

The Gospel of John (72); The triumphal entry of the King of Israel

Introduction:

Today's study of God's Word does not contain much direct application for us, but it does contain much about the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course this is itself transformative. For although we may fail to discern direct application, if the Holy Spirit blesses us with seeing the glory of Christ displayed in His Word, He will perform a work of moral and spiritual transformation in us. This is as the apostle Paul declared, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). May the Lord bless us this day to see the glory of the Lord so that we become more like the Lord Jesus for having done so.

Let us turn to John 12:12-19.

The passage before us today sets forth Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Son of David, the King of Israel, arriving to establish the Messianic kingdom, for which Israel long hoped, which God had foretold through the Old Testament prophets. Before us is the public revelation and manifestation of Jesus as the King of Israel, arriving to inaugurate His kingdom.

This entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem is recorded in each of our four Gospels. Each account varies in details, giving emphasis to matters that the Holy Spirit had moved each Gospel writer to record and declare. But every one of these four accounts emphasize that Jesus was entering Jerusalem in order to assert His kingship and inaugurate the promised kingdom of the Messiah.¹ Here is John's account of this event:

¹²The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

"Hosanna!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!
The King of Israel!"

¹⁴Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵"Fear not, daughter of Zion;
Behold, your King is coming,
Sitting on a donkey's colt."

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

¹⁷Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

Here we read of the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem as the promised King of Israel. You may recall that last week we said that Mary's anointing of Jesus at the banquet in Bethany was an anointing of Jesus as King. But that was a rather private, implicit confession of Jesus as king. But here we have a very

¹ I included a parallel account of all four Gospels on the last page of these notes.

public acknowledgment and explicit confession that Jesus is the King of Israel who was inaugurating the long-awaited promised restoration of the kingdom of David. As we had affirmed last week,

...Mary's act was intended to present Jesus as a royal personage—a king. The historical evidence matches well with the Fourth Gospel, which is keenly interested in the royalty of Jesus (e.g., 1:49; 6:15; 12:13-15; 18:33-19:3; 19:13-22); indeed, the full picture of the enthronement of Jesus is the Son of Man “lifted up” on the cross (3:14; 12:32). This pericope makes Jesus’ kingship implicit and private; in the next pericope Jesus’ kingship is explicit and public (12:12-19). As the reader will come to see, however, this is an ironic king. For just as He is being anointed for His burial (v. 7), so also will He be enthroned as king not with honor but with shame (19:2, 3) and not on a throne but on a cross (19:19).²

Our Gospel writer, John the apostle, set forth the kingship of Jesus through this Palm Sunday event primarily through the employment of two Old Testament passages of Scripture. The first is his use of Psalm 118. The second is of Zechariah 9. We give attention to both of these Old Testament passages in our study today.

As we consider this event recorded before us, we may do so by this outline:

1. Preparations for a King (12:12, 13)
2. The royal entrance of the King (12:14, 15)
3. The true nature of Jesus’ Kingship (12:16)
4. The public response to Jesus (12:17-19)

I. Preparations for a King (12:12, 13)

We first read of the stirring and gathering of a c great crowd of people who desired to herald the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem as the promised King of Israel.

¹²The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

“Hosanna!
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’
The King of Israel!”

This passage opens with a statement of time. In **verse 12** John wrote, “*The next day* a great multitude that had come to the feast...” The day previous to this event was in Bethany when Jesus was the host at a supper in His honor, at which Mary had anointed Jesus’ feet with very expensive spikenard. The “feast” mentioned here in verse 1, however, is not referring to the feast at which Mary had anointed Jesus in Bethany, but to the “great multitude” that had arrived to Jerusalem to observe the great Passover Feast.

The number of people who gathered to Jerusalem for the Passover was immense. It would seem that most of them were from out of town. “A great multitude that had come to the feast” greeted Jesus. It was not those who were leaders in Jerusalem, but those who had traveled to Jerusalem who welcomed the arrival of Jesus. There were a great many people who traveled to Jerusalem annually to observe there the Passover Feast.

² Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 526.

