

Palm Sunday/ Sunday of the Passion

March 29, 2026

Text: Zechariah 9:9-10 (Lenten Sermon Series Text)

Other Texts: Isaiah 50:4-9a (Old Testament); Philippians 2:5-11 (Epistle);

Matthew 27:11-66 (Gospel); John 12:12-19 (Palm Procession Gospel)

“Look Up to See Your King!”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Judeans’ heads must have hung toward their feet much of the time. They must have felt defeated. Sure, they had returned from exile in Babylon. But the temple was still in ruins. They were a small remnant of what they once were, subjects of the mighty Persian Empire. But now the prophet told them, “Behold, your king is coming to you!” 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. But they still didn’t have real freedom as they were subjects of the mighty Roman Empire. They longed for the glory that was once Israel’s. But then someone shouted, “Behold, your king is coming to you!” Fast-forward two millennia...

Our heads hang toward our feet much of the time. We often feel defeated. Sure, we have political freedom; we’re not subject to another country. Though even in this land we are experiencing increasing restrictions upon common sense, morality, and speaking God’s Word and living according to it. But worse, we are subject to sin and its sad effects. We long for the days of glory. And then today we hear, “Behold, your king is coming to you!” For on this Palm Sunday, we look up to another prophecy from Zechariah, the Holy Week Prophet.¹

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot 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.²

The Jews were excited that Jesus had come to Jerusalem. They didn’t need to hang their heads anymore. They could look up and see their hero, their king, riding on a donkey just as Zechariah had prophesied. Here He was, their long-promised Son of David, the Messianic King! Here He was, their salvation from the Romans, from poverty, from sickness, from suffering. Here was Jesus! Look up and see Him. Spread your coats and palms to welcome Him. Shout hosanna, “Save us now!” both to honor him as the King and to cry out for the rescue He brings.

When Zechariah prophesied “Shout,” he chose a word that was both a battle cry and a praise to God. The Jews, seeing Zechariah’s prophecy fulfilled before their eyes, must have been filled with hope, praising God for finally sending His Messiah to wage war holy war on Rome, the rest

¹ This Lenten season, for our midweek services, we have been looking at different Holy Week prophecies.

² Zechariah 9:9-10. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

of the Gentile nations, and so restore the kingdom to Israel!³ Their King would conquer the world: “His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” Could there be any doubt? They had seen Jesus perform amazing miracles: controlling weather, feeding multitudes, healing injury and disease, raising the dead. Think of these in war! The weather always benefiting your armies, supply lines completely unnecessary, injured and sick troops restored to full combat readiness. Yes, *dead* troops raised to life and ready to fight once more. No enemy could withstand them! “Hosanna!” they cried. Destroy our enemies for us!

Yet, though it was prophesied, something in the prophecy seems off. Jesus rides on a donkey. No mighty war horse. No war chariot pulled by powerful stallions. A *donkey*. He was coming gently, peacefully, humbly. “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” And the foal wasn’t even His; *it was borrowed*.⁴ But a humble king has its benefits, being one who would look out for His people and not Himself. But then things got really strange!

Yes, how strange it must have seemed to those who still followed Him on Friday of that week. The King they were encouraged to look up to was no longer riding anything, not even a humble donkey. No, the humility went much deeper. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”⁵

How strange to look up and see their promised King being tortured and then executed on a cross. This was no longer a humility that could be respected; this was pure insult! To Jesus, sure; but also to them who had cried out “Hosanna!” to Him. Pilate’s charge against Him, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,”⁶ was a slap in the face to them all. They were expecting a different kind of king—a monarch who would remove their shame by putting Israel’s enemies under their feet. A Messiah who would wage a war to end all wars, destroying Rome and all their enemies, bringing both national peace and restored dominance. But He brings even more shame upon them as He’s crucified like a common criminal by the power of Gentile Rome.

Why? Why did He who once walked through an angry mob set to throw Him off a cliff allow Himself to be arrested? *Why* did He who raised the dead allow Himself to die? The Jews must have wanted to hang their heads again. In sorrow. In shame. In anger. In hopelessness.

