

The Greatest Week in History – Part I
A Horseless King
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
February 18, 2024

Text: Zechariah 9:9-17, Luke 19:28-40

Purpose: Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah. Jesus' kingdom is not one of might and force – armies and dominions. His Kingdom is from above, not below. All that call upon this Savior, and receive Him as Lord, will be forgiven and adopted into the family of God.

A pastor and two of his deacons are out on the river fishing in their rowboat. Twelve o'clock rolls around, and one of the deacons notices a nice spot on the bank to have lunch. So, they head over to the bank to eat.



The deacon stands up in the boat, steps out onto the river and walks over to the bank. The pastor looks on with amazement, and thinks to himself, if his deacon is holy enough to walk on water, surely, he can.

The other deacon stands up, picks up the picnic basket, steps out of the boat, and walks over to the bank and sits with the first deacon. Again, to his amazement, the pastor thinks again, if his second deacon is holy enough to walk on water, surely, he can.

The pastor stands up, steps out of the boat, and sinks into the water. The first deacon turns to the second and says, "Think we should have told him where the rocks are?"¹

This past Wednesday was the first day of Lent. It is the 40 day period of time (not counting Sunday) leading up to Easter Sunday. For many people it is a time of preparing our hearts to listen and hear the Gospel message. For others it may be a time of denying themselves something – maybe soft drinks, sweets, coffee, or some other thing as a daily reminder of what Jesus Christ has done for us through Calvary. Each person comes to this season in their own way.

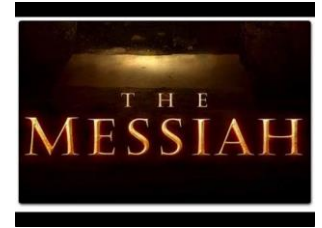


As I was planning for this upcoming season, I decided I wanted to focus on the *Greatest Week in History*². That is the week between Palm Sunday and Resurrection Sunday.



- When you look at the *Book of Matthew*, 8 out of 28 chapters focus on the last week.
- The *Book of Mark*, 6 out of 16 focus on the last week of Jesus' life prior to the crucifixion.
- The *Book of Luke* (which is the one we will be focusing on during this seven-part sermon series) devotes 5 ½ chapters out of 24 to the *Greatest Week in History*.
- The *Book of John*, (which I especially love because it includes the Upper Room Discourse of Jesus to His Disciples) 10 out of 21 chapters focus on that special week in history.

Each week as we examine the *Greatest Week in History*, we will turn back to the Old Testament and examine the background and context in which Jesus came and fulfilled every aspect of being the longed for one of Israel.



- Jesus is the Messiah, He is the Christ, the people of Israel were searching and waiting for.
- Jesus was the one that would come from the line and lineage of David.
- He was the one John the Baptist was preaching about.
- He was the one that would, at the end of the *Greatest Week in History*, offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin to reconcile the whole world back to Himself.

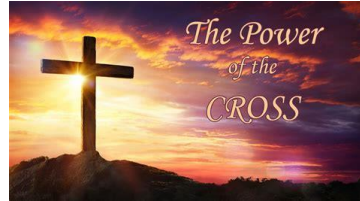
Preaching God's word is such a privilege. Telling others about the love of God and forgiveness for our sin is one of the greatest gifts you can give another person. When it comes to passages related to Holy Week, it can offer a great challenge to present the Gospel message in a fresh new way. If you were to select a few passages from Micah or Ezekiel, you can find a few nuggets of gold people have never considered. Preaching about that final week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion can make many people say, "I've heard that before. Been there – done that. Let's hear about something different."



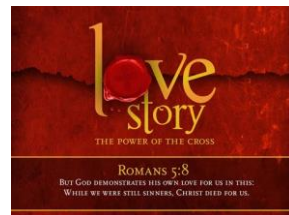
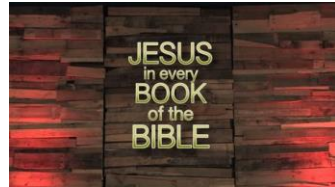
As a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ it is easy to want to take the message of Easter and repackage it into something trendy or relevant. You could talk about the Triumphal Entry and make some application to business.

