

Zechariah wrote: “Behold, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious. He is humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9) KJV.

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King (Matthew 21:1-17)

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”[a]

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna[b] to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”[c]

“Hosanna[d] in the highest heaven!”

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus at the Temple

12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’[e] but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’[f]”

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“‘From the lips of children and infants  
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’[g]?”

17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

It is Palm Sunday – the day we reflect on our Savior’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Jesus most certainly entered Jerusalem that day as King. Historically – to ride a donkey was a symbol of entering in Peace. But Jesus’s “Peace” was at odds with the social and political systems that had been established over a long period of time. And as we know, the longer something has been in place, the harder it is to change. Change most often happens little by little with a thousand different addendums and decisions being globbed together over a long period of time. Most things start out fairly simple and straightforward – but through misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misguided leaders, desires for power, desires for money, etc – all of these things cause changes but never all at once. So when Jesus entered Jerusalem and the “system” couldn’t change Him, then the “system” had to get rid of Him. Ultimately, it would seem, the “straw that broke the camel’s back” was when Jesus upset and drove out the money-changers. “No one can serve two masters...”

So when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, mobs of people shouted Hosanna! Mobs of people threw palm branches to line the path of victory. And within a few days these mobs of people would be simply mobs of people. Instead of shouting Hosanna! they’ll be shouting Crucify! Instead of whole-heartedly accepting Jesus they will whole-heartedly reject. They ended up in this position because it wasn’t what they thought it was. They thought they were lining up behind the conqueror of Rome. They thought they were lining up behind the one to free Jerusalem and all of its inhabitants from the cruel political oppression. They thought that through Jesus they would be free. In that respect, they were right and wrong at the same time. He certainly came to set them free, but it wasn’t what they thought it was. He preached a single, simple message throughout his earthly ministry. And through his final days before being unjustly murdered, Jesus continued to beat the steady drum of “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near”.

Repent.

We know repentance is when we feel bad enough about something that we want to be forgiven. We know repentance is when we have hit such a tough spot in life that we cannot find or see a way out. We long to be free. We think that by repenting that God will lift the burden of life off our shoulders and take on our problems. And that’s true. But it’s not what we think. It seems that most times we only consider repentance when things are “bad enough”. If everything is running smoothly, if everything is fine-and-dandy we don’t give a second thought to how our thoughts, words, and actions need to be constantly thrown at the feet of our Savior so that we – His people – can find that peace and comfort in any circumstance through the presence of His Spirit. We tend to think that if nothing is “wrong” then we must be “right”. Until something big happens. Until something truly painful and difficult happens. Then – all of a sudden – we try to winnow out that exact moment that we sinned or fall short. We don’t change our thoughts, words, and actions in order to make the Kingdom of Heaven appear. We change our thoughts, words, and actions because the Kingdom of Heaven is here! There’s a tremendous difference in the lives that live out those two “realities”.

Jesus didn’t say, “Repent to make difficult times go away”, “Repent to make disease go away”, “Repent to make hard work go away”, nor did he say “Repent to make unhappiness go away”. His constant message was, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” Too often we treat repentance as a sort of “Get out of Jail Free” card. If I’m just sorry enough, Jesus will make it all disappear. If I convince God I feel bad enough about what I did, I won’t really have to change – and He won’t discipline me for what I chose to do in this circumstance.

Repentance is not simply a way of expressing sorrow. Repentance is the very action of “denying self”. If I’m using repentance as a way to get God to “forgive” (really to overlook or not pay attention to) a

moment and then willfully carry on with the same thoughts, words, and actions as if nothing has happened then I'm using God's promise of forgiveness to deny Him and protect my sinfulness. Repentance is to be the very thing that puts us in a far greater place because it follows through on Jesus statement, (Matthew 16:24-26) 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

There have been a lot of people sharing/expressing how the current condition of our world is a result of God's wrath. Yes. Absolutely this is a result of God's wrath. My interest here is not to bring up all the passages that support such a view – but to offer some reflection on why repentance should be prevalent even when there is no pandemic.

The reality is – the presence of God's wrath is not the result of any individual sin. It is the ongoing expression of God's displeasure with the sinful state of His creation. He destroyed the world in a flood because of the world's sinful state. He offered Moses the opportunity to wipe out all the children of Israel and begin again with Moses because of the sinfulness of the people. God's displeasure with us is how – as individual's – we end up acting and behaving as a group. We are unkind. We are uncaring. We are self-centered. We are self-righteous. We are lost!

Repentance is our only opportunity to deny this unkind, uncaring, self-centered, self-righteousness by daily putting us in a position to change our thoughts, words, and actions – and to do so with the very presence of His Holy Spirit. The simple reality is this: if we think it, then we say it, then we do it. If my first thought is that someone else is "stupid" – then my words will confirm it – and my life will live it out. And I'm an unpleasant presence to God. If my thoughts are that everyone else is doing this wrong – then my words will confirm it – and my life will live it out. And I'm an unpleasant presence to God. If my thoughts are focused on God thought – on His grace (which becomes my grace) on His mercy (which becomes my mercy) on His forgiveness (which becomes my forgiveness) then I become pleasant in the presence of the Lord.

Repentance is when we:

Change our Thoughts – 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

Which changes our Words – 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

With our Thoughts and Words focused on Christ then our Actions change – 13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (James 3:13-16)

Let's Pray:

Father – you know my thoughts, my words, and my deeds. And Father, I know that without accepting and following your son, none of what I think, say, or do will save me. May I always be in a state of repentance – capable of accepting responsibility for my own actions and accepting your help in overcoming my broken approaches to life. Father forgive us for these intentional moments of sin when we seek out solutions to our anger and hurt by being angry and hurtful. Replace my anger with peace, and allow my life to reflect the constant presence of your son. Lord – we can't thank you enough for the ways you provide and for allowing us each and every moment we have. Please Lord, build us up in what we think, say, and do to be more pleasing to you. We thank you – and we love you.

Amen