Josephus (*Bel.* Vi. 422-425) describes one Passover, just before the Jewish War (AD 66-70), when 2,700,000 people took part, not counting the defiled and the foreigners who were present in the city. Even if his numbers were inflated, the crowds were undoubtedly immense.³

The event recorded here is recognized as being “Palm Sunday.” The feast at Bethany had taken place on Saturday, the day before this event. Within a few days Jesus would be arrested, tried, crucified, and buried. One week from this day, Jesus would come forth from the dead on that first Resurrection Sunday. With this episode and its recorded entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, the Passion Week of Jesus had commenced.

When a “great multitude” heard that Jesus was coming to the Passover, they spontaneously formed a greeting party, heralding Jesus as the promised King of Israel, who had come to Jerusalem at this Passover, with the purpose of inaugurating the promised Kingdom of God. The actions of the people as well as the acclamations that they sang out, gave a public acknowledgment and welcome of Jesus as their King, the Son of David.

Now it is true that John does not explicitly declare Jesus as the promised Son of David. But that John does convey this truth is quite evident in his description of the welcome of these Jerusalem multitudes. John showed in two ways that Jesus was the promised King, the son of David. First, John described the crowds welcoming the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem with palm branches. Second, John showed that Jesus was the promised King of Israel by recording the crowds using the language of Psalm 118. Let us consider these.

A. The multitudes welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with palm branches.

We read that this great multitude “took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him.” Date palm trees were plentiful in Jerusalem in the first century and they continue to be so today. Interestingly, there is no word in the Old Testament that associates palm leaves with the Passover. There are references, however, to palm branches associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. Of course that annual feast had been observed six months before in the autumn, which we considered in John 7. But palm branches had become somewhat of a national symbol in the second century BC when Simon Maccabee led the Israelites to defeat and purge their land of their Syrian oppressors. Upon the success of that military campaign, the crowds of Jerusalem publicly welcomed Simon to the city with singing and waving palm branches. Palm branches were also present when the temple was later rededicated a couple of years after their liberty had been obtained. Moreover, after the events recorded in the Gospels, the Jews had depicted palm branches as a national symbol celebrating their brief and limited military victories over the Romans in both wars of in AD 66-70 and AD 132-135.⁴ And so, the palm branches had become an emblem of “nationalist hope that a messianic liberator was arriving on the scene.”⁵ **Edward Klink** expressed it this way:

The significance of Jewish history—and therefore the symbolic action of the crowd—is evidenced further and directly connected to the ministry of Jesus in two other ways. First, since either five or six of the disciples had Maccabean names (as well as two of Jesus’ [half] brothers), this strongly suggests that Jesus ministered in a region that cherished the national heroes of Israel as a proud people under foreign rule, hoping for ultimate deliverance. Second, surrounding the time of Jesus’ ministry there is evidence of Jewish coins that had the image of the palm tree, with some bearing the inscription “for the redemption of Zion.” Thus, while the symbolic act of carrying or waving branches would have symbolized for many ancient readers the communication of triumph or royal welcome, by focusing specifically on “palm branches” with its centuries of religious significance and its overtones of Maccabean nationalism, the crowd is officially heralding Jesus as a king.⁶

³ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 431.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 259.

⁵ Carson, p. 431. Consider John 6:14-15.

⁶ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 536.

By the way, we call this event “Palm Sunday.” But actually, even though the account is found in all four Gospels, only John recorded the detail that the people waved palm branches signaling the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. Matthew made mention that the people “*cut down branches from the trees* and spread them on the road” (Matt. 21:8). Mark recorded that many people “spread their clothes on the road, and others *cut down leafy branches from the trees* and spread them on the road” (Mark 11:8). And Luke made no mention of branches of any kind. He simply recorded that as Jesus went, “*many spread their clothes on the road*” (Luke 19:36).

It is not clear why the Synoptists do not indicate the kind of branches that were used on this occasion, but it is to John that we owe the information that they were from palm trees... Palms were an emblem of victory, and in John’s mention of them here we must detect a reference to the triumph of Christ.⁷

The gathering and waving of palm leaves by the multitudes indicates that they were welcoming Jesus as their promised King who would deliver them from their oppressors and restore the glory of their nation.