We often look up to Jesus and wonder: Why does He allow my body to break down? Why does He allow my relationships to fall apart, leaving me feeling so lonely and betrayed? Why does He let me struggle with my finances and worry so much? Why does He allow my loved ones to suffer? Why does He permit so much evil in the world? Why doesn’t He save me, save *us*, from all this sorrow, suffering, and pain? We wonder: is it that He can’t or just won’t?

³ Cf. Acts 1:6 where, right before Jesus’ ascension the disciples are still wondering about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. It is of great importance to recognize that after Jesus’ ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, that question is no longer asked as the reality that the kingdom is not of this world, but spiritual, is finally understood. The fullness of the kingdom will be in the world to come, the new creation, when Jesus returns as the King in glory.

⁴ See Matthew 21:1-5.

⁵ Philippians 2:8.

⁶ John 19:19.

Yes, we cry out “Hosanna!” “Save us now!” But there doesn’t always seem to be much saving. Why? *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 or to make this life easy.

When you get disappointed in what Jesus doesn’t do for you, are you tempted to reject Him just 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’ll take things into your own hands? Do you ever think, “I can always turn to Him later, when I need what He has to offer”? Yet, what does Scripture say, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”⁷ And again, “Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”⁸ Jesus might not be the Savior and King you think you need, but He is most definitely the One you, me, and all people *truly need.*

“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation.” Look up to see Jesus, who arrived to shouts of praise as the conquering king, only to die on a cross, *for that was the plan from the beginning.*⁹ He is righteous: never sinning, always carrying out God’s will. What we’re not. But He gives His perfect righteousness *to you:* washing your sins away in His blood which paid for them, covering you with His perfect obedience so that you are righteous before God.

Look up to the cross to see your King, who brings you salvation from your real enemies. For it was on the cross that He waged all-out war against sin, against Satan, against death, against hell. Look up to see your Champion fighting the ultimate battle for your freedom! Don’t hang your head in shame. Look up! For He stayed faithful, even unto death on a cross, for every time you forsook him for your sinful, selfish desires. His righteous record is now credited to you, making you perfect in God’s sight. He *is* the humble, gentle, obedient Savior and King you need.

Zechariah prophesied that King Jesus’ “rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” As we continue to witness and experience sadness, strife, and tragedy, broken relationships, broken families, and broken promises, violence, natural upheavals, catastrophes, wars and rumors of wars, His rule is certainly not visible. *Yet.* Now His kingdom is spiritual. He rules in the hearts of believers, spreading His kingdom, that is, the Christian Church, through the Word and Sacraments where the Holy Spirit gives Jesus’ victory on the cross to all who repent of their sins and believe in Him as their Savior and King.

While still hidden, have no doubt that Jesus is the real Prince of Peace. For while it is true that we have many earthly and spiritual enemies, there is only One whom we must not have as our foe. *God.* Our sins and sinful nature put us at war with Him; a hopeless war, proven by the devil’s failed rebellion and his being doomed to hell. Jesus’ atoning death for us established peace in our relationship with God, delivering us from the guilt and shame of our sins and from the fear of death and hell that they deserve. And one day, that peace with God through King Jesus will no longer be hidden. He will return. But not on a donkey, and certainly not on a cross.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is

⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:2b.

⁸ Hebrews 3:13.

⁹ Cf. Revelation 13:8.

called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.¹⁰

Fellow members of the Kingdom, on that Day we will have peace from all our problems, from all violence, conflicts, and wars, from all suffering and pain, from all evil, from death itself. On that Day, the King will throw down all His enemies: the devil, the demons, the two beasts, and all unbelievers; casting them into the lake of burning sulfur never to trouble His people again. And then His rule, and its peace, will be universal, perfect, and eternal.

So look up now to the cross in faith to see Jesus, your King, at His lowest, for then you are spiritually ready to look up to the clouds and see Him when He returns at His highest, riding the clouds of heavenly glory. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you!” Amen!

¹⁰ Revelation 19:11-16.