



Sermon Transcript

April 5, 2020

God's One Story of Redemption

Rejoice Greatly! Shout Aloud!

Zechariah 9:9-10

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on April 5, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
Zechariah 9:9-10

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

Introduction

Our passage begins with a call to *“Rejoice!”* And take note that there is nothing reserved about this call to rejoice. It is a call to exuberant joy. *“Rejoice greatly!” “Shout aloud!”* In other words, don’t hold back! Don’t restrain yourself. On one hand, you could say that this call to rejoice is a command and we see this command issued throughout the Scriptures. But it is not just a command; it is a response. It is an involuntary response that happens when you are overcome with something that produces joy inside of you.

Just think of everyday examples of what causes you to respond with joy. For example, when your favorite team wins a game or better yet, the championship, no one has to command you to “rejoice greatly” or “shout aloud.” No instructions are given to the fans to now stand and applaud and join us in singing “we are the champions! - and make sure you smile while you sing.” No! Overtaken by joy, the crowd spontaneously rises to their feet and breaks into song as they rejoice greatly. Loud shouts of joy are heard for days to come. It is a spontaneous and involuntary response of joy.

That is what you have here in our passage this morning. Yes, it is a command. But more significantly, it is a response to what God has done. What causes this exuberant joy to emerge? *“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.”* Of course, this is the verse that Matthew uses to describe what is happening 500 years later on that “joyful” first Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem and presented himself as Israel’s promised king. Jesus is the source of our joy. Jesus and joy go together.

Synonymous with Jesus is the promise of God’s salvation and all throughout Scripture, this is the cause for our unrestrained joy. It is the steadfast love of God at the end of Psalm 32 that causes us to *be glad . . . rejoice . . . and shout for joy.* In Psalm 98 it is the salvation of God that all the ends of the earth have seen that causes us to *make a joyful noise and break forth into joyous song.* Jesus told us that if we want to rejoice in anything *rejoice that your names are written in heaven.* In fact, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that even if you suffer and are persecuted for your faith you can still *“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.”* This is why Paul says in Philippians 4 to *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”* How can Paul say such a thing? How can we rejoice in all things? It is because we know that our hope in Christ is eternal and sure. We know how the story ends. And so with great hope we read in Revelation 19, *“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exalt and give him the glory.”* Jesus and joy go together.

But lets be honest and real this morning. Sometimes we need the command to rejoice to get us there. You can hear the resolve to rejoice in Psalm 118 when the psalmist says, *“This is the day that the LORD has made, LET US rejoice and be glad in it.”* Some of our versions say, *“we WILL rejoice and be glad in it.”* It is as if we are saying that we recognize that this day is a gift—but this day is filled with things that are tough—so with a measure of resolve—we will opt to choose . . . *“we will rejoice and be glad in it.”* But even when you need the resolve to rejoice it is not a resolve to just be happy—or to put on a happy face in the midst of a pandemic. Even in Psalm 118, the resolve to rejoice is anchored in Jesus. Right before this verse the psalmist alludes to Jesus as *“the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”* That is a verse Jesus applied to himself in Matthew 21:42. And then immediately after expressing a resolve to rejoice we have the very words the people sang as Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, *“Save us [hosanna] . . . Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.”* THIS IS THE DAY the LORD has made—the day of his salvation. That is the joy that carries us through this day of pandemic. Jesus is our joy. Jesus and joy go together.

The last couple of weeks have been hard. This worldwide pandemic continues to accelerate and spread in our country and in our state. The numbers of those who get the virus and those who end up in critical condition and those who die are on the increase daily in our communities. We are told that we haven’t even hit the peek of it, which some conjecture is another two to three weeks out. Many have lost their jobs and we are all impacted by the economic fallout. As we quarantine in our homes, some are finding it hard to find a quiet corner in the house as they balance work and kids with school; while others are alone and all they know is an isolating quiet that is difficult and very lonely. Can we really rejoice in this day and actually be glad in it? Really?

And yet, this morning we take our first step into holy week—the week that leads us to the very center of our faith: the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins and his victory over sin and death which is demonstrated through his resurrection from the dead. I am not here to downplay the stress that continues to mount with the uncertainties of this pandemic. And yet, I do not hesitate to call you to rejoice. *“This is the day that the LORD has made, LET US rejoice and be glad in it.”* How can we muster up the resolve to rejoice in times like this? *“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation.”* So let us *Rejoice greatly!* and let us *Shout aloud!*

Jesus and joy go together. If you are having trouble with rejoicing then you need to remind yourself of Jesus and what he has done for you. I can’t think of a better week to do that than holy week. I want to look at Jesus this morning through Zechariah 9:9-10.

Rejoice! The Call to Weary Sinners

Zechariah is the next to last book of the Old Testament. It is one of the books that helps close out the story of the Old Testament. The other books that bring the story of the Old Testament to a close are Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai and Malachi. The last two weeks we were in the part of the story of the Old Testament where the people of Judah, the two tribes to the south, were taken into captivity and exiled in Babylon. A couple weeks ago, we asked the questions that emerged from the exile: “How did we get here?” And, “Will we ever go back?” This final part of the Old Testament answers the second question, “Will we ever go back?” After 70 years in captivity in Babylon, a remnant of the people living in captivity returned to the broken down city of Jerusalem. There is much encouragement for us in Israel’s story because don’t you find it to be true in your spiritual journey that God often brings us back to himself after times of “spiritual exile.” Maybe you have been in exile for some time and through the events surrounding this virus you sense God is calling, bringing you back to himself. Come back to him.