B. John showed that Jesus was the promised King of Israel by recording the crowds using the language of Psalm 118.

John gives evidence that Jesus was entering Jerusalem as the promised King through the proclamation of the crowds. We have recorded in verse 13 the people shouting out:

*“Hosanna!
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’
The King of Israel!”*

These words are taken from **Psalm 118:25** and **26**. This is a royal psalm, which celebrates the fact that God is the true King of Israel and that He would send a King who would be His representative, who would rule over Israel on His behalf. Here is the complete psalm:

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever.

²Let Israel now say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

³Let the house of Aaron now say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

⁴Let those who fear the LORD now say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

⁵I called on the LORD in distress;
The LORD answered me and set me in a broad
place.

⁶The LORD is on my side;
I will not fear.

What can man do to me?

⁷The LORD is for me among those who help
me;
Therefore I shall see my desire on those who
hate me.

⁸It is better to trust in the LORD
Than to put confidence in man.

⁹It is better to trust in the LORD
Than to put confidence in princes.

¹⁰All nations surrounded me,
But in the name of the LORD I will destroy
them.

¹¹They surrounded me,
Yes, they surrounded me;
But in the name of the LORD I will destroy
them.

¹²They surrounded me like bees;
They were quenched like a fire of thorns;
For in the name of the LORD I will destroy
them.

¹³You pushed me violently, that I might fall,
But the LORD helped me.

¹⁴The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.

⁷ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 584.

¹⁵The voice of rejoicing and salvation
 Is in the tents of the righteous;
 The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.
¹⁶The right hand of the LORD is exalted;
 The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.
¹⁷I shall not die, but live,
 And declare the works of the LORD.
¹⁸The LORD has chastened me severely,
 But He has not given me over to death.
¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness;
 I will go through them,
 And I will praise the LORD.
²⁰This is the gate of the LORD,
 Through which the righteous shall enter.
²¹I will praise You,
 For You have answered me,
 And have become my salvation.
²²The stone which the builders rejected
 Has become the chief cornerstone.
²³This was the LORD's doing;

It is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴This is the day the LORD has made;
 We will rejoice and be glad in it.
²⁵*Save now, I pray, O LORD;
 O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.*
²⁶*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
 LORD!*
 We have blessed you from the house of the
 LORD.
²⁷God is the LORD,
 And He has given us light;
 Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of
 the altar.
²⁸You are my God, and I will praise You;
 You are my God, I will exalt You.
²⁹Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
 For His mercy endures forever.

Again, the words that John records as having been proclaimed by the multitudes welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem are based on **verses 25 and 26**. These verses read, *“Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!”* Within these words there are three important elements or statements that argue for the kingship of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. First, the crowd shouted “Hosanna.” This is a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew or Aramaic word that was addressed to God declaring to Him, “Save.” The Hebrew word in psalm 118:25 is הוֹשִׁיעָה (Hoshiah, i.e. Hosanna), but the Greek translation of this verse, in the Septuagint (LXX), is ζῆσον (save). Literally, it would mean, “Give salvation now.”⁸ The crowd is calling on God to save them, to deliver them. “By this one word, the crowd expresses their hopes about Jesus, assuming He is God’s light shining upon them” (Psa.118:27).⁹ But this expression that had been a call upon God to save them had become an expression of praise later. Hosanna became a voiced word of praise to God by this people. And of course, that is how the word, “Hosanna”, is used today; it is a voiced word of praise to God (for having saved us).

2. Second, the crowd called out, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.” Right after the psalmist called out to God to save him (them), he blesses or welcomes the one coming on behalf of God to accomplish this work of salvation. The crowd is rendering this praise of Jesus of Nazareth as the coming King who would affect the salvation that God their true King purposed to bestow upon them. They were acknowledging Jesus to be their promised Messiah, the Son of David.

3. Third, the crowd then declared the identity of Jesus as “The King of Israel!” It may be translated this way, “Even the King of Israel.” “This final part of the proclamation is the clearest declaration of the kingly nature of the crowd’s interpretation of Jesus.”¹⁰ This phrase is not found in Psalm 118, but was

⁸ Carson, p. 432.