You could talk about Jesus and how He cleansed the temple and how that conflict has some parallels with marriage conflict. You could link the resurrection of Jesus from the grave with the latest movie.

The problem with most of those strategies is that it takes the power of the Gospel message and the events of Jesus' last week and trivializes it. It actually makes your other point more important than what was accomplished by Jesus on Golgotha. Being creative and culturally relevant are important, but not as important as telling the story of Jesus the Christ through what Paul called, "the foolishness of preaching."

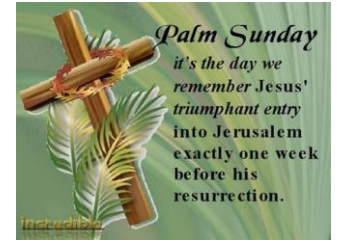


As a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, preaching is more than simply bringing a little talk on a certain topic. It is to introduce those listening to the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible has created us, sustains us, and desires that we enter into fellowship with Him. This is only accomplished through God's Plan of Salvation. God was in Christ reconciling us back to himself. The entire Bible hinges upon the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Every word in scripture either points forward to this redemptive work or reflects on its implications. The Bible can only be fully understood once we come to believe and receive Jesus Christ as God's one and only Son who came to redeem us.



That is why studying and reading God's word is so very important. The Bible is God's love story for His creation. In Jesus Christ we have a pathway back to God by receiving and accepting Him as our Savior, Master, Redeemer, and Lord. You need to make the regular and systematic reading of God's word a priority for your life if you are to ever grow in your relationship with God.

Today we come to the first day of the *Greatest Week in History*. To help us understand what Jesus was doing that day He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, we need to turn back to the Book of Zechariah and understand the context in which it was written.



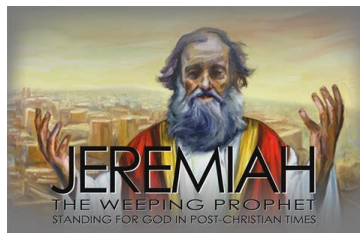
Zechariah began his career as a prophet of God in the eighth month of the second year of King Darius I. His career ended two years later. The time of his ministry would be from 520 B.C. to 518 B.C. As you read through the Book of Zechariah you will see various visions with many of them serving as a call to those in Exile to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of Solomon. Before you can understand what Zechariah wrote, you need to understand the context in which his ministry existed.

In the year 586 B.C. (66 years before Zechariah) King Nebuchadnezzar completed the third and final invasion on the city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar had already conquered the surrounding area all the way down to Egypt and this city was the final hold out in the area. With this last invasion, all of the wealth of the



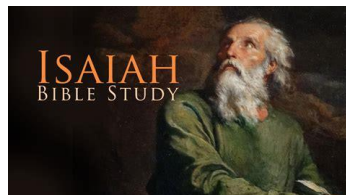
city was plundered including all of the gold from the Lord's storehouse, all of the important citizens were put in chains and brought to Babylon, the city was burned and the walls and buildings were destroyed.

But the Lord promised them that they would not remain in captivity forever. Even though the Assyrians had assailed them, even though Egypt had attacked them, even though they were taken into captivity by the Chaldeans (Babylonians), God would remember them and return them to their home once again. The prophet Jeremiah (25:11) told the people of Israel *"And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for seventy years."*



Once the Temple of Solomon was destroyed in 586 B. C., those that knew the scriptures and the prophecies of Jeremiah, knew that they would be allowed to return in 70 years. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries and like so many during that time, were making prophetic statements concerning the long anticipated Messiah. The Book of Isaiah has several foundational verses about the coming redeemer of Israel.

Isaiah 2:3-4 *"Many people shall come and say, come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of Jacob: He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in*



His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Isaiah 8:14 *"He will be as a sanctuary and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."*

Isaiah 9:6-7 *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."*

Jeremiah also echoed the coming of the Messiah.



Jeremiah 23:5-6 *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called; 'THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'"*

While they remained in captivity, the longing of the people was that God would send a Redeemer. That God would allow someone from the family tree of David to be raised up to lead them in righteousness and peace once again.



- They knew their sin with idolatry had caused the judgment of God to fall on them.
- They knew their sin of failing to honor the Sabbath of the Land had caused the judgment of God to come to them.
- They knew they had not trusted in the Lord of Israel.
- They knew they had sinned and longed once again to be God's chosen people – to live in harmony and peace.

There arose a desire from many people that if the Lord was to return they needed to prepare the Temple once again. They knew that needed to be ready for His return so they set about re-building the Temple and re-establish the sacrificial system. There was hope in the air once again.

It is in this context we have today's central Zechariah passage.



*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*I 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. (Zech.
9:9-10)*

Israel was looking for a military leader to come and overthrow their enemies. They were looking for a political leader that would make all that was wrong with their world – right.

But Zechariah pointed out something that only a few caught. The leader that God was going to send was **not** one that would ride on a horse of war, but rather the One God would choose would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. A humble animal not a proud one.

- God was going to send the world a King.
- God was going to send their Savior.
- God was going to send them a Messiah (which means Christ)
- God was going to send them a Redeemer.
- God was going to do as He promised.



But it would **not** be like the world expected. God was going to send the world a **Horseless King**.

Zechariah and others may have thought if they rebuilt the Temple of Solomon quickly, God would send their redeemer quickly. There was such anticipation for what God was going to do through this soon coming person. But Israel and the world would have to wait.



As a matter of fact, they would have to wait a long time. All of the prophets of Israel would go silent for 400 years before God actually sent the fulfillment of their prophecies.



The whole host of prophets would die, longing and anticipating this Messiah. – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, plus the group known as the 12 prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

God was silent for 400 years. Nothing. Not a word from God. There was not one prophet in Israel to speak to the people. God had said all He needed to say through the recorded words of His prophets. The cannon of the Old Testament was closed with 39 Books as authoritative of God's word to Israel and the world.

Maybe that is why the religious leaders of Jesus day did not want to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus did not fit the mold they had pre-conceived the Messiah would be. There was



anticipation on the part of the people of Israel that God would once again intervene in their nation. After a brief period of self-rule after the Maccabean revolt, Israel was now under the oppressive rule of the Roman Army. At Jesus' birth the land was under the oppressive hand of Caesar Augustus (63 B.C to 14 A.D.) with Herod the Great as the local ruler of the region. Later during the last week of Jesus' life, the people had to deal with Pontius Pilate (20 B.C. to 50 A.D)

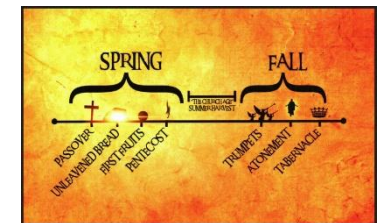


For three years, Jesus traveled all across the area of Israel preaching about the Kingdom of God, teaching His followers the ways of the Kingdom of God, healing the sick and infirm. He gathered crowds

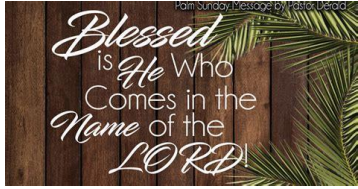
everywhere He went. Often Jesus would have to withdraw alone simply to find solitude to pray. Jesus had given sight to the blind, caused the deaf to hear again, cured leprosy, cast out demons, forgave sins, and even raised the dead back to life. He had given His followers guidelines for living in the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. Now it was time to turn His attention to Jerusalem once again, one last week.

Jesus knew what lay ahead of Him this week – the *Greatest Week in History*. He knew it would involve several confrontations with the Pharisees and Sadducees. It would involve betrayal, beating, and crucifixion. Yet Jesus knew this was what He had come for. He had come to be our sacrifice.

It was six days before Passover. Crowds were beginning to make their way to Jerusalem. Devoted Israelites were required to come and bring their tithes



and offerings three times a year. It had been several months since many gathered for the festival of Tabernacles in the fall. Passover, along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Festival of First Fruits kicked off the first series of holidays of the year.



As the crowds gathered, I am sure they remembered the Festival of Tabernacles where they built booths along the road and watched the Festival of Lights there on the

Temple Mount. They probably could recall the feeling they felt as they sang the songs of ascent on the way to Jerusalem. Those songs were based upon Psalm 118. They sang of the coming Messiah. *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* They were joyously singing praises to God.

Now Jesus, who was fully aware of what the scripture taught, and understands the real meaning of those songs of praise, sends His disciples to a village nearby to get a donkey tied up waiting for Jesus to use. We don’t know if Jesus had made prior preparations with the owner of the donkey, or if they simply knew of Jesus and when they said it was for Him, they willingly allowed the donkey to go with the two disciples.



The Book of Matthew gives us an account of this event and even references Zechariah 9:9, which we read earlier, concerning the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus made sure that every jot and tittle, every line and every verse related to the Messiah would be fulfilled as foretold by the prophets. Even riding a donkey into Jerusalem.

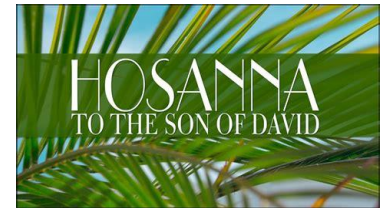
For you see, King Jesus did not ride on a Horse – an animal of war – an animal that demonstrated strength and might – instead, he rode on a donkey.

The disciples took off their outer garments and placed them on the donkey for him to ride on. They spread out their garments on the ground in front of the donkey.

Others cut down branches from the trees and spread them along the way. There was joy building. There was excitement rising. Finally, many saw Jesus as the fulfillment of those ancient prophecies. They shouted and cried out,



*“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is He who comes in the
name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!”*



The religious rulers of the day rebuked Jesus and asked Him to tell those gathered there to be quiet. Jesus replied, *“If they don’t praise me, then even the rocks will cry out!”*

It is said that Jesus entered into Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate of the Temple Mount. I have stood on the hill above the Mount of Olives and seen the space in the wall where the



Eastern Gate once belonged. After the Crusaders lost control of the City of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, the Turks gained control and closed in that wall. My tour guide said they closed it in because they did not want the Messiah to be able to enter that place in the wall and then claim the Throne of David. They even placed a Muslim cemetery in front of the gate to halt any further ideas of opening it up in the future.

But the Messiah had already come. They can close it up because Jesus has already come! Around 32 A.D. Jesus walked through that stone gate and rightfully claimed His place as the King of the Jews. He has ushered in a kingdom of love, forgiveness, and peace. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King.

This is just the beginning of the *Greatest Week in History*.

You may say, “What does an obscure verse of scripture in the Old Testament and a nice little story in the New Testament have to do with me today?”

Well it is a story that involves everyone.

- Jesus has come to seek and save that which was lost.
- Jesus has come to redeem the lost sheep of Israel first, and then the entire Gentile world.
- Jesus has come to claim the Throne of David.

God sent His one and only Son to be a sacrifice for sinners. Because God created everything, He could have created us as robots to do as He commands. Instead, God gave us free will to choose or reject Him. God could have made us such that He could have commanded us and we would respond. But that is not the way of God. That is not the way of Love.

God desires that we freely receive Him. He does not come to us and force our loyalty. He wants us to freely choose to yield our lives to Him. He will receive us, if we receive the forgiveness offered through the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son.

The Roman Road of Salvation

Romans 3:23

“For all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God.”

Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 5:8

“But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 8:38-39

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 10:9-13

“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”



That is why Jesus came ... to seek and save us. That's what Easter is all about!



He will not force His way into your life, He gently knocks on your heart asking you to let Him come in. What is your response to Him today?

Will you praise Him? Or will the rocks have to do it for you?

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Micky's Funnies, A Fish Funny, February 6, 2024

² Outline based on 2013, January Bible Study