

Zechariah 9:10
Life in the King's Kingdom

A read an article yesterday that a novel written in 2005 was finally being published. Back when it was written and submitted, the novel was rejected as being too farfetched and unrealistic. The name of the novel is "Lockdown". It envisioned a dystopian future where a pandemic beings in London and everyone has to go on lockdown. The author said he reread it recently and was spooked by how eerily accurate it to what happening around us. A month ago we couldn't have possibly imagined being in the situation we're in today. School and businesses shut down. Limited right to assemble. Restricted travel. It was unthinkable.

But you know what I'm hoping comes out of all of this? When all of this is over, I'm hoping there's a renewed appreciation for the blessings we have living when and where we do in history. There are places in this world where such blessings don't exist. There are countries where, pandemic or not, their freedoms are restricted even more than what we are enduring now. We have been blessed to part of this country with all its blessings and we shouldn't forget it.

This morning I'd like us to do the same with that other kingdom we're a part of. I'd like us to take stock of the blessings we have as citizens of our Savior's kingdom and rejoice that he is our king.

God wanted his people to be ready for their king. He didn't want them to be caught off guard or blinded by their own misgivings. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he wanted everyone to understand not only THAT Jesus was the Messiah-king, but WHAT KIND of Messiah King he would be. That's why he talked about hundreds of years before it ever happened through the prophet Zechariah. That's why he gave a description of his characteristics, righteous, having salvation, and lowly...not the kind of the characteristics we would expect in a king but the very kind we needed in a Savior-king. That's why he even got specific about how he would ride into the city...on a lowly steed. On a donkey. Not the kind of ride you'd expect from a king...and so it would serve as a glaring marker of the true one to come. God gave all these details so his people could be ready and they wouldn't miss it.

And those are the details we usually focus on on Palm Sunday. We focus on the KIND of king Jesus came to be. But that was not the end of God's prophetic message through Zechariah. In addition to the kind of king his people should look for, God also gave a description of the kingdom this king would rule over.

That's going to be our focus this morning. We're going to focus specifically on verse 10 of that prophetic message from Zechariah and talk this morning about life in the king's kingdom. Let me read that verse one more time.

¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow will be taken away, and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His kingdom will extend from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.

If we would spend a little time this morning walking through Old Testament prophecies and focus on all the places the prophets talked about the future kingdom of God's Messiah, we start to notice a trend. THE defining characteristic of Messiah's kingdom is peace. It's pictured as bringing peace in nature among animals that would normally consume one another. It's pictured as peace among nations. As God spoke through Zechariah hundreds of years before Jesus was born, once again he makes peace the defining characteristic of life within the king's kingdom.

God said he would remove the instruments of war from among his people. And even more than that, the words the Spirit guided Zechariah to choose indicate that God wouldn't just take away some swords and chariots, he would remove the discipline entirely. Warfare wouldn't even be taught among God's people. Instead there would be peace. Peace among his people. Peace proclaimed by the king. Peace spoken to all the world.

But what kind of peace exactly? What kind of peace would be experienced by those living in the king's kingdom? You don't need to look too hard to realize there is still much violence in our streets, there are still many wars being waged, and there is still much hostility and discord among races and cultures and political ideals. What happened to the peace the king was supposed to bring?

The truth is that this promise won't find full and final fulfillment until the glories of heaven. But even in the face of violence and warfare, this promise is flourishing all around us. The peace of Jesus' kingdom is a peace that transcends worldly peace. It is a spiritual peace. It's the peace of the gospel. It's the peace that was heralded at the birth of the promised king. It's the peace that was secured through his death and resurrection. It's the peace that restores our relationship with God through the forgiveness of our sins. It's a peace that exists even when the trouble of the world still afflict us. Life in the king's kingdom is a life of peace that we live every day. At peace with God. Loved through Jesus, our Savior.