⁹ Klink, 536.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 537.

an added declaration of the crowds recorded by John. And so, the crowd identifies Jesus as the promised king who would come on behalf of God to save His people.

Now it is quite clear that the reader of John's Gospel has a greater understanding of the nature of our Lord Jesus and His kingdom than did this great multitude who welcomed Jesus into their city. They probably had in their thinking that this Messiah was about to deliver them from Roman oppression and deliver His people into a state of liberty, reinstating the Davidic kingdom of Israel that once dominated that region of the world. But just as God had used Caiaphas the Jewish high priest to reveal more than he had intended regarding Jesus (cf. John 11:49-52), so God had this crowd express truth that was beyond their understanding.

As we look again at Psalm 118, we may consider the verses that immediately precede the announcement of the coming Messiah who would save His people. **Verses 21 through 24** read this way:

²¹I will praise You,
For You have answered me,
And have become my salvation.
²²The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
²³This was the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴This is the day the LORD has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.¹¹

Yes, the psalmist had declared that the Messiah would come on behalf of God to save His people, but it would be a salvation that the people did not comprehend and in a manner of which they were wholly ignorant. Yes, the Messiah would become King, but that Kingdom would be inaugurated and He would be installed in a manner totally unknown to them. Jesus would become King through being rejected by the "builders", the Jewish leadership. And it would be through the grace and power of God alone, that Jesus came forth from the dead at His resurrection that He then becomes the chief Cornerstone. This would be an amazement to all, wholly ironic in nature, to the surprise and wonder of the people:

²³This was the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴This is the day the LORD has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

And so, here, the heralding of Jesus as the promised King of Israel is extremely important. He would be King shortly, but in a way that no one truly anticipated, even though He had taught His disciples, but in a way they did not fully comprehend until after the crucifixion and resurrection.

Thus the heralding of Jesus as King here is highly significant. In a sense, the crowd is reenacting Psalm 118, proclaiming Jesus as King as He enters Jerusalem. It is in this way that the introduction and setting of the pericope concludes, establishing for the reader a vibrant scene of royal pomp and circumstance.¹²

¹¹ Most Christians quote verse 24 in isolation from the passage. They apply it to any and every day. "Regardless of what bad things are happening to me, this is the day that the Lord has made and so I will be glad and rejoice in it." And although that is a good sentiment to have, it is not true to the context. This "day" speaks of the day of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. We will be glad and rejoice in it, what occurred on that day and what it forever means to us as His people. I also view verse 24 as a prophecy of the time that Christian worship would shift from the Saturday, the Sabbath Day, to Sunday, the Lord's Day. We are commanded to worship, that is, "to rejoice and be glad in" the Lord's Day, commemorating and celebrating the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus Christ on Sunday.

¹² Klink, p. 537.

II. The royal entrance of the King (12:14, 15)

We next read of the manner that our Lord entered Jerusalem, which also depicts Him as the arriving King. **Verses 14 and 15** read,

¹⁴Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵“Fear not, daughter of Zion;
Behold, your King is coming,
Sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

The opening words of John 12:14 display the sharpest distinction between John’s account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the accounts of the same event by the Synoptic writers-- Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Each of the Synoptic writers gave much detail of Jesus’ instruction to two of His disciples on where and how the animal was to be found and secured in preparation of Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem.¹³ John passes by all those details. John’s account is not in conflict with the other accounts, it is just that John did not see the need to give these details. As one wrote:

The Synoptists here preserve much more information, and make it clear that Jesus arranged for the ride on the ass, thereby self-consciously fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. John cuts out these arrangements, and briefly reports, *Jesus found a young donkey* (the verb certainly allows room for the meaning ‘to find by the agency of others’, as Barrett, p. 418, points out, but it shows no interest in it).¹⁴

John showed the nature of our Lord’s Kingship through both His use of riding on a donkey as well as his use of Zechariah 9:9. Let us consider these in turn.

