

IN NOMINE JESU

THE MESSIAH SAVES THROUGH THE NEW COVENANT

Our sermon for this last Sunday in the Lenten season is taken from our inspired readings. Hear again the Word of the Lord:

Also, for you, in (the) blood of My covenant with you, I will set free your captives from (the) pit without waters.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This Sunday brings the Church to another realization of God's prophecy and His fulfillment of His Word. Our translation of words proclaimed and recorded over 2,500 years ago have been declared as fulfilled in the last week of Jesus' life during His state of humiliation. You, dear Christians, have an advantage that the first hearers of Zechariah, and the first century AD witnesses of Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem and the Temple, did not have. That is, you have been given the Holy Spirit who opens your hearts and minds to all the truths contained in the Word of God. Because God has kept you in the faith through His Visible, and proclaimed, Word you discern spiritual truths that have always been in the scriptures. That is what this sermon - as the proclaimed Word - is constructed to illuminate for you as we work through the completed prophecy of Zechariah, beginning with the first verse in our reading:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, cause to shout, O Israel, behold your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, bowed down and riding upon (a) she-ass and upon (a) colt, (the) son of (a) she-ass.²

¹ Zechariah 9:11.

² Zechariah 9:9.

When those words were first declared, only a remnant, descendants of those who had been deported from Israel first, and then Judah, had returned to their homeland. Their forefathers had been utterly crushed under the military might of Assyria, Babylon and Persia. When God gave His Word to Zechariah, the remnant had been hoping for God's gifts to proceed from the rebuilt Jerusalem altar for about 16 years. The people had just finished rebuilding the Temple of the Lord. Even so, the Divine Presence of the Lord was not dwelling in the Temple. (The Lord's glory had last been seen departing the Temple, coming to rest on the mountain the east of the Temple, (the Mount of Olives)).³

By the way, where did Jesus begin His entrance into Jerusalem and Herod's Temple? (The Mount of Olives) Could it be that the Church of the New Testament is to behold, in Jesus' triumphal entrance, the Presence of the Lord returning visibly from where He had visibly departed centuries before? With that in mind, hear again the beginning of the prophet's call:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, cause to shout, O Israel, behold your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, bowed down and riding upon (a) she-ass and upon (a) colt, (the) son of (a) she-ass.⁴

Zechariah calls out to a people used to disappointment, depression, internal and external national turmoil. His words are God's encouragement, His

³ cf. Ezekiel 11:23.

⁴ Zechariah 9:9b.

promise of the King to come. The Promise was given to a people whose kings, and their lines, had been removed from all rule and authority, dominion and power on account of their, and their people's, sins. Their Temple rebuilt, a minority living in the land with sacrifices being offered in form without the visible Presence of the Lord among them, the people were told to wait, for their King comes. Do you think the first hearers of today's word expected to wait 550 years for that Promised King to arrive?

That truth should give comfort to you who are waiting for God to fulfill His promises to you. He is faithful. He will give His people what they need, when they need it. He works His promises according to His timetable. During the time of the faithful people's waiting, God gives His grace and mercy. You know that is true because He kept the remnant who believed that their King was coming, throughout the 550 years. They knew what to look for when the King arrived, for the prophet said,

behold your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, bowed down and riding upon (a) she-ass and upon (a) colt, (the) son of (a) she-ass.⁵

That King would be completely right with God. That is, while He was to be fully human - the Son of David promised centuries before Zechariah spoke - this King would not sin. Further, in Himself, the coming King would have salvation. It would be His nature (as well as His Name).

This King would enter not as a conquering warlord, on a mighty steed with

⁵ Zechariah 9:9.

armies in the point, in the main body and in the van. Rather, the Promised Perfect King Who would bring salvation would enter the Holy City, not as some English translations read, “humble,” but, “bowed down,” or “afflicted.” He would be the Man weighed with the troubles of the world, the Man of Sorrows, afflicted and stricken for His people.

To drive home the vision for the people of their just and saving King, He was foretold to enter on the colt of a female donkey. His would be an arrival on the steed of the ancient rulers of Israel and Judah. The image hearkens back to the time before the war-horses introduced by David’s lesser son, Solomon, became the kingly mode of transportation. The image of the diminutive stature of the King of Salvation’s mount would be dwarfed by the common sight of the mighty steeds of His faithless forerunners. This was no warlord; it was the Prince of Peace.

Zechariah’s words promise that this King of the Lord’s people would be different. From His very entrance, people should know that His reign would be other than that of worldly rulers. A spiritual kingship, and kingdom, by a ruler accustomed to suffering for His people is promised, as our text says,

Then He will cause to cut off (the) chariot from Ephraim; and (the) horse from Jerusalem; and (the) battle-bow will be cut off; and (a) word of peace (will be) for (the) Gentiles; and His domain (will be) from waters unto (the) Sea, and from the River unto (the) ends of the earth.⁶

⁶ Zechariah 9:10.

