

# The Joy of a King without an Army

Thomas Robinson, Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018

## Matthew 21:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Now when they came near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> instructing them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately **you'll find a donkey** tied, and **a foal** with her. [Gen 49:11] Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, '**Their Lord needs them,**' and he will send them at once." <sup>4</sup> This happened so that what was said through the prophet would be filled up:

<sup>5</sup> "Say to the **daughter of Zion**, [Isa 62:11]

*'Behold, **your king is coming** to you, ...*

***humble, and mounted on a donkey,***

*and on a **foal, son of a donkey.**'"* [Zech 9:9]

<sup>6</sup> When the disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them, <sup>7</sup> they brought the donkey and the foal and spread on them their **cloaks**, and he rode on them. <sup>8</sup> The huge crowd spread their own **cloaks in the road**, and others cut **branches** from the trees and spread in the road. [2 Kg 9:13; 2 Mac 10:7] <sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went ahead of him and that followed him were shouting,

*"**Hosanna** (Save, I pray) to the **Son of David!**"* [Psa 118:25]

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**"* [Psa 118:26; Mt 23:39]

***Hosanna in the highest!"***

<sup>10</sup> And when he **entered Jerusalem**, the whole city quaked, saying, "**Who is this?"**

<sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "**This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.**"

<sup>12</sup> And Jesus **entered the temple** and drove out all who **sold and bought in the temple**, and he overturned the tables of the **money-changers** and the seats of those who sold pigeons [Zech 14:21]. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "It is written,

*'**My house shall be called a house of prayer,**'* [Isa 56:7]

*but you make it 'a **cave of bandits.**'"* [Jer 7:11]

<sup>14</sup> And the **blind** and the **lame** came to him in the temple, and **he healed them** [2 Sam 5:8].

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## Zechariah 9:9-12

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you: He is righteous and brings salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey and on a foal, son of a donkey. <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the war-chariots from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and 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. <sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup> Turn back to your Stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that double I will turn back to you.

## Malachi 3:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And suddenly into his temple will come the Lord whom you seek, even the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight: Behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like a cleaner's bleach. <sup>3</sup> He will take his seat as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

## 1 Corinthians 3:13, 16-18

<sup>13</sup> Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will show it clearly, because it is being revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, what sort it is....

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you all are God's temple and the Spirit of God is dwelling in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy them. For the temple of God is holy, which is who all of you are. <sup>18</sup> Let no one be self-deceived. If anyone among you thinks that they are wise in this age, let them become foolish in order that they may become wise.

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## **A Week of Joy and awful Foolishness**

Palm Sunday leads to Easter – two celebrations bracketing startling, awful events: conflict, betrayal, abandonment, injustice, torture, crucifixion. This year Easter is April 1 –April Fool's. It's there from the start: It's a fool's tale: "*The word of the cross is foolishness...*" (1Cor 1:18). And for many of the wise of our day it still is. Actually, for everyone! The foolishness is built in. In this series of events God intends to challenge all our assumptions of how things are: What it means to be strong, to make a real difference, to show glory and power, even God's. We all, even much of the church, think we know better what's smart, powerful, glorious, wise. And then there's that young man! Astride a little donkey, riding down the hill toward the brilliant marble and gold of Herod's vast temple, with the fortress of Rome's soldiers, toward death.

## **A Waiting Prophecy, Expectation, Surprise**

Studying 'Minor prophets,' the final part of the prophetic scripture. For 500 yrs, the words of Zechariah and Malachi have been planted in Jewish hopes and expectations, a long wait. The coming king – who? when? Universal rule – how? The messenger of the covenant. The refiner's fire. The hope, renewal, turning back to God. The kingdom of God! An end to beastly empires. Jesus knew those words! Palm Sunday is the day he enacted Zechariah's words with resonance in Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Psalms. The crowds recognized it and joined in with joy. A king unlike Rome or the Herods – no destroying army, God's king of peace and transformation. It's Passover – redemption from slavery. People had filled in the prophets' words with many ideas. God's king! A purified people (Pharisees), destruction of Rome's power (Zealots), a pure community (Essenes), reality & temple (Sadducees), various messianic figures. Jesus' own disciples expect a kingdom with themselves as leading governors. Jesus' words don't fit. Jesus starts all those filled-in expectations to vibrate. They are intense but see God in terms of human power, glory, wisdom. They can't yet imagine the transformation of reality that will break in with Jesus: God/man crucified. A new kind of life, resurrection life, a reality now! Because the expectations are intense, they're strong enough to be emptied and refilled. God's king rides a donkey, speaks peace to Gentiles, destroys instruments of war, refines like fire. God fulfills promises, transforms expectations. Far weaker, dying! Stronger, beyond imagining. People had to learn to re-understand God in the light of what God was doing in Jesus. Can God really be that way? How could he come to his temple on a donkey? How could he speak peace to pagans? How could the dying God be the God who saves? *Hosanna!* How could all the hopes lodged in the Messiah, Son of David, take the form of the suffering Son of man?

## **The Lord who comes to His Temple**

But the story doesn't stop. That temple ended destroyed, burned: Zealots against Romans. But Jesus had long been showing how "temple" expectations of God's presence and forgiveness had to be re-envisioned. It was there in prophecy but had to be realized. God present among his people, in his people. The king, savior, refining fire comes to every community and person. Who can stand? He comes with all that unbreakable foolishness? Weakness is strength. Loving enemies, turning cheeks. Not serving mammon. He takes our "health & wealth" desires and recreates us into a donkey-cross-resurrection people. It's God's foolishness. It's God's Life!