A. The use of the donkey by Jesus (12:14a)

We read in **verse 14a**, “*Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey.*” We might think that riding on a donkey into town would be a rather humbling of oneself rather than exalting oneself before those who observed Him. But this would be a wrong understanding. Yes, riding a donkey indicated that Jesus was coming in peace, rather than with the intention to administer justice against His enemies and wage war. **Donald Carson** said this of the manner of our Lord’s entry:

Whatever the exact sequence, to report the ride on the donkey immediately after the acclamation of the crowd has the effect of damping down nationalist expectation. He does not enter Jerusalem on a war horse (cf. Isa. 31:1-3; 1 Kings 4:26), which would have whipped the political aspirations of the vast crowds into insurrectionist frenzy, but He chooses to present Himself as the king who comes in peace, ‘gentle and riding on a donkey’ (Zech. 9:9).¹⁵

But we should not think that this manner of entrance would have been perceived by the crowds as undignified. This was the manner and entrance of a king. Here is an extended explanation of this that I thought would be helpful for us. These are the comments of **Edward Klink** on the words, “Jesus found a donkey and sat upon it, just as it is written”:

First, Jesus “found a donkey.” The symbolic meaning of the donkey may be the most important tool for interpreting the nature of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and, more specifically, His response to the acclaiming crowd. Many interpreters consider Jesus’ use of a donkey to be a correction of the crowd

¹³ Cf. Matt. 21:2-7; Mark 11:1-7; Luke 19:29-35

¹⁴ Carson, p. 433.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 433.

because of the general assumption that “the ass has lowly associations (cf. Sir 33:24). Since many interpreters assume the crowd’s acclamation of king Jesus was drenched in nationalistic expectations, it is often assumed that Jesus chose a donkey with the specific intention of “damping down” such misguided expectations. If Jesus were to accept the crowd’s royal praise, He would have chosen a kingly horse (symbolizing war), not a donkey, a beast of burden (cf. Isa. 30:6).

But the biblical and historical evidence does not support this picture of the donkey. While the horse would eventually become symbolic for military power, mules and donkeys have a much earlier and longer heritage as symbols of royalty... As much as donkeys were widely characterized “as the beast of burden *par excellence*” throughout the Near Eastern texts, they also served as a mount for people of high standing—nobility and aristocracy, prophets, royalty, and deity. That is, while the donkey on its own is often symbolic of a “pack animal,” with a rider of high standing the donkey became an intentional symbol of status (e.g., prestige, power, and wealth). Most often to signify royal status. As Way described it, “The donkey is, so to speak, the ‘Mercedes Benz’ of the biblical world.” The fact that the narrator describes Jesus Himself as the one who procured the donkey suggests that His choice of the animal—and all of its symbolic meaning—was part of His response to the crowd. Rather than correcting or rebuking the acclamation of the crowd, Jesus appears to be accepting it, even participating in the crowd’s reenactment of the royal proclamation of Psalm 118.¹⁶

But not only did Jesus “find a donkey”, but we read that “He sat upon it.” This action of Jesus described by John sets forth Jesus as asserting His kingship. Again, we read: “Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, *sat on it*...” Yes, He found a donkey, but this is set forth in a secondary (temporal) clause: “when He had found a young donkey.” But the main verb of the subject of the sentence is, “Then Jesus... *sat on it*.” “It is not the presence of the donkey that is suggestive of the image Jesus is presenting but what Jesus did with the donkey—He mounted it.”¹⁷ This was a “kingly move” on His part. It is an assertion of His regal status. Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was not a display of humility as it was an assertion of regal authority. He was the promised King of Israel. And is this not what John was asserting? We already read this forthrightly, John inserting the declaration that Jesus is the King of Israel, appending it on his use of Psalm 118, for the people had cried out:

“Hosanna!
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’
The King of Israel!”

And it is here that John calls forth Zechariah 9:9 to explain our Lord’s action.

B. The use of Zechariah 9:9 by Jesus (12:14a)

Again, we read **verses 14 and 15**: “Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

“Fear not, daughter of Zion;
Behold, your King is coming,
Sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

This is where John employed the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 in order to set forth the Messianic kingship of Jesus. Now, although the verse that is quoted by John includes only Zechariah 9:9, that verse is taken from a context to which we should be informed. Here is **Zechariah 9:1-10**:

The burden of the word of the LORD

¹⁶ Klink, p. 538.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Against the land of Hadrach,
And Damascus its resting place
(For the eyes of men
And all the tribes of Israel
Are on the LORD);

²Also against Hamath, which borders on it,
And against Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.

