the region because of not only his teaching, but also his miracles, especially the miracle we see in John 11 when he raised Lazarus from the dead. John tells us that people who had witnessed that miracle had spread word about Jesus and his power, and so now everyone was confident in the seemingly imminent victory of their king.

And I think we can understand that, right? If someone can raise the dead, then surely he can do whatever he wants, including redeeming his people from oppression.

So, here on Sunday, Jesus, the king, rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. And the included detail that Jesus rides in on a donkey is important for a number of reasons, but most importantly it showed them—and us—that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah, the coming Deliverer and Rescuer.

In fact, all four gospel writers include the detail of Jesus' riding on a donkey in their accounts, however, only Matthew and John directly quote from the Old Testament prophecy that speaks to this.

Zechariah, the second to last book in our Old Testaments, includes this prophecy...

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.

And so again, the four gospel writers, wanting to highlight that Jesus is the promised Messiah, make sure they include this detail. Jesus rides into Jerusalem in the exact manner that was predicted many, many years before.

And in our passage this morning, John 12:15 is the quote of Zechariah 9:9, *however*, I want to point out this morning that it is only a *partial* quote.

Notice the difference between Zechariah's prophecy and John's description. Zechariah admonishes Israel to "rejoice greatly!" Rejoice, because God will be faithful to his promise to bring a Messiah.

But John introduces the prophecy of Jesus riding on a donkey not with, "rejoice" but rather with, "Fear not."

So we might ask, what was John doing here? Was he being unfaithful to the text? Did he misquote Zechariah? I don't think so. John is simply expressing *how* we might rejoice.

You see, we more readily exercise joy when our fears are removed. You know this, when the weight of our fears are no longer crushing our hearts, our hearts are freed to do what renewed and spiritually alive hearts are meant to do - rejoice! Clearly this was a needed word to those early Christians, and it is a needed word for us today in 2022.

Every year Chapman University in California conducts a Survey of American Fears.¹ They list 95 different fears to see which ones are the most prominent in the given year, and they range from A to Z, literally, from the fear of air pollution, to the fear of zombies.

Their latest survey with available data is from the beginning of 2021 and the top five fears of Americans were: 1) corrupt government officials, 2) people I love dying, 3) a loved one contracting COVID, 4) people I love becoming seriously ill, and 5) widespread civil unrest.

Thinking back to the events of 2020 and early 2021 we can certainly see why those ranked so high. And with everything that has happened in the world since then, no doubt, that might look a bit different today, but that is really the point of the survey. Year after year, fear always exists; the *focus* of our fears are what change. And so, I know that is true for us this morning as well. Reasons for fear abound, but the specifics might look different from one heart to the next today.

So on this Palm Sunday I want us to hear the words again, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

And with that statement, again, I don't think John is saying something contrary to Zechariah, I think he is trying to eliminate our fears that we might be led to greater joy, and this can be done, according to John, as we consider what Palm Sunday commemorates and teaches.

So, this morning it would be good for us to ask the questions, "How might Palm Sunday speak to our fears?" Or, "How might Palm Sunday increase our joy by calming our hearts?"

¹ "The Division on the Study of American Fears," <https://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/research-centers/babbie-center/survey-american-fears.aspx>.

Thinking about what the Triumphal Entry of Jesus as King meant, I want to highlight just a few ways that our fears might be subdued...

1. Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus is King over all of history, even the darkest parts.

So much of our fear is centered around tragedy, calamity, disaster, and seemingly purposeless suffering. And yet, Jesus with a royal entrance into Jerusalem speaks to this.

Consider again the prophecy of Zechariah 9. Earlier we read verse 9 but listen to it again along with a few of the verses that follow it, some of the greater context...

Zechariah 9:9-10, 16

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. **10** 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... **16** On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.

This prophecy is all about not just the arrival of the king, but the *victorious* arrival of the coming King. So put yourselves in the shoes of those waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna that day. Remembering this prophecy and seeing Jesus ride into town on the donkey, surely you would have thought here comes our victory. Here comes our day of peace and prosperity. Here comes our salvation, just as Zechariah said.

But then a few days later, they see that victorious King arrested and killed before their eyes. It would seem that either he wasn't who he said he was or that the rebels against this king were victorious over him, and thus, all is lost, or everything seemed to be meaningless.

However, what would happen to Jesus at the end of that week was not in spite of him being king. Jesus would ride into Jerusalem as the King, he would stand before Pilate as King, he would be nailed to the cross as King, and he would be buried as King. Those were not circumstances that occurred outside of his dominion or reign. The dark moments did not challenge or change his title as King. And it certainly didn't challenge or change his purposeful reign.

Now, in politics we know that all administrations have goals for their time in office and they make many promises while campaigning to see that those goals would be met if they were elected. But we know that much of what is hoped for and promised in campaigns fail to come to fruition. Our politicians do not wield complete authority to do what they want, thankfully. There are always opponents to proposed legislation who challenge what can be accomplished.

But that isn't true for King Jesus. There are no real opponents who can thwart his purposes or stop his plans. And this was true even in, and especially in, his death.

In fact, we see later in John 12...

John 12:23-24

23 And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

It is actually through his death that victory comes and fruit is produced. While the onlookers saw defeat, Jesus was producing fruit. And not just some fruit, but "much" fruit.

There is another Old Testament reference about the rule of King Jesus tied to the Triumphal Entry. This one is found in Genesis 49...

Gen. 49:10-11

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

11 Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes.

So, in verse 10 we read the royal descriptions of the coming Messiah. But in verse 11 we are given this beautiful imagery of the coming king who "binds" his foal and colt to "the choice vine." What does he mean by that?

Most commentators believe it speaks to the abundance of fruit in the reign of the king. That the king would be so fruitful that there would be no worry or concern of the donkey eating the fruit of the best vines. That he is so fruitful and prosperous that his clothes would be stained with the fruit of the vine.

Again, when the onlookers saw defeat, Jesus was producing fruit. And he continues to produce fruit, even when we see defeat. Whether it is in the circumstances we see in the world at large or in the circumstances we face in our own personal lives, no amount

of darkness challenges the title of Jesus as King or the results of his purposeful and fruitful reign.

So, what does this mean for us? It means we can joyfully lay down our fear of purposeless suffering and tragedy before the throne of Jesus. Again, Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus is King over all of history, even the darkest parts.

2. Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus is King over all authorities, even the most evil.

This is good news for us because fear of corrupt authorities was the top fear of Americans last year and it was the top fear by a landslide—20 percent higher than the second top fear which was the fear of loved ones dying.

But what we celebrate one week from today reminds us that Caesar couldn't stop the reign of Jesus. Pilate's actions wouldn't either. The religious leaders couldn't stop the reign of Jesus. Satan couldn't stop the reign of Jesus. And this truth, that Jesus reigns over all authorities, later fueled the earliest of disciples as they came head to head with corrupt authorities during their ministries.

In Acts 4, Luke tells us about a confrontation between the Jewish religious leaders and two disciples of Jesus, Peter and John. This is after Jesus rose again and ascended to heaven, and now the disciples were tasked with preaching the good news of the gospel beginning there in Jerusalem. So, Peter and John are preaching, many, many people are believing and coming to faith in Christ, so the religious leaders arrest them, drag them before their council and charge them not to speak about Jesus ever again.

And rather than cowering before them in fear, they respond that they can't help but speak of Jesus after what they've seen and heard.

They are released and go back to the other disciples and they spend time praying together, and listen to how they pray...

Acts 4:24

24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them..."

Again, "Sovereign Lord..." They address God with a title that recognizes his complete power and reign over all things and all people. It's a title that describes the One who has unstoppable power and absolute control.

Listen to how they continue in prayer...

Acts 4:25-28

25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? **26** The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ — **27** for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Again, they believed that the actions of those who conspired against Jesus accomplished exactly what the Lord had planned. So, how do the evil and rebellious plans of those who stand against Lord stack up against the Lord himself? They don't. They don't stop God, they don't kick him off his throne, they don't force God to call an audible and change things up, and they don't limit what God can accomplish.

And this belief fueled the early disciples in their response to corrupt leaders who wanted to silence them. Rather than being overcome by fear of man, Luke tells us a few verses later that they continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

But what about us today? What does this mean for us in 2022 when fear of man is rampant in our culture, even within the Church? One theologian in reflecting on the connections between belief in a holy, sovereign God and fear writes, “But what if atheism is true? What if there is...no sovereign Lord—and we are all just cosmically alienated accidents in an accidental universe? If so, then fear is the logical psychological response to the headlines. So we shouldn't be surprised that fear of corrupt leaders is rising at the same time secularism is. As faith in an all-powerful God wanes, fear of powerful men rises.

But fear is not the logical psychological outworking of robust theism. This is an opportunity for believers in an anxious age. Christians can be redemptively countercultural by taking our cues less from social-media algorithms that promote fear, and more from the theology of the first-century church. We can point anxious friends, family, and neighbors to the fear-dispelling God of the universe, ‘who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them’, and whose power dwarfs earth's most powerful empires, nations, and kings.”²

Again, Jesus rides into Jerusalem as King and his reign was, and continues to be, over all other authorities, even the most corrupt.

