

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

The Meaning Of Palm Sunday

By

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Zechariah 9:9-17

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In 520 BC the children of Israel under the leadership of Zechariah were rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem. There was discouragement among the captives that had returned from Babylon. Jerusalem was in a very poor and decayed state. Although the foundation of the temple had been laid, the work was going very slowly. It was Zechariah's mission to bring the task of temple building to completion. This he did.

The altar of burnt offering was set up on its old site but as yet there are no priests worthy to officiate in the ritual of sacrifice. Zechariah called the people to repentance and prophesied the promise of a new theocracy for Israel in which God will be King, the Messiah will come, and the Kingdom of God will be established and will triumph over all hostile world powers.

A new age will dawn for Zion. The Church will be victorious over all her enemies. The restoration of Israel will be glorious indeed.

Palm Sunday signals Messiah's coming. Three of the gospels tell us that Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled on that first Palm Sunday as Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt. John tells us that many of the people who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of Palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, **"Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel."** **John 12:13**

Several things stand out in this signal event in the ministry of Christ. The first thing is the sign of His coming. He was to come humble and lowly, riding on the foal of a donkey.

Why in the world would God ordain that Messiah should come this way? What are we to learn from this? You have to visualize in your mind's eye what it would be like to come to an inauguration on a little, unmanageable, foolish colt. No fanfare of trumpets. No mighty steed of war. None of the trappings of ostentation and power such as the kings of the earth would be sure to have. No train of slaves. No cortege of attendants and captains and mighty men. No outward show of magnificence.

When our presidents are inaugurated a great show is made. This is the day when the power passes from the former administration to the new president elect. He would arrive by helicopter or limousine. The dignitaries are all seated. It is an impressive spectacle.

But Jesus comes humble and lowly disdaining all such display except palm branches strewn in his path and rejoicing at his coming. It is truly a time of rejoicing and celebration.

What an insight this gives us into the character of God. The omnipotent One who has all power, all wisdom, who made the worlds and all that dwell in the earth. He comes without oratory and speeches. He who has all majesty and glory comes meek and lowly, riding on the foal of a donkey. How this flies in the face of man's pride and arrogance.

The second thing we should note about this event is that those who do the rejoicing are those who are the Church. She is referred to as the daughter of Zion, the daughter of Jerusalem. These are the true believers, the Spirit indwelt disciples. Unfortunately not all Israel recognized him as Messiah when he came.

This day has no meaning for the unbelievers of the world. Before people can rejoice in this event they must have spiritual eyes to discern who Jesus Christ is.

Palm Sunday signals redemption. Zechariah prophesies in verse 9, **He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.** And he brings peace for Verse 10 **tells us the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the**

nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.

What blessings his coming brings --Salvation and peace to all who make him their king.

In verse 11 he says, **As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Zech. 9:11**

Let us deal with the real issues of salvation. What is it that Messiah has come to do? For most if not all Jews the coming of Messiah was anticipated to be the restoration of Israel to the glory of the days of Solomon. All the nations would recognize the power and might and excellence of the Messiah King and Israel would be the chief among the nations. People conceived that he would set up a very earthly, even military Israel that all nations would respect and fear. But we see instead that he comes not on a steed of war but on a colt of a donkey, without an army, without a visible power base. Instead, in His coming there is salvation and men are set free from the waterless pit.

What in the world is the waterless pit? Were any of the Jews in a waterless pit at his coming? Not in a literal sense. No, but in the spiritual, figurative sense they were. All men are the prisoners of their own sins and lusts and carnal cravings. They seek after many things to try and assuage this burning thirst, but they find nothing in this world that can satisfy that thirst or free them from the waterless pit. Jesus comes to free them, to give to them the water of life and satisfaction.

Christ told the woman at the well that if she would ask of him he would give her living water. Then she said to him, **"Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? ... ¹³Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." John 4:11-14**

A waterless pit is a suitable picture used by the Lord to tell us of our condition apart from his Son and his salvation. There is no enjoyment in a pit. Whatever you might find to do in a pit is only a temporary relief from the awfulness of one's condition.

Two things are needed for anyone in a waterless pit. You must have water or you will perish, and you need to be freed from that hopeless condition. Unless you get out of that pit and get some water you have no future and no true enjoyment of anything.

This is the picture of a world without Christ. The world may entertain itself with pleasantries and with amusement, with possessions and human accomplishments but because your soul and my soul were made for God we can never find true happiness until our souls are satisfied with Him. We can be complete only in Him. We must be reconciled to Him and have the life that only He can give, the water that only He can give.