³For Tyre built herself a tower,
Heaped up silver like the dust,
And gold like the mire of the streets.

⁴Behold, the Lord will cast her out;
He will destroy her power in the sea,
And she will be devoured by fire.

⁵Ashkelon shall see it and fear;
Gaza also shall be very sorrowful;
And Ekron, for He dried up her expectation.
The king shall perish from Gaza,
And Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.

^{6c}A mixed race shall settle in Ashdod,
And I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

⁷I will take away the blood from his mouth,
And the abominations from between his teeth.
But he who remains, even he shall be for our God,
And shall be like a leader in Judah,
And Ekron like a Jebusite.

⁸I will camp around My house
Because of the army,
Because of him who passes by and him who returns.
No more shall an oppressor pass through them,
For now I have seen with My eyes.

⁹***Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, 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.***

¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
And the horse from Jerusalem;
The battle bow shall be cut off.
He shall speak peace to the nations;
His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.'

The context of Zechariah is of God's people being attacked and ravaged by its enemies. Granted the Lord had employed these enemies to bring judgment upon His people. But His purpose in judgment is declared to have an end. God would send forth His king to overthrow the enemies of His people, and it would seem, remove the sins of His people that brought forth His judgment upon them. The Lord would

destroy those who would destroy His people. And so, God gives the command for His people to rejoice in their deliverance:

⁹***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, 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.*”**

Yes, the king is coming in peace, for He is riding a donkey. But He is coming in peace for His people, that is, for those who believe in Him as their King, because He has overthrown their enemies, that which had threatened them. This donkey ride, therefore, speaks of what He would very soon accomplish through His death on the cross, even the atonement for the sins of His people.

Let us consider more carefully the words of comfort to God’s people because their King has come to them.

A. “Fear not, daughter of Zion”

Actually, when we read Zechariah 9:9, we do not read these exact words. John has used these words, ***“Fear not, daughter of Zion”***, to replace Zechariah’s words, ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!”*** This is commonly done in the New Testament.

The opening words, *Do not be afraid*, are found neither in the Hebrew nor any version of Zechariah 9:9, and replace, ‘Rejoice greatly’. Quite likely they are drawn from Isaiah 40:9, where they are addressed to the one who brings good tidings to Zion. It is not uncommon for New Testament quotations from the Old Testament to derive from two or more passages (e.g., Matt. 27:9-10; Mark 1:2-3).

Who is the “daughter of Zion”? It was a common way to refer to the people of ancient Jerusalem who were oppressed and afflicted, who had suffered under God’s judgment. But it is a word of pity on their behalf. Therefore this is not a reference to all Jews indiscriminately, but to the remnant of Jewish people, the elect of God whom He purposed to save from their sins. And so, this is not a promise to Jews as Jews, but it is a promise to a remnant of Jews; they are called “daughter of Zion.”

The New Testament identity of this daughter of Zion are all those that believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Here Zion is not physical Jerusalem, but of our heavenly Zion, the city whose Builder and Maker is God, a city built without hands (cf. Heb. 11:10, 16). Paul wrote of this very thing. Of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, he described them as being the offspring (daughter) of Zion even as God was their Father. Paul wrote of the “city” of Christians, “but the Jerusalem above is free, which is *the mother* of us all” (Gal. 4:26). If you are a Christian, or one day you become a Christian, you are one member of the “church”, the “daughter of Zion.”

B. Why should the daughter of Zion not be afraid? Because as Zechariah declared, and John cited,

***Behold, your King is coming,
Sitting on a donkey’s colt.”***

John declared, “You need not be afraid for your King is coming, and He is riding on a ‘donkey’s colt’, for He is coming in peace.” But why has He come in peace? It is because He has vanquished the foes that had formerly threatened and afflicted His people. Yes, the King is coming in peace, because He has already defeated and vanquished His enemies thereby setting free His people. This is consistent with how Zechariah set forth this passage in chapter 9 of that book of prophecy.

