

BEHOLD YOUR KING!

March 23/97

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INTRO: When I first began to pastor, it happened that as I developed how I would approach special days like Palm Sunday, Good Friday etc... that I began to do a lot of research into the history of those days. And this year, as I thought of what I should cover on this day we call Palm Sunday I went over some old messages and thought I would restudy and rewrite some as my abilities and knowledge had grown over the years. Also, many of the people in church here now were not there when I preached those messages and those that were may find themselves learning a lot of new things from those messages.

The message I am redoing this morning is a message I did in 1997 called, "Behold Your King!" The passage that was read for us was Matthew 21:1-11. In this passage we have described for us Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. It is a most significant event! And before we look at that, I want to just mention something to our students who are studying for ministry. Let me give you a word of warning. I have heard messages on this passage that centered on the aspect where Jesus told His disciples to find a donkey, loose it and bring it to Him. And the messages were built on this thought that as the disciples were to free the donkey, so we should bring the Gospel message to sinners to free them, and then bring them to Him.

Well, it is not that many such messages did not have a lot of truth to them. But it would be best expressed, in my opinion, as someone else said about such a message, "Good message, wrong text." You do not have to read into such accounts and try to find hidden, underlying truths in such historical passages, to find substance for messages. As a matter of fact, it is quite dangerous, in my estimation.

Now we have had read for us this morning Matthew 21:1-11. I want us to consider just the prophetic words of verse 5 this morning (read). More and more I am coming to the conclusion that the Gentile Christian world needs a much deeper understanding of the Old Testament, and in that I include myself. Do you understand the significance of the prophecy we have just read? If you have an understanding of the OT prophets you may have an understanding of the significance of this passage. D. Martin Lloyd Jones, that great preacher from England, writes in his commentary on Ephesians these words, "The Holy Spirit guided the early Church, which was mainly Gentile in character, to preserve the Old Testament

as absolutely essential; and a Christian who thinks he can do without the Old Testament is merely displaying his ignorance. You do not understand the New without the Old" (Vol. V; 305,2).

Now let us read once more Matthew 21:1-5 (read). Verse 5 is a prophecy from the prophet Zechariah, the second last book in the OT. I invite you to turn to Zechariah 9 (read 1-9). In verse 9 we have the prophecy spoken of in Matthew 21:5. This is our focus this Palm Sunday morning.

## I. THE TIME OF THIS PROPHECY

We want to first consider the time when this prophecy was given. For this we go to the beginning of the book. So look at 1:1 (read). Zechariah gives us two specific dates. The first is that Zechariah began his prophecy in the second year of Darius. In 7:1 we have another date given. This one is in the fourth year of Darius. Now you may remember from Scripture that Israel was taken captive by the Babylonians for seventy years. Now Cyrus, king of Persia had allowed Israel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it. This had been prophesied by Isaiah some 200 years before it happened. So, Jerusalem was rebuilt. Well Cyrus had a son called Bardiya or Smerdis. This man usurped the throne of Cyrus, according to Encyclopedian Britannica, after Cyrus' death. Then the man we have mentioned in Zechariah 1:1 and 7:1, Darius murdered Cyrus' son Bardiya and became ruler of Persia. This is the country we today call Iran.

So it is not difficult to determine the date of this significant prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. For Zechariah began writing in Darius' second year. The Encyclopedia Britannica readily identifies the date Darius became ruler of Persia. It is 522 B.C. So if Zechariah began writing in his second year it would be 520 BC. But Zechariah 7:1 was penned in Darius fourth year, which makes it 518 B.C. So in 518 BC on the fourth day of the ninth month Zechariah wrote these profound prophecies and words.

In Matthew 21, Jesus would have been about 32 years old, in my calculations. So, the prophecy we are reading is about 550 years old! The fulfillment of this prophecy in Matthew 21 is one of the many prophecies that validates the divine inspiration of Scripture. As a matter of fact, the prophecies that are fulfilled from Palm Sunday to resurrection Sunday

should be enough all on their own to prove beyond a shadow of doubt to any earnest seeker that the Bible is the divine Word of God!