This Messiah King comes with salvation. He is Himself salvation. He is endowed with salvation.

We are told how this is accomplished in the prophecy. **because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.**

The Lord Jesus Christ has made himself a sacrifice for sins. Five days after this triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Good Friday, he was hanging on a cross. He was impaled on a tree. His blood was shed to redeem us from the power and penalty of sin.

All who have not come to him yet sit in a waterless pit. They may or may not recognize the hopelessness of their predicament. But in this world of sin and woe, of man pitted against man, of hunger and starvation and sickness and death, surely the pit is recognizable.

In Zechariah's prophecy we are given to know that our salvation rests not alone upon the mercy of God, but upon His justice. **He is just and endowed with salvation.** In His mercy and love, he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

To bestow righteous mercy there had to be the fulfilling of justice. When Ashley Smith witnessed to Brian Nichols she told him that he would have to be punished for what he had done.

Sin cannot be brushed aside. A person cannot escape justice. Jesus fulfilled justice on behalf of sinners by taking their punishment upon himself.

A Chinese evangelist Leland Wang tells of an incident in his childhood that illustrates the substitutionary work of Christ. On one occasion he had been very naughty and his mother, with a stick in her hand, called him to her to be punished. But he ran off, taunting his mother because she could not catch him. She had little chance of catching her small, lively son. So she stood still and said, "I feel ashamed of myself that I have brought up a boy who is not willing to be disciplined by his mother when he does wrong, so I must punish myself," and she began to whip her bare arm. This so touched Leland's heart that he ran back to his mother, threw himself into her arms, and pleaded with her not to hurt herself but to punish him. But no further punishment was necessary.

Mr. Wang said that, as he grew older, the memory of this incident helped him to understand the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ who willingly took our place on the cross.

This illustration is helpful but falls short of being a true analogy of the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Why? Because even if Leland Wang's mother punished herself for his disobedience she was not qualified to take the punishment for his sins for the simple reason that she was herself a sinner and owed an incalculable debt for her own sins. One sinner cannot pay the sin debt of another sinner.

In the second place God decreed the punishment for even one sin is death. Leland's mother lacked the perfect righteousness needed to justify him before God even if she had died in his place. Add to that the fact that she lacked the power to recover from the sting of death, in which case her sacrifice would be a futile gesture.

Only the sinless Son of God could act as a substitute and pay the ultimate penalty and have life in himself after being under the sentence of death for three days to be resurrected. Only his substitutionary sacrifice justifies God in forgiving me and you our sins.

The prisoners of Israel are set free and given the water of life because of the blood covenant. Not only that they are then armed with the might of the Lord to carry the gospel to the nations. The sons of Zion will go forth to meet the sons of Greece... **For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece; And I will make you like a warrior's sword.** ¹⁶ **And the LORD their God will save them in that day As the flock of His people; for they are as the stones of a crown, Sparkling in His land. Zech. 9:13, 16**

The church becomes the battle bow for the Lord. He promises to appear over them to give them victory over the unbelief and opposition of the world. The church has the message of redemption to share with the nations and she shall succeed in her mission. She shall trample underfoot all the sling stone cast against her. She will be as those who are boisterous with wine.

Christians are like sacrificial vessels filled with the Holy Spirit, full of joy and excitement, full of life and righteousness. What beauty is theirs! How comely is the church in her missionary zeal for the Lord of hosts! And many more shall come to know God besides Judah and Ephraim.

There is a lost and dying world that sits in a waterless pit. But we have the water of everlasting life to carry to them. We have the message of the Messiah King.

After Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well about the water of eternal life, she asked him for it. She said, **"Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."** ¹⁶**He said* to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."** ¹⁷**The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."** Jesus said* to her, **"You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."** ... ²⁵**The woman said* to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."** ²⁶**Jesus said* to her, "I who speak to you am He."** John 4:15-18, John 4:25-26

She immediately went to her home town and began to preach Christ, saying, ²⁹**"Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"** John 4:29

Like the Samaritan woman we go tell others. She immediately became a missionary. First we are saved and then we are involved in the great work of World Missions.

On this Palm Sunday, have you been saved? Are you drinking from the well that will never run dry? Do you have freedom from the guilt and power of sin? Are your feet on the solid ground of Christ's salvation?

I invite you to come to him with repentance and faith. Then you will truly have cause to rejoice. Come to Him today. Make him your own personal Savior. And go and tell others. Answer the trumpet call of God to march with him through the length and breadth of the earth with the message of salvation. He promises to bless our efforts to reach others with the Gospel.

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