

Times sure have changed with transportation for special occasions like weddings, since I got married 35 years ago. Back then, you asked a family member who had a nice car if you could borrow it for the wedding day. You then decorated the vehicle with crate paper, and tied some cans on to the back end. I remember borrowing a family member's old Lincoln Continental for our wedding day. Boy, did I feel 1st class that day, as my brother chaperoned us around Sturgeon Bay, WI in a Lincoln. Today, we no longer borrow a nice family car. Forget what your parents are driving. Their cars are antiques. We need to look really good as we travel around town. So we have limos. But these limos aren't just limos, they are stretch limos, super stretch limos, hummer limos, or Van or Bus Limos. As we drive around, we want people to know that this is a special day in our lives. We honk the horn at them. We wave at them.

In Bible times, when you wanted to travel 1st class, you traveled not in a stretch hummer but in a gold-plated war chariot, or on an impressive war stallion. History tells us Julius Caesar returned to Rome in 45 B.C. in a golden chariot harnessed to 40 elephants! Or have you heard about a man named Judas Maccabees. He was nicknamed the "the Hammer". Judas rallied an army of Jewish men to fight against the Syrians who occupied Jerusalem. The Syrians had set up pagan worship in Jerusalem, even offering up pigs in the temple. In 163 B.C. Judas Maccabees entered Jerusalem riding on a massive stallion, and the people shouted and waved palm branches and cheered, "Hosanna! Judas cleaned out the idols in the Temple, burned incense, offered sacrifices, and lit a huge menorah that burned for eight days. The Jews sang hymns and thanked the Lord for making the temple clean again. Afterwards, everyone decided to make this a yearly festival for the whole nation. Judas was their hero—and many thought he was the Jewish Messiah. To this day the Jews celebrate 8 days of the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah. Not long afterwards, Judas was killed in battle, buried, and that was the end of the Hammer.

Thus, the use of palm branches in Jewish history seem to be related to military victories. Palm branches and throwing out coats demonstrates happiness over a leader has come to save his people. Thus, when Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem about 2000 years ago, the crowds threw out palm branches again. They had the idea that Jesus was going to be their Messiah. "Hosanna to the Son of David". Save us now, Son of David, save us from these blasted Romans that occupy our land. We want you to be Superman! We want you to help us avoid pain. We want you as a Messiah who will never die. But Jesus did not fit the bill of what they were looking for. How sad, because Jesus is just the Messiah we all need. And so today, in spite of the crowds confusion, we will join the crowd, and we will "Rejoice Greatly Your King Is Coming To You!"

Amazing! Just amazing! 500 years before it happened the prophet Zechariah predicted the Messiah would come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, actually the colt of a donkey, not even full grown and mature. He told the people of his time to anticipate this great event by rejoicing greatly. So let's put a smile on our faces right now.

Why do I want to high five all of you here today? Why do I want to jump up and down for joy? Well, its because of a person named Jesus and what he is bringing to me and you. Our text says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey." Don't let you eyes deceive you as you look at your King Jesus riding on a donkey. God's Word tells us that he comes to us righteous and having salvation. These two words "righteous" and "salvation" are two of the most

important words in the Bible. I need to be righteous, that means holy and perfect to be accepted by God. Look at Jesus. He comes into Jerusalem as the only righteous person who ever lived on the face of this earth. He was perfect in everything he did. He rides into Jerusalem to offer his righteousness to a world of people who constantly fall short of God's righteousness and God's glory. Romans 3 says, "There is none who is righteous, no not one."

If you want to be righteous before God you cannot go to a store and purchase this righteousness the way you might buy a gallon of milk. You cannot do a Google search on the internet to find this righteousness in some exotic place. You cannot join a religious commune in Tibet and wear saffron robes to find this holiness. You cannot find this righteousness in yourself by doing the best you can because your best will always fall short of God's glory. You can only find this righteousness in Jesus. Isaiah 61 says, "I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness. There is not a day in our lives when we cannot dance around for joy because of this righteousness that King Jesus brings into our lives. Paul said in Philippians 3 "That I might be found in him, not have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith,"

Look at Jesus your King. He also brings salvation with him. The crowd on the streets of Jerusalem shouted out "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." The word "Hosanna" means "Save us." These words come from Psalm 118 where it says, "O Lord save us; O Lord grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." No one can bless you and save you as Jesus can. One old time evangelist said, "He rescues the gutter most to the uttermost." He takes you from being nothing in the eyes of your God and makes you dearly loved by your heavenly Father. Psalm 103 says it so clearly, "He redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion." Colossians 1:13 says, "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

The crowds on that Palm Sunday who were welcoming Jesus triumphantly into Jerusalem had no idea who he really was. They thought that the Messiah was going to be a political and military hero who would achieve victory over the hated Romans occupying their land. Jesus had a whole different agenda. Jesus wasn't riding into Jerusalem atop a white stallion and swinging a sword like some military conqueror. Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, which is a common beast of burden. It is an animal that is universally recognized as being symbolic of humility, peace, servanthood and gentleness. The crowds wanted a conquering king who they could put on a throne. What Jesus wanted was to be willingly enthroned in the hearts of individuals. That's a whole different thing, isn't it? Jesus was not coming to bring a short-term political solution to the Roman problem of the first century. He was coming to bring along-term spiritual solution to a problem that has been shared by all of mankind all through history, which is that our sin and wrongdoing have separated us from God.

The prophet Zechariah tells us our king is someone who is gentle. Please don't equate gentleness and meekness with weakness. The night before he died Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. Here is Jesus, our Lord and God, the creator of the universe, becoming one of us and bowing down to serve us. Philippians 2 says of

Jesus, "He made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross!" The human hands of Jesus that hold on the donkey are the hands of God that created the universe, the hands of God that will be nailed to the cross for our sin. We dance around for joy this morning because our King came to rescue us. Our King is gentle, down-to-earth.

Finally, this king The King who rides on a lowly donkey offers you a place in his kingdom and a peace this world cannot give. The prophet Zechariah describes this peace in this way. "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem. The battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth." This peace is described in Isaiah as the wolf living with the lamb and the lion eating stray with the ox. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." The peace Jesus gives is the ultimate peace of knowing sin is forgiven and God loves us dearly even if our whole world falls apart. Romans 5 describes this peace, "Therefore sin we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rome could offer peace to the city of Jerusalem but it was nothing compared to the peace Jesus offers people who live in his kingdom. During my junior year in college, I took a course on Roman history. The professor who taught that class became ill and a retired professor stepped in. We never had tests that whole semester. For the final we had to write an essay on the Latin words he wrote on the board: "Si vis pacem, para bellum." If you want peace prepare for war. Jesus offers a peace far superior to the peace Rome had to offer. Jesus went to war against the forces of evil as he hung on the cross. By a miracle of God's love Jesus was able to take every sin every committed upon himself, pay the punishment for us, and provide us with peace.

Look at Jesus riding into Jerusalem. Look at the kingdom your king provides for you. He rules your life, controls your life, carries you in his arms, sustains and strengthens you. "Nothing in all creation will ever separate you from his love." Your King is your Shepherd who told you, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." The Lord is my shepherd, not the Lord is a shepherd. No the Lord is my shepherd. Listen to the prophet Zechariah proclaim to you, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion...See your king comes to you." He did not say, "See a king comes to you," he said, "See your King come to you!" Every day I can dance for joy, shout for joy, sing for joy. That's my King. And when he returns again on clouds of glory, I will dance for joy and shout for joy and say without any fear or hesitation: "That's my King!"