## II. THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROPHECY

So, let us now consider the significance of this prophecy. To do that, let us first consider the context of Zechariah 9:9. In this chapter verses 1-7 prophecy the destruction of Israel's enemies. Now these prophecies were fulfilled by a man named Alexander the Great. In 333 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered a Persian army under Darius the III at the Battle of Issus. Alexander the Great became the 3rd world power prophesied by Daniel. The Medes and Persians, (Iranians) were the second world rulers. So after the battle of Issus, Alexander the great came down the Mediteranian coast and right there the prophecy of Zechariah 9:1-7 was fulfilled. If my calculations are correct, about 175 years after Zechariah 9:1-7 was written, it was fulfilled.

Well, Alexander the Great destroyed Hadrach and Damascus, cities of Syria (9:1-2a). Damascus today is the capital of Syria and still harbours a deep hatred for Israel. And of recent, Syria has been in the news a great deal. Then Alexander moved down to Tyrus and Sidon, cities of Phoenecia (9:2b-4). When the Philistines to the south of Phonicea heard what Alexander did to the Phonicians they were petrified. Ashkelon, Gaza and Ekron and Ashdod mentioned in verses 5-7, are cities of the Philistines.

Now I want you to notice a very significant verse. You see Alexander the Great has conquered around Israel and will now move inland towards Jerusalem. It is here that we read of God's protection of Jerusalem in verse 8a. Here this prophecy says, "I will camp around My house, Because of the army, Because of him who passes by and him who returns." Fred Hartman, of the magazine *Israel My Glory*, comments like this in his commentary on Zechariah, "Alexander, with his massive armies, had passed by Jerusalem on the way south to make war against the Philistine cities. He had demanded that tribute be paid, which Israel's high priest refused to do. With the Philistines on his mind, Alexander and his conquering armies bypassed Jerusalem. Once the Philistine area had been secured, the thought of taking the city returned to the general's mind. His swift-moving military machine would now go up to

Jerusalem-so he thought" (Zechariah: Messenger of the Messiah's Triumph, 89). But in Zechariah 9:8, 175 years before this happened, God had already said what would happen. You see, He had said, "I will camp around My house..."

So, Alexander, when he had defeated Gaza headed for Jerusalem for he was angry with the High Priest's disobedience to him regarding tribute money. Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived and wrote in the time of Jesus writes of this account. He tells us that when the High Priest heard Alexander was coming he was very afraid. He called on the people to pray and they offered sacrifices to God for protection against Alexander. And in a dream God spoke to the High Priest and told him to take courage and adorn the city and open the gates and that he and the priests should go to meet Alexander in their priestly garments and the rest should dress in white and thus go out and meet this army, and that they should be unafraid. Well, as Alexander neared the city the Chaldeans and Phoenicians who were with him could hardly wait to lay hands on these Jews and their plunder, for they know Alexander was very angry with the high priest.

Now I want to give you a lengthy but very interesting bit of history from Josephus. Here is what Josephus says happened as Alexander the Great neared Jerusalem, "...the very reverse happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest. The Jews did altogether, with one voice, salute Alexander, and encompass him about; whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, Parmenio alone went up to him, and asked him how it came to pass that, when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom he replied, 'I did not adore him, but that God who had honored him with his high priesthood; for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonian, who, when I was considering myself how I might obtain dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the

Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind.' And when he had said this to Parmenio, and had given the high priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city; and when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifices to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the book of Daniel was shewed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was that person intended; and as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present..." end quote (Josephus 244).

So, consider this. The prophecy of verses 1-9 is given in 518 BC. The fulfillment of this prophecy happened in 333 BC, 175 years later. But the prophecy of verse 9 is fulfilled in 30-33 AD! At least 360 years separate the fulfillment of verses 1-9 and verse 9. And the preceding context of verse 9 is verses 1-8.

### III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPHECY

Now, just why do you suppose the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 is given right here? I propose to you that it is the significance of this prophecy, both in its similarity to the context, and its dissimilarity.

Now, you see, in this prophecy, what is of very great significance is what is left out in the Biblical account. In verses 1-8, we have that great king, Alexander the Great coming to Jerusalem. I do not know on what color horse Alexander the Great was riding as he approached Jerusalem, but no doubt, it was on a horse. Was it on a white charger? Hartman, in his commentary on Zechariah says this, "From the days of Solomon on, no dignitary rode on anything but a strong, well-built white charger", end quote(91).

But Alexander had a taste for horses. There is a legend about a black horse Alexander had. Let me read some of this legend for you from an internet article. It says: "The legend begins with Philoneicus, a Thessalian bringing a wild horse to Philip II, the

father of Alexander the Great. Philip was angry at Phinoneicus for bringing such an unstable horse to him but Alexander had watched Bucephalus and set his father, Philip, a challenge. Although Alexander was only 12 years old he had noticed that Bucephalus was shying away from his own shadow. Alexander gently led Bucephalus into the sun so that his shadow was behind him. Eventually Bucephalus allowed Alexander to ride him, much to the public humiliation of Philip. Philip gained face by commenting 'Look thee out a kingdom equal to and worthy of thyself, for Macedonia is too little for thee.' Alexander named the horse Bucephalus because the horse's head seemed 'as broad as a bulls'. Bucephalus, the mighty stallion, died of battle wounds in 326 B.C in Alexander's last battle. Alexander founded the city of Bucephala (thought to be the modern town of Jhelum, Pakistan) in memory of his wonderful horse" end quote (<http://www.alexander-the-great.co.uk/bucephalus.htm>).

Now I want you to draw a picture in your mind. You can make this horse white or black, as you desire. Now picture a general of generals, all decked out with medals on this white charger or this black beauty, a horse with a head as broad as a bull. Then picture him following this high priest, dressed in his priestly garb as they head back to Jerusalem. Here is this large company of priests and people dressed in white, and behind is Alexander the great, not leading, but following. And behind him, this army of vicious men who had so desired to kill and plunder, but now are being led to sacrifice with the high priest. Do you get the picture?

Now lay that picture aside, and draw another picture in your mind as I read the account (Matthew 21:1-10). Now do you see why the Lord slipped this prophecy in right here in Zechariah 9:9! Between the approach to Jerusalem of Alexander the Great on a great horse, and Jesus on a lowly donkey, is the stark contrast between the ways of Christ and the ways of the world. It is such a stark contrast that should be found between Christianity and the world.

Alexander the Great was a violent man. He rode vicious horses and had vicious men in his army. He would violently attack anyone who got in his way. The one thing that mattered to Alexander the Great was what Alexander the Great wanted.

Picture Alexander on his great charger, riding with head high. Picture his soldiers selling bereaved men, women and children on the slave market. Then picture Jesus touching dying lepers, healing a woman diseased for 12 years, going about doing good and preaching the Gospel. Picture Him when Judas came and betrayed Him and the created led the Creator to the slaughtering block. Picture Him like a Lamb going to the slaughter, never arguing or fighting. The contrast is so great as the heaven is above the earth.

But Israel's king, we read, is lowly and just. When Jesus Christ came, He came not to look out for His own interests but those of others (Phil. 2:5-8). In Philippians 2:5 it says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." I think it would read more literally, "Let this kind of thinking be in you which was also in Him." And what kind of thinking did He do? Well, He did not think equality with God Almighty in heaven to be something to be clung to. He considered it something He could give up, in light of the desperate plight of mankind. And that is what He did. He left the splendor of heaven, knowing His destiny was the lonely hill of Golgotha. He demoted Himself from being King of Kings and Lord of lords, to taking the form of a slave. Rather than remaining as the glorious King of kings, He emptied Himself and became of no reputation. And then, being in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself still further, to the point where He hung naked on the cross. It was shame heaped upon shame.

Now think of Alexander the Great, whether on a white charger or his black Bucephalus. The picture with that of Jesus is such a stark contrast, it must be contrasted, not compared, though the lowest is the highest! Alexander the Great brought death and destruction wherever he went. He conquered. According to Hartman, he butchered thousands and sold multitudes into slavery. He was nothing like Jesus. He was anything but a savior.

