

In 2008, it was all about hope for the future. From the iconic “Hope” posters, to the “O” logo with the rising sun symbolizing a new day, to the slogan “Change We Can Believe In,” Barack Obama’s campaign sought to convince voters that America needed future-focused changes, and that he was the president we needed to make those changes.

Four years later, the logo remained the same, but the phrase became “Forward,” to convince Americans that our country was moving in the right direction, and President Obama was the president we needed to keep moving forward.

In 2016, everything went 180. As many voters perceived a decline in America’s global power, and frustrations grew over perceived failures to combat terrorism and enforce border control, a businessman with a “tell it like it is” personality convinced Americans that he was the president we needed to “Make America Great Again.”

I’ll let CNN and Fox News debate whether these presidents lived up to their campaign slogans. But the point is, when someone’s in a leadership position, they have to convince people that they’re the right person to solve the current problems.

And that’s fitting, as we join the crowds of Jerusalem to wave palm branches, shout Hosannas, and praise, ***“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.”*** On Palm Sunday, we laud Jesus as our King. But just as there were plenty of skeptics about “king Jesus” on that first Palm Sunday, there are plenty of skeptical people today who wonder whether Jesus really should be their King-- maybe even some of you. So, what is it about Jesus that can convince us he is the one able to solve all of our problems, and be ***The King We Need?***

We’ll look to the prophet Zechariah for the answer. Around 550 years before the first Palm Sunday, by God’s inspiration, Zechariah foresaw the coming of Israel’s king. He prophesied, ***“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you.”***

Zechariah’s prophetic ministry occurred after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon, around 520 B.C. About 50 years after the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and carried its people off into exile, Cyrus, the King of Persia who conquered Babylon, had allowed some of the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. And so 50,000 Jews journeyed home and began rebuilding. But after some minor success in laying the foundation of the Temple, some of Israel’s neighbors started attacking and harassing them, halting the rebuilding project for 14 years.

You can imagine after 50 years in exile, and getting attacked once they returned home, the Jews were feeling beaten down and helpless. So God sent Zechariah to encourage the Jews to continue building the Temple, and give them hope for their future. Certainly, a prophecy about a king coming not just “to” them, but “for” them would have filled them with joyful anticipation!

But what kind of king were they expecting? Probably a king who could solve all their problems. They were weak and vulnerable to enemies; they’d lost their national power. So in their minds, they needed a powerful, conquering king. The kind of king who charges in on a stallion, sword drawn, leading his people to crush their enemies. A king who could restore their power.

It makes sense that they hoped that way, after all the struggles they’d faced. But as Israel visualized a warrior king, Zechariah’s description of their coming king must have left them a little confused.

***“See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*** They would have been on board with their king being righteous. You want your king to be just and righteous, both in his life and how he rules the kingdom.

But the rest of the description is a little tougher to grasp. A gentle king? Gentle kings don't destroy enemies, or expand kingdoms! How would a gentle king solve their problems? And this king wouldn't be striking fear in his enemies' hearts riding on a donkey. And not even an adult donkey, but a young, untrained, unbroken donkey still running with its mother. In that day, donkeys were solely beasts of burden. Kings rode mules or horses, but definitely not donkeys.

A king riding a donkey would be like the president rolling up to his inauguration in a Honda Accord! A reliable, useful vehicle, but certainly not presidential! Likewise, a donkey is a reliable, useful animal, but certainly not kingly!

Israel would be excited to hear that ***“His rule would extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”*** That's the kind of kingdom expansion they were hoping for! But this king wouldn't rule the world in the conventional way by vicious attacks, mighty armies, or intimidating threats. Zechariah prophesied the opposite, that God would ***“take away the chariots from Ephraim, and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken.”*** This king wasn't coming to rule with weapons and warfare. This king would rule by grace, ***“proclaiming peace to the nations.”***

When you add all of that together, Zechariah prophesies a king the people weren't expecting. And yet, this coming king was exactly the kind of king God knew his people needed.

And so for nearly six centuries, Israel waited, eagerly expecting this donkey-riding king to come and solve all their problems. Then finally, he arrived. And although Jesus fit Zechariah's prophecy perfectly, he still wasn't the king they were expecting.

At first, they thought he might be. As word spread about this man who was healing the sick, feeding the hungry, driving out demons, and even raising the dead, the whispers grew louder. Certainly, this man had shown he could take care of all their problems! Could he be the Messiah? The king they needed?

Their excitement reached its peak on Palm Sunday. The day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, a humble, gentle, lowly king, riding on the foal of a donkey, fully aware of his Father's plan; fully aware of the horrors he would endure in that city over the next week. Fully willing to endure them, so that he might victoriously proclaim peace to the nations.

And his followers responded accordingly! Lining the road, they laid down their cloaks, paying royal homage to Jesus. They waved palm branches, symbolic of victory. They shouted “Hosanna!” which means, “Lord, save us!” They joyfully praised, ***“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”*** ***“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*** They rightly praised Jesus as their king and Messiah, the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy from long ago!

But not everyone really understand what kind of king Jesus came to be. Certainly, there were some in the crowd who believed Jesus had come to be the Savior from sin. But how many of them there were convinced that Jesus was going into Jerusalem to be the Savior from Caesar, not sin? As their forefathers had thought, they wanted an earthly king who could solve all of their problems, defeat their enemies, and restore them back to power. And so they proclaimed Jesus as the king they needed. They just didn't understand why he really was the king they needed. Even Jesus' closest disciples ***“at first did not understand all this.”***

Do we always fare much better in realizing why Jesus is the king we need? Like the Jews in Zechariah's day, there have probably been times in your life—maybe right now-- when you've felt beaten and broken down by life. And so because you're a Christian, you visualize King Jesus coming to destroy all of your enemies, troubles, and fears.

But the problem with visualizing King Jesus that way is, what happens if you're still facing those enemies, troubles, or fears? If we believe that Jesus is our personal genie who will take care of all of our earthly problems, how do we respond when our power doesn't increase, our enemies don't desist, and things happen that still leave us feeling weak and vulnerable? Do we wonder whether Jesus really should be our king? Do we "get revenge" on him by refusing to worship him or live according to his Word? The truth is, Jesus won't always be the King we want. But Jesus will always be the King we need.

That's exactly why he was riding that donkey into Jerusalem. To fulfill Zechariah's prophecy; to remove every problem we truly need gone from our lives, and promising to make what he doesn't remove work for our good.

He may have ridden a donkey, instead of a war-horse, but Jesus rode into Jerusalem to conquer our worst enemies-- sin, death, and Satan. Not with an army, but with arms stretched out in sacrifice on a cross. He rode into Jerusalem, not to expand our kingdom and restore our power, but to open to us his heavenly kingdom, by an act of humility. Jesus is the king we need, because he solves all of our eternal, spiritual problems, and gives us peace in earthly troubles.

For Jesus to be the king we needed, he had to be a gentle, humble, lowly king. He had to set aside his almighty power and glory as God, and be born as a lowly human being, so he could keep God's law perfectly in our place. He had to be a humble, lowly king so he could humbly and willingly shed his blood to pay the price for our sins. Self-glorifying, world-conquering earthly kings wouldn't do, because their power is only temporary. But our humble, gentle, righteous, donkey-riding king, wins eternal victory.

Obviously, palm branches are a focal point of Palm Sunday, hence the name. As I mentioned, palm branches were symbolic of victory. How fitting that the crowds were waving palm branches as Jesus rode into Jerusalem to win the ultimate victory over death and hell!

In a vision in the book of Revelation, we're given a glimpse of a great multitude of believers in Heaven. And we're told that those believers were from "**every nation, tribe, people, and language.**" Just like Zechariah prophesied, King Jesus' peace stretches to the ends of the earth. Do you know what that great multitude of believers were holding in their hands? Palm branches. Because through faith in King Jesus, that multitude is victorious, just as you, with palm branches in your hands and on your minds today, are victorious. Because God sent a humble, lowly, donkey-riding king, to be exactly the King we need.