

The Gentle King
March 25, 2018
Brian R. Wipf

Can I use politics right now as an opening illustration without you thinking I'm trying to make a political point? If you're new to FBC, you'll learn that when it comes to our time on Sunday morning, we care most about the things of God not the ways of man; as I'm about to show you, God's ways are higher and better than our ways. If you've been paying attention to the news lately you know that North Korea has been making its fair share of headlines. It's been testing its ballistic missile capabilities for a while now and they love to have their military parades. I'm sure you've seen pictures or videos of these parades that kind of look like this (PIC). North Korea is not the only country that likes to have military parades. Russia, China, France, Great Britain and many other countries have them, too. Even President Trump has made news lately saying he wants to have a parade, also.

Why do countries do this? They are a lot money and work; I think I heard the parade President Trump wants will cost, like, \$30M. Parades are celebrations. They're supposed to boost morale. Look how big our army is! Look how big our weapons are! Hooray! Parades are supposed to increase our sense of pride and, more importantly, our confidence. Our tanks are so big, our missiles are so powerful we don't need to worry; we don't have to be afraid. And not being afraid is important. Do you remember a couple of months ago when President Trump famously said that he has a bigger nuclear button on his desk than Kim Jung Un? Debate the wisdom of that with each other later this week over coffee, but the point of that posturing is to communicate a sense of might and power. And if you're playing that game it makes sense, right? The one with the biggest missiles, the one who has the most tanks and fighter jets is probably going to win. And citizenry is supposed to sleep more soundly because of it.

But what if that's the wrong way of looking at the world? What if puffing out your chest and boasting about your strength is giving into a way of life, it's submitting to a kingdom, that God is actually trying to save us from? What if counting missiles and aircraft carriers is a way of looking at the world that God is putting to an end? And I guess I'm not merely suggesting these questions in a hypothetical way, but proposing to you that God indeed operates differently than this. God's kingdom is not of this world; God wins the victory in a different way than how the world works. God puts on parade something different than his muscles; God parades his gentleness and his humility. Today is Palm Sunday and at the heart of this important day is this message that God wins the battle in a way completely foreign to ways of the world. Let me show you from the wonderful story of Jesus entering into Jerusalem to kick off Holy Week (READ John 12:12-19).

The feast referenced in vs. 12 are the festivities surrounding Passover, the annual celebration by the nation of Israel. Families would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate. A Jewish historian from the 1st century named Josephus wrote that Jerusalem would swell to about 2.7M people during the Passover season. Some believe his estimate is inflated, but even

if it wasn't that exact number it tells you just how full and packed Jerusalem was the week that Jesus was there, which ended with his execution on a cross.

If you are old enough to remember 911, do you remember how the country was united in both helping the people directly impacted by those terrible attacks and also united in our commitment to not let this happen again? There was this huge national pride and resolve we had together regardless of race, creed, gender, or religion. That's kind of like how things were in Jerusalem. The Roman Empire ruled the region and the people of Israel resented their control. So they were hungry for a leader, a king, who would throw off the rule of the Romans and implement God's kingdom again. And here you have Jesus healing the sick, delivering the oppressed, raising the dead. He stood up to the bullies with steel in his eyes. It gave people hope; they wondered, "Could this be the promised king of Israel?"

That's the excitement captured in vs. 12; large crowds heard that Jesus was coming so they cried, "Hosanna!" when they saw him, which means, "Come and save!" That's how hungry they were to taste deliverance. But I don't think it was because they believed in Jesus (I mean, they crucified him 5 days later), it's that they wanted a change in their nation.

I love how vs. 16 says, "his disciples did not understand these things at first." Honestly, nobody did. How could they? Vs. 16 says the disciples only started figuring things out months later after they had been taught by Jesus how everything fit together. The crowds didn't know what was happening; neither did the religious leaders, the Pharisees. They were confused, too.

So, what was Jesus up to? The key for us this morning is going to be looking at Jesus riding up to Jerusalem on a donkey and the OT passage that's quoted. So, let's look at that. Vs. 14 says, "And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming sitting on a donkey's colt!"

It's pretty common to see OT passages quoted in the NT. The NT doesn't reveal God's *brand new* work, but his *renewing* work. What that means is the new work God did through Jesus and is doing by the Holy Spirit was referenced, promised, and should be understood in light of what God has said in the OT. So, here's what's happening in our passage: we best understand what Jesus is up to by understanding the OT passage quoted. That's how we understand or learn what Jesus riding into Jerusalem on mule is supposed to mean. That passage quoted is from Zechariah 9, so let's turn there (READ vs. 9-11).

One of the things you'll notice is how the exact wording from Zechariah is merely summarized in John 12; don't be surprised by that, we summarize all the time. Did you see the prophetic statement about the king riding up on a donkey? It's right there in vs. 9. That's what Jesus did just like Zech 9 says. But what does it mean? Let me show you the big idea and then we'll learn 3 lessons that I'm hoping will make you think, "Maybe that's how I'm supposed to live my life, too."

Notice how the prophetic writer makes a point to share the king's disposition while riding into Jerusalem on a mule. It says on the bottom of vs. 9 that he's humble. *Humble* and mounted on a donkey. That's what our king is like. He's gentle, he's humble, he's not trying to stick out his chest. You know, all of these leaders organizing their military parades aren't trying to broadcast their humility; far from it! They are putting the biggest and baddest weapons of war not to demonstrate their gentle spirit, but their strength! Gentleness isn't going to help anyone sleep at night with Kim Jung Un's hand on red button.

But Jesus doesn't try to inspire confidence by matching strength for strength. I mean he shows up to Jerusalem on a mule. That's not going to impress anybody. If he came on a war horse or in a chariot, that would raise some eyebrows. But that's the point he's trying to make with the mule. His strength is of a different kind; he wins the day another way. He is coming to win; don't miss that. Vs. 9 - he is coming with salvation; vs. 10 - he's going to cut off the chariots and war horses. He coming to rule from sea to sea; over the rivers to the ends of the earth. But he wants to win a different battle (vs. 11) - he wants to save souls locked in the pit of hell of sin. But his method is different. He wins with gentleness. With Sacrifice. Through suffering and service. And of course, we know how this Holy Week ends with the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross.

One of the most amazing things about Jesus' work for you and me is that he went willingly. Read the gospel accounts this week; it will do you soul well. And watch Jesus offer himself willingly. He doesn't fight or protest. He doesn't try to run away. He doesn't hit back. He absorbs the wrath and anger of the world, the wrath and anger - ultimately - of his Father God as the sins of the world are placed on his shoulders. He wins the victory by dying.

Can I highlight three things our gentle king will do through his sacrificial service? First, he will cut off war. Vs. 10, he says, "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off." How many of you are tired of hearing about the ongoing war in Syria and the Middle East? How many of you are fatigued of the hostiles words exchanged with North Korea and the threats that we see on a regular basis? I know I am. And here's the deal friends (I hate to be pessimistic): it's not going to stop. In fact, what did Jesus say about the last days (which we are in, my good brothers and sisters)? There would be wars and rumors of wars. Believe me, there's only one hope for wars to cease and it's our gentle king, Jesus. And it's going to happen.

The second thing our gentle king will do is bring peace. This, of course, goes along with the cessation of wars, but peace is more than not fighting. It's coming to a place where our hearts and spirits are no longer at war. Peace means we are no longer competing with one another; we can let our guard down because there's not a threat of violence. And Jesus offers this peace, too. Vs. 10 & 11 - "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."

Notice how peace is connected to Jesus' rule. So, this peace isn't something Jesus gives and then leaves. No, he brings peace by being our ruler and our king. This peace from Jesus will come as we live happily under his rule and reign. That's a helpful picture for me; the life of peace with others isn't found by me living independently to my own rule and reign (you know, like self-governance or autonomy - I'm going to keep fighting with people then); peace is found when I submit myself to the king. And that requires ongoing, radical trust in Jesus.

The last thing our gentle king provides is deliverance from our greatest problem. So, where does radical trust in Jesus come from? Look at vs. 11, "As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit." Notice how this promise is for God's people; it's for his own. God's own people need freedom; they need some deliverance. From what? The waterless pit. In Jerusalem, at the of Elm Street on the North side, there was a tavern called "The waterless pit".... I'm kidding! The prophetic writer isn't talking about a place per se; he's not writing about a specific event or time. He's wanting you to think more deeply than that. What's the waterless pit? It's the place of endless dread and hopelessness. It's the home of Giant Despair. It's the underbelly of a dark and wicked world made by our own sinfulness and the power of darkness. It's dark and cold (like a pit) and there's nothing refreshing or nourishing about it (it's without water). It's hell, friends. Hell on earth and Hell forever.

Maybe that's what life is like for you; it's a waterless pit of struggle and pain. And if you're honest, you'll admit that most of it is your own doing. You're there because of what you've done, not because of what others have done. You are more a victim to your own thoughts, your own attitudes and actions than anybody else's. Zech. 9 is saying that the gentle king has come for you. He wants to set you free. He's coming to make a new relationship with you. That's what a covenant is; it's a relationship. It's a relationship of promise. And he's willing to make his promises to you in blood; that's how serious God is in wanting to help and deliver you.

I want to provide all of us a challenge this week. Remember again the vision of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a mule, the gentle king. Think of it; he came to Jerusalem knowing what was waiting for him. He came to complete the perfect saving plan of God. He took the necessary steps to find us, to reach us. Here's what I want to challenge you to do; I want you to take a step towards Jesus. That step will be different for all of us depending on our spiritual journey. For those of us who have said "yes" to Jesus, maybe there's something Jesus has been waiting for you to give up for him. Or maybe there's an act of obedience you know you need to take. God has been faithful to you before when you were obedient; he will be faithful again. You don't need to be afraid; remember, he's gentle. If you're relatively new to Jesus and you're still feeling your way towards him, maybe what you need to hear is simply this. Jesus has been walking towards you your entire life; he's been there when you didn't even know it. God has more in store for you and all that is found in Jesus. So, maybe you need to stop being so cynical or suspicious. Or maybe you need to start letting Jesus help you with your struggles (that's about humility). Whatever it is, take a step towards Jesus. God's word says (Eze. 34:16),

“I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.” Don’t be on the receiving end of God’s judgement by remaining proud, he’s looking to help you. Seek him while he may be found.

Key verse - John 12:13

Questions for the week

- How is Jesus being a gentle king good news to you and me?
- What promise are you most looking forward to God fulfilling?
- What step of faith is God calling you to make?