III. The true nature of Jesus' kingship (12:16)

We next read that the disciples did not understand what they had witnessed. **Verse 16** records:

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.¹⁸

It seemed to be somewhat out of character for Jesus to draw any attention to Himself, but here He is, doing just that. Why? They did not understand, but they did understand, later. His hour had arrived. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) described this well:

A careful reader of the Gospels can hardly fail to observe that our Lord Jesus Christ's conduct, at this stage of His earthly ministry, is very peculiar. It is unlike anything else recorded of Him in the New Testament. Hitherto we have seen Him withdrawing as much as possible from public notice, retiring into the wilderness, and checking those who would have brought Him forward, and made Him a king. As a rule He did not court popular attention. He did not "cry or strive, or cause His voice to be heard in the streets" (Matt. 12:19). Here, on the contrary, we see Him making a public entry into Jerusalem, attended by an immense crowd of people, and causing even the Pharisees to say, "Behold the world has gone after Him."

The explanation of this apparent inconsistency is not hard to find out. The time had come at last when Christ was to die for the sins of the world. The time had come when the true Passover Lamb was to be slain, when the true blood of atonement was to be shed, when Messiah was to be "cut off" according to prophecy (Dam. 9:26), when the way into the holiest was to be opened by the true High Priest to all mankind. Knowing all this, our Lord purposely drew attention to Himself.¹⁹

Even though the disciples had been with Jesus for His full ministry of three years, having heard Him teach in both public settings and privately, they had remained ignorant of much. Only after the crucifixion and the resurrection, only after the Lord Jesus instructed them after He had been raised, and only after the Holy Spirit had begun to dwell "in" them, that they then began to understand more clearly and fully to what they had been eyewitnesses.

IV. The public response to Jesus (12:17-19)

¹⁷Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

The multitude rejoiced in Jesus, at least at this time. But the Pharisees were stymied and frustrated. Of them Ryle wrote:

This is the language of men baffled, angry, and at their wits end from vexation, to see their plans defeated. Instead of finding people willing to lay hands on Jesus as a malefactor, and to deliver Him up

¹⁸ Classical dispensationalists still do not understand this episode. They have asserted that through this triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, Jesus was *offering* the Jews to accept Him as King, which, if they had done so, would have resulted in Him establishing the Davidic kingdom of an earthly Jewish millennium of 1,000 years. So, rather than this event being a presentation of Jesus as King, it was really just an offer of a kingdom, which the Jews refused. The result was that God's offer of the kingdom was withdrawn, but that (earthly) kingdom would later be realized with the second coming of Christ. No, Jesus was not offering an earthly, political kingdom, but He was establishing His spiritual kingdom. Through His passion of obedience unto His Father resulting in His death on the cross, Jesus became qualified to be the exalted King of (spiritual) Israel upon His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation (cf. Rev. 5:5).

¹⁹ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 364f.

into their power, they beheld a large multitude surrounding Him with joyful acclamations, saluting Him as a King! Of course they could do nothing but sit still and see it. The least attempt to use violence against our Lord would have raised a tumult, and endangered their own lives. So that they were obliged to see their most hated enemy entering Jerusalem in triumph, like Mordecai led by Haman (Esther 6:11).²⁰

We can well imagine their glee when soon they were approached by one of His own, Judas Iscariot, who was willing to turn our Lord over to their will.

This was indeed a triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, but the course that He would then take would be a difficult one. He would obey His Father even unto death. In a few days these crowds will be shouting out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" I understand there was a painting once made which portrays the whole event of Jesus and Jerusalem in one scene. The painting depicts in the foreground a lone donkey standing as it is chewing on palm leaves. It is obviously intended to be the donkey that Jesus rode eating the branches that had been strewn in its way. In the background is a hill on which a cross stands.

May the Lord enable us to see the true nature of His kingdom and the manner in which it was obtained and inaugurated. And may that knowledge of our Lord, so transform us that we might live as His disciples, following and learning from Him.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Timothy 1:17)

²⁰ Ibid, p. 374.