Look at how Zechariah said it would be established. **he will proclaim peace to the nations.** Not by force. Not by demand. But by promise and proclamation. The king would win the nations over through the spiritual power of his Word.

The gospel woos hearts and minds, it does not force or coerce them. Jesus did not come with threats and condemnation but with the promise of salvation.

And that peace also now defines our life. Paul reminds us that “we do not wage war in the way the sinful flesh does. Certainly, the weapons of our warfare are not those of the flesh.” Do you think we could get more people into church using something other than the message of the gospel of peace? We could. Do you think we have a greater prominence and recognition in our community if spent more time trying to conquer hearts with something other than the gospel of peace? I do. But those are weapons of the flesh and they’re NOT winning anyone’s soul. The sinful flesh always pushes us to seek victory through force, but that’s not the kingdom Christ has established. Engaging in more worldly, warlike tactics might produce results but they will be in contradiction to the kingdom of Christ.

I was reminded of this truth in our own ministry. In the past year we’ve sold two properties. Both of them were sold to religious groups who flat out teach false doctrine. Some might wonder if that’s appropriate. Some in the community even criticized it. But we remember the reality of this kingdom in which we live. God does not call on us to wage economic warfare or any other kind of warfare to combat false teaching.

We proclaim the gospel of peace. Because that alone can change hearts and stand up against the assaults of Satan, no matter what form they take. We limit our work to proclaiming the gospel to win hearts and minds and expand the kingdom of God.

And look at what results! **His kingdom will extend from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.**

Mention the topic of borders in our current political climate and prepare yourself for an impassioned reaction. Are they loveless and cruel because compassion and welcoming arms should be offered to all those who are oppressed and needy? Are they a necessary protection in a world of sinfully evil actors who would happily take advantage of such an offer? Are they a needless hinderance to those who need action on their behalf immediately? Are they a beneficial control to prevent being overrun and overwhelmed? Those arguments won’t be settled anytime soon and I’m sure you have an opinion.

But when it comes to the Messiah King’s kingdom, borders simply don’t come into the equation. His kingdom will exist without them because it simply transcends all those factors that make physical borders a matter of discussion. It transcends cultural and ethnical bounds just as God always intended. It has no geographic location. It was intended for and promised to the nations. Given its

lowly beginnings led by its humble king, few would have predicted how this prophetic word could have been fulfilled. Yet the kingdom born in suffering and humiliation and death would result in the conquest of countless human hearts and find its way into every culture, language, people, and tribe. Yes, Jesus came as king for every soul of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike.

Let's remember that as we live our lives in our king's kingdom. We're going to have to resist some strong urges from within...sinful urges that would threaten to limit the king's kingdom in ways he never intended. We're going to have to resist the urge to limit the power of the gospel of peace...thinking it couldn't possibly help in THIS situation. We're going to have to resist the urge to write off a visitor to our congregations because it's just so obvious from appearances that this visitor is just not the right fit for us. We're going to have to resist the urge to use all the differences we find between us and another as an excuse to keep silent. We're going to have to resist and instead remember that there is room for every sinner in the king's kingdom because he has proclaimed and brought peace for all.

That's what Jesus was doing on Palm Sunday. Amidst the acclamations and the shouting, there was already the undercurrent of resistance against him. There were already those who were plotting his death. In just a few short days, the crowds would be shouting something different. Crucify! Yet Jesus rode on. Because that's what he came to do. He came to bring peace to a world of sinners. He came to lay down his perfect life so that sins might be forgiven. Jesus was riding for you. He was riding forward to die your death...to take the sins we've talked about today...those times we put our hope in something other than his gospel...the times we limit his kingdom and exclude those for whom Jesus died...he rode on forward to take those sins all the way to the cross... to nail them to his own body and bring you at peace with God.

Let us rejoice on this Palm Sunday and prepare our hearts for this Holy Week. And let us live in our king's kingdom at peace and welcoming all to hear the news of our Savior's triumph. Amen.