Did you hear the promises of that text, and the meanings of the imagery as the ancient faithful were to hear them? That the Office of the Holy Ministry may perform as God intended, they are declared to you now. In that passage, the Promised Salvation King will remove all implements of war from Israel and Judah. The name, "Ephraim," of our text refers to the ten northern tribes deported from Israel in 722 B.C. They are mostly lost in the mists of history. The war horse will be taken away by the King who enters in peace from Jerusalem, the capital of the southern Kingdom of Judah, and her two tribes. The battle-bow, the long-range personal artillery of the era, will no longer be found in the midst of the Lord's people. All that means is that this Kingdom will be spiritual, a Kingdom of the Right as we Lutherans call it, and not a Kingdom of the Left.

The Promised King of God from the words of the 6th century B.C. will not only bring a spiritual kingdom, without the implements of human war to the scattered people of ancient Israel and Judah. His will be again a united kingdom, under One King, the righteous One of God, who has Salvation. The prophet declares that this coming King will bring peace to the Gentiles, that is, to those of the nations who are not born of Jewish mothers.

So many people will be included in this King's spiritual kingdom that the whole world will be included. That reality is indicated in the imagery of the known world that is described in terms of the greatest expansion of the King's forefather, King

David. All the ends of the earth will be encompassed by the Promised King's rule and dominion. Yet, that rule will be a spiritual rule, and dominion of the Word of God.

This is made clear for the faithful of our day, when we hear the next words in

Zechariah's prophecy:

Also, for you, in (the) blood of My covenant with you, I will set free your captives from (the) pit without waters.⁷

The prophet is declaring that the Promised King saves through a New Covenant. To seal this covenant, blood would be shed. That would be the suffering King's blood. If you did not hear the Promise of the New Covenant in Jesus' blood in this text, if you believe it is not there, turn, repent, and believe the Gospel of 2,500 years ago, for it was fulfilled 2,000 years ago!

God, through Zechariah's words to a people worshipping without His Real Presence, declared that He will establish in the blood of His covenant with His faithful people that He will set their captives free. That means that, in the midst of those who call themselves the people of God are the real people of God, known to Him, rescued by Him from the waterless places. Figuratively and spiritually, these are the places where there is no life: the desert of unrepentant sin; the wasteland of the hell's separation from the Real Presence of God; the desolation of death without God.

God is the One who is to do that rescuing, that salvation of His faithful

⁷ Zechariah 9:11.

people from the midst of the unbelieving world. The Way of His Salvation He makes clear to those who will hear – to you, we pray. That is the Way of the New Covenant in His blood. If you did not hear the promise of the blood of the sacrifice which we will celebrate in a few minutes, and recall through the narratives of Maundy-Thursday, unstop your ears that your hearts may be opened by the Word of the Promise. Over a half-millennium before Jesus instituted the New Covenant in His blood, the prophet declared that God would *in (the) blood of My covenant with you, I will set free your captives from (the) pit without waters.*⁸

With those words, there should have been no misunderstanding. The Old Covenant was null. The Temple, though rebuilt, fell again into ruin. The sacrifices ended again. Even when Herod built his Temple over the ruins of the first Temple, there was no Presence of the Lord in that Temple built for the sacrifice of blood. Only after Jesus entered the Temple that first Palm Sunday, only after He instituted the New Covenant in His blood, only after He died on the cross and pierced the veil of the Most Holy Place to pour His blood of atonement and final sacrifice upon the rock of that place, only then did the Real Presence of the Lord enter the Temple to bring forgiveness and salvation to His people. For centuries before that biblical, historical and spiritual reality, God called to His people to remain in the faith, as He said,

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope, also today I am causing to declare:

⁸ *Zechariah 9:11.*

*double I will restore to you!*⁹

Those words are a clear call to repentance. The word translated “return” is the same word we may translate “repent.” God is calling those who were once prisoners in the waterless places to become prisoners of hope. He desires that those awaiting His promises remain captives to hope in those promises.

For the ancient remnant of the faithful, that meant to wait for the day of Salvation, when the bowed-down King of peace would enter God’s Holy City. For the current remnant of the faithful, you, I pray, that means waiting in the fulfilled Promise of the Blood of the New Covenant for the completion of the Kingdom of Glory, now, in 500 years, in 5,000 years, in God’s time. God has promised to restore, to repent, to return double to His people for their time of tribulation as they wait in hope.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent VI, Palmarum (*LSB One-Year Series*)

Zechariah 9:9-12; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 21:9

April 5, 2009

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SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁹ Zechariah 9:12.