

Look Up to See Your King! Zechariah 9:9, 10

The Israelites' heads must have hung toward their feet much of the time. They must have felt defeated. Sure, they had returned from exile in the East. But the temple was still in ruins. They were a small remnant of what they once were, and they struggled with their identity. But now the prophet told them, "Look up! Here comes your King!"

Fast-forward five centuries...

The Jews' heads must have hung toward their feet much of the time. They must have felt defeated. Sure the temple was rebuilt, and Herod had even had some impressive renovations. But they still didn't have real freedom. They were subject to the Romans, who told them what to do and how to do it. They longed for the glory that was once Israel's. But someone shouted, "Look up! Here comes your King!"

Fast-forward two millenia...

Our heads hang toward our feet much of the time. We often feel defeated. Sure, we have freedom; we're not subject to another country's king. But we are subject to sin and its sad effects. We long for the days of glory. But today we hear, "Look up! Here comes your King!"

We look up to see our hero—our conquering King. We look up to see him on the back of a donkey. We look up to see him on a cross. We look up to see him in the clouds.

On this Palm Sunday, we look up to another prophecy from the Holy Week Prophet. Our text is Zechariah 9:9-10.

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow will be taken away, and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His kingdom will extend from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.

"Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! No...it's Superman!" And with that, everyone looked up to see their hero coming to the rescue.

The Jews of Jerusalem were excited that Jesus had come to their city. They didn't need to hang their heads anymore. They could look up and see their hero, but he wasn't up in the sky. They needed to look up only as far as the back of a donkey.

Here he was, their long-promised Messiah, their conquering hero! Here he was, their salvation from the Romans, from poverty, from sickness, from suffering. Here was Jesus! Look up and see him. Then spread your coats and palms to welcome him. Shout loud hosannas to honor him!

When Zechariah told the people to shout, he chose a word that was used as a battle cry. How hopeful the Jews must have been. Their king had finally arrived to wage war on Rome! Their superhero would conquer the world. *His kingdom will extend from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.*

They had already seen him perform amazing miracles. He would be able to raise fallen troops back to life. He'd end the need for supply lines as he multiplied loaves and fish. He'd destroy the enemy once and for all!

“Hosanna!” they cried. It means “Save now!” Conquer the enemy for us! Conquer the world! But look how he arrives: on a donkey. Can you picture Superman rattling to the rescue behind the wheel of a rusting bucket of bolts? There was no display of superhuman strength; no lasers shooting from his eyes. He didn’t drive a golden chariot pulled by white stallions. He was coming gently, peacefully, humbly. *“Look! Your King is coming to you... He is humble and is riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

There is appeal to a hero who comes with a display of power. There is also appeal to a hero who comes humbly. He’s a hero we can relate to, a hero not seeking glory but seeking to deliver the oppressed.

How strange it must have seemed to those who still followed him on Friday of that week. The hero they were encouraged to look up to was no longer riding anything, not even a donkey.

How strange to look up and see him on a cross, being tortured to death. The people were expecting a different kind of king. They wanted a monarch who would put Israel’s enemies under their feet. They were waiting for a Messiah who would wage a war to end all wars. They were looking for their Superman who would destroy Rome and bring them national peace.

But now they looked up to see him on a cross. Why? Why did he who once walked through an angry mob allow himself to be arrested? Why did he who raised the dead allow himself to die? They must have wanted to hang their heads again.

We often look up to Jesus and wonder: Why does the omnipotent God allow my body to break down? Why does he allow my relationships to fall apart, leaving me feeling so alone? Why does he let me struggle with my finances and worry so much? Why doesn’t he save me from all the suffering and pain? Why doesn’t my Savior save me from my troubles?

Because he’s not that kind of king. He didn’t come to wage war on poverty or disease or unhappiness. He didn’t come to take away problems or pain to make this life easy. When you get disappointed in what Jesus doesn’t do for you, are you tempted to reject him as the inhabitants of Jerusalem did? Do you feel that if he won’t be the kind of Savior you want right now, then you have no need for him, at least not right at this moment? You can always turn to him later. Then he’ll give you what you think you need.

Do we ever want to tell Jesus what kind of king we think he should be? Will we abandon him until he gives us what we want. Then are we surprised if he abandons us leaving us without a hero? Should he make every effort to rescue people who aren’t interested in being saved?

Maybe not. But you know what kind of king he is. *“Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation.”*

Look up to see your Hero. He is righteous. He never sinned. He always does what is right. Look up to see your King. He’s victorious. He brings you salvation from your soul’s enemies. Look up to see your King. He arrived in a glorious Palm Sunday parade. But the week won’t pass until he’s lifeless on a cross. Look up to see him at his lowest. See him wage war against Satan, against death, against hell. Look up to see him fighting the ultimate battle for your freedom!

Don't hang your head in shame. Look up! He did proclaim peace! He did win peace between you and God. He defeated the old evil foe. He stayed faithful for every time you forsook him. His righteous record is now credited to you. He's made you perfect in God's sight. He is the humble, gentle, obedient hero you need.

So if King Jesus proclaimed peace to the nations, why doesn't the world look more peaceful? Why do we still have so much strife? Why do we still hear of wars, of crashed planes, of traitors, of murdered families? Why are our lives still in turmoil because of broken relationships, broken families, broken promises?

Because he's still not that kind of king. We need to understand what Zechariah meant when he promised: *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow will be taken away, and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His kingdom will extend from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.*

On a wall outside the headquarters of the United Nations, words from Isaiah 2:4 describe a world at peace. Yet since the first Palm Sunday, there have only been wars and rumors of wars.

In 1949, the US Air Force unveiled its newest bomber, the B-36. Its wingspan was 230 feet. That could easily stretch from this pulpit to the river side of our neighbor's house across the street. Beneath those mighty wings were four bomb compartments capable of carrying 86,000 pounds of bombs. That's ten times more than the World War II B-17. It was given a surprising nickname for an aircraft carrying so much destructive power. It was called the Peacemaker. Every enemy knew that it was better to make peace, rather than war, with a nation that flew such a plane.

Such weapons are needed because there will always be wars and rumors of war. Jesus said that would be true until he returns. So the promise of "peace to the nations...from the River to the ends of the earth" must mean something different.

Jesus is the real Peacemaker. His atoning death for us established peace in our relationship with God. It includes deliverance from guilt and shame. It brings rescue from the fear of death and hell. And one day, we will have peace from all our problems, from all wars and conflicts, from all suffering and pain, from all frustration and heartache. A day is coming when he will end wars of every size and type. On that day he will save us from all the effects of sin and give us perfect, eternal peace.

Just not yet.

So we look up to the skies and eagerly await the day when our King will return. No longer will he come humble and gentle. He'll come with power. He won't be riding a donkey. He'll be riding on the clouds. We look up with confident expectation that he is coming to bring us perfect, permanent peace.

Dear friends, look up to see your King on a donkey, riding into Jerusalem to be our conquering hero. Look up to see your King on a cross, paying with his blood for our peace with God. Look up to see your King coming on the clouds, when he will put an end to all conflict. In the meantime, shout his praises: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Daughter Jerusalem! See your king comes to you"! All hail Jesus, our King.