² Thaddeus Williams, “Christians Can Be Counterculturally Fearless,” January 3, 2022. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/2022-christians-fearless/>.

3. Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus is King, and has drawn near to sinful men and women, therefore, we can draw near to him.

Fear in Scripture is an important theme but it can also be a confusing theme. On the one hand, we are given hundreds of encouragements to not be afraid, but then we are also admonished to fear the Lord. How do we understand that?

Understand, there is a *healthy* and right fear of the Lord. This is the respect and awe that we should have as we consider his majesty, holiness, and absolute sovereignty over all things including ourselves, which drives us to submit to him in worship and reverence.

But there is also a *sinful* fear of the Lord. It is a fear that draws us away from God. James describes this fear when he speaks of the demons' belief in God that causes them to "tremble," but it certainly doesn't drive them to worship. It is the same kind of fear that Adam had when after he sinned he hid himself from the Lord.

Michael Reeves describes this fear as "the fear of the unbeliever who hates God, who remains a rebel at heart, who fears being exposed as a sinner and so runs from God."³ In other words it is a fear that is opposite of loving God and drawing near to him, instead it causes people to cower in shame or run in hatred.

But we know that a fear of God that draws us away from him is something that we as believers experience as well. In our lowest of moments, when our sin is undeniable and seemingly ever-present, when we think to ourselves "I can't believe myself, I should be a better Christian by now," because we recognize his holiness and perfection, we can all cultivate the kind of fear that causes us to cower in shame and shy away from him.

But it is then that we have failed to remember the heart of the king who has graciously drawn near to us.

I mean, if all we knew was that God is holy, sovereign, majestic, and glorious, then of course we would run from this God. Because we know we can't stand in his presence. We would try to avoid him at all costs, or we would try to deny his existence entirely in order to calm our own fears of having to answer to him.

But Palm Sunday reminds us that this holy, sovereign, majestic, and glorious king has come to us, and he came not to first bring judgment, but to lay down his life for you and me, demonstrating the love of God.

³ Michael Reeves, *Rejoice and Tremble* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 33.

Romans 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Because of our repentant faith in Jesus, we can lay down our fear of God's judgment and condemnation, and rather than running from the throne of our king, we can run to him. The sinful fear that can grow in our hearts vanishes when the kindness of our King is set before our eyes.

The Puritan theologian, Stephen Charnock, wrote, "Nothing of God looks terrible in Christ to a believer. The sun is risen, shadows are vanished, God walks upon the battlements of love, justice hath left its sting in a Savior's side, the law is disarmed, weapons out of his hand, his bosom open, his bowels yearn, his heart pants, sweetness and love is in all his carriage."⁴

Because the king has come to us, and even more, allowed his royal body to be beaten, torn, and crucified, the justice that our sins deserved have been dealt with by the King himself. The wonder of Christ as King is that the hands that hold the scepter are scarred from the nails that were driven into them. The head that wears the crown first wore a crown of thorns. The One who will one day ride on a warhorse bringing judgment first rode on a donkey to bear our judgment on himself.

So, for those of us who are battling fear this morning, whether it be the fear of purposeless suffering, corrupt and evil authorities, or perhaps an unhealthy fear of the Lord himself, or something else, know that the king who rode into Jerusalem that day reigns over it all.

Since all of those things and people that cause us fear are subservient to King Jesus, our fears can be as well. So, Fear not, people of God, our king has come and we know that he has promised to come again to make all things new. Let's fearlessly follow him in the meantime.

And if you've never trusted in Christ, we would implore you to do so. Jesus is King and he can be your Savior....

CONFESSION

Before I pray for us, I want to give us all an opportunity for silent prayer and confession. So with heads bowed and eyes closed, let me invite you to confess your unhealthy fears to the Lord and spend time asking Him for a renewed, courageous heart that sees Jesus on the throne...

⁴ Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 4:163.

PRAYER

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Before stand to sing again, let me remind you that Jesus the King, in his sovereignty and providence, used the greatest injustice in history, the death of Jesus, to produce the greatest gift in history, the redemption of his people through the fulfillment of the law on our behalf, sufficient sacrifice to atone for our sins, and the defeat of our greatest enemies: Satan, sin, and death. And now, if you've trusted in Christ you can stand boldly in this world and the one to come...

Romans 8:31-34

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

So, let's all stand together and confidently sing praises to our reigning King.

VERSES

John 12:12-19

Zechariah 9:9

Zechariah 9:9-10, 16

John 12:23-24

Genesis 49:10-11

Acts 4:24

Acts 4:25-28

Romans 5:8

Romans 8:31-34

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What fear(s) do you face most often or in this season of life? How should the reign of King Jesus bring you comfort?