Jesus Christ came offering salvation to his enemies. Some of His final words uttered on the cross were in favor of His enemies. He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." The apostle Peter writes these words of honor about his master, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps: Who committed no sin, Nor was guile found

in His mouth, who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..."

The arrival of a king to any city is a great event. My wife and I watched a video on Queen Elizebeth. These places prepare long in advance for the arrival of the royal person. It is an event that calls for much ceremony and pomp. Picture Alexander's arrival and the knees of the inhabitants of Jerusalem smiting each other with fear. Picture that great steed prancing along, eyes fired up and nostrils flaring, ready for the battle. Then Picture Jesus Christ riding this lowly donkey, feet almost reaching down to the ground and the head of the donkey anything but raised in pride. Picture the mighty soldiers all mounted on white chargers, following their mighty leader. Then look at Jesus and His disciples and the children as they enter Jerusalem. Picture Alexander on his trained charger and Jesus on a young unbroken donkey and the contrast stands at its sharpest.

Do you understand the significance of Zechariah 9:9? Listen to his words once more, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just, and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt the foal of a donkey."

#### IV. THE PEOPLE OF THIS PROPHECY

Look at the prophecy with me once more, and consider the people of the prophecy. Look at it. It says, "Tell the daughter of Zion." I think this phrase, 'daughter of zion' refers to Jerusalem, and thus of its inhabitants. Now the event spoken of in our prophecy happened just before the feast of Passover. And at this time, four days before Passover, the city will have been bursting at the seams. Passover was one of three feasts at which all Jewish males were required to appear in Jerusalem. And here, the daughter of Jerusalem is representative of the Jewish nation as Jews from every tribe have gathered here at this time.

And when Jesus arrived on this day at Jerusalem, He received a royal welcome. Our text said the whole city was moved. It is an incredible moment. It is a glorious moment, but it is but a moment. Turn to John 2 with me to look at another Passover feast just 2



years before this (read 2:23-25). Jesus knew that man was finicky and untrustworthy. Man could heap praise on you one day and curse you the next. Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile, were rare. Jesus knew it.

And on this wonderful day people spread their extra clothes on the road and cut down branches and spread them on the road and they welcomed a king! But the King who rode the donkey knew what lay ahead. This same people that showered Him with praise will hail down curses in just a few days.

Now let me tell you something else about Jesus. Many times He could have saved Himself. If it had been His desire, he could by this time have been ruling as a king. But He knew the Jewish world was not ready for Him. He knew that when the Jewish leadership would incite the people, these same people would change overnight. He knew all that.

Let me show you a little of what He will say the very next day as He once more makes His way to Jerusalem, and He is at about the same place, overlooking this beautiful city. Having just given the Scribes and Pharisees one of the most scathing addresses He ever gave anyone, and having said in verse 36, "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation", He says the words of verses 37-39 (read).

Yes, this is Palm Sunday, but there is no Palm Wednesday. In the early hours of Wednesday, He spent three agonizing hours in prayer; prayer for deliverance from the most loathsome cup ever offered anyone. And at the closing hours of Wednesday, He lay dead in a tomb. Crucified by the same people who crowned Him on Palm Sunday.

CONCL: So, let me conclude by asking which kind of king does the world still clamor after today? Is it the kind that sits on a huge horse? Or is it one what comes on a donkey? Is it the cowboy kind? Or is it the shepherd kind? And may I ask you, which king have you chosen? Do you say, "I have not made my choice yet? Then you have chosen the Alexander the Great kind. Let me encourage you to consider well, that it is the end that counts. What of Alexander the Great? Where is he? What of Jesus Christ? Where is He? And some day Alexander the Great, and all like him, will bow their knees before the King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords. You

see, it is the last chapter that counts, and I have read it.  
I want you to see it in closing in Revelation 19:11-16.  
Jesus is coming to Jerusalem once more. This time it is on a  
white charger. He came once as a servant. He is coming  
again, but this time as King of kings, and Lord of lords!