As the people of Judah were going into exile, the prophet Jeremiah had told the people that their exile would last for 70 years. At the end of those 70 years, Jeremiah said that Babylon would fall and that God would bring the people of Judah back to Israel. And so we read in the first three verses in Ezra, *“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled . . . made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom . . . Whoever is among you of all his people . . . let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house [temple] of the LORD.”* Incidentally, one of the most important biblical archaeological finds is the Cyrus Cylinder on display in the British Museum. On this ancient cylinder, Cyrus recounts his victory over Babylon and how he issued a decree granting permission for the exiles living in Babylon to return to their homeland and to rebuild their sanctuaries. Ezra 1:1 tells us that the *LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus* to do this. God can stir up the hearts of those in power and those who don’t even know him to accomplish his purposes.

Nonetheless, you can only imagine how excited and full of hope the people of Judah were at returning to their homeland, to Jerusalem. But it didn’t take long for the returning exiles of Judah to get discouraged. First of all, only about a tenth of the exiles returned. The temple and the city were in disrepair. Upon returning, they immediately began to rebuild the temple and after laying the foundation, they experienced opposition from their neighbors and for fourteen years they did not add to the foundation of the temple. They were also discouraged because it dawned on them that while they may be back in the land, it was nothing like it used to be. The prophets had told them to rebuild

the temple and that God would restore his presence to the new temple and bring his kingdom and the Messiah to rule over all nations. In fact, it is in Jeremiah 29 after Jeremiah tells them that they will return home after 70 years of captivity that he makes the statement everyone loves to quote. Speaking of Israel's future, God says, *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness [prosper you] and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* But the exiles are looking around and there is no sign of peace and hope. The future promised kingdom of God and the glory of God is nowhere to be found. Instead, life is hard and they are still subject to a foreign nation.

So the question that emerges out of Zechariah is simply "why?" Why hasn't the glory of God returned with us? Why hasn't the promised kingdom of God emerged? Where is the glory of God that used to rest in the temple? So Zechariah tells them that if they want to experience the glory of God then they must not be like their ancestors who failed to keep the covenant established at Mt. Sinai. They need to be faithful covenant partners. And so he says to them in Zechariah 8:16-17, *"These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts and love no false oath, for all these things I have, declares the LORD."* That sounds simple enough, right? Love God and love others. Keep the commandments. Be faithful covenant partners and you will see the glory of God restored to Jerusalem.

Since January, we walked through the entire Old Testament and when did Israel ever keep their end of the covenant? They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because they didn't trust God. When Moses was up on the mountain receiving the ten commandments, they were making a golden calf and worshiping it. When they entered the land, during the period of Judges they entered into a downward cycle and at the end of it they were all doing what was right in their own eyes. They finally get a king, but not long into having a king the kingdom splits into two and the northern tribes never have a king that leads them to follow God, while the kings to the south—the descendants of David's throne—were a mixed bag when it came to leading the people to follow God. And we know that over time there was such a significant drift away from God that they landed in exile, in Babylon. So here they are, back in the land and once again, they are called to keep the covenant. So does it surprise you at all that being in exile didn't cure their sinful heart? Does it surprise you that they quickly revert back to the ways of their ancestors? Ezra expresses dismay at how quickly the people of Israel revert back to their old ways. Nehemiah literally pulls out his hair over his frustration with the people of Israel. Haggai confronts their misplaced priorities. And by the time Malachi confronts them, the people of Israel even wonder whether it is worth serving God or not.

So what does this have to do with Jesus being our joy? The end of the story of the Old Testament all sounds rather hopeless. But it is not, as you will see shortly. The end of the Old Testament is filled with hope. But that hope is not placed in the people of Israel. Or, to bring it close to home, our hope and our joy does not rest in us. Here is what the story of Israel tells us. Our relationship with God is not transactional. In other words, my relationship with God does not go like this: “I do something good—for God— and now God must do something for me.” That is how every other religion works. But that is not the God of the Bible. You can’t manipulate God, you can only receive him. And so the story of Israel brings us to the end of ourselves where we recognize that we can’t feel our way to God or barter with God. Instead we are left to fall on our knees and cry out, “God have mercy on me.” “There is nothing in my hand I bring.”

Are you weary this morning because no matter how hard you try, you know you don’t even measure up to your own standards? You make your resolution but never follow through. On paper you agree that you ought to be kind to others, but your tongue betrays what you say you believe. And so you feel like giving up and you can’t even imagine how God would ever accept you. There is no joy in that, only despair. Or, you have the opposite feeling about God. You are angry with God because you feel like you have lived a pretty good life but God isn’t doing for you what you think you deserve. Perhaps, you tried God, but you have concluded that God doesn’t work. You don’t feel like you are getting the life you feel you are owed. So you are angry with God. There is no joy in that, only bitterness. Joy begins when the weary sinner gets on their knees and acknowledges what was true of Israel—what is true of all of us—we got nothing to offer God that earns us any merit. God is not indebted to us. And until you humbly recognize and repent of the sin in your own heart, you will never know joy. The first step to joy is to fall on your knees and cry out, “God have mercy on me a sinner.”

Rejoice! The Response to Jesus

This is what lends context to the call to rejoice. This is what helps us understand why we are called to rejoice “GREATLY” and why we would be moved to “SHOUT ALOUD!” Deep down, I know that I am made to know God. If anything is being exposed through this virus it is the inability for the things of this life to bring me lasting peace and security. Is your health your security? Well there is an invisible enemy out there and you don’t know if it has tapped you on the shoulder or not. And what if it does? Where is your security then? Is it your job or money? But what if you are part of the 6.6 million who filed for unemployment this week? Where is your security in that? Everything our culture relies on for security is being pulled out from under our feet and

if that is what you built your life upon, it is like the house built on the sand. When the rain comes it crumbles like a house of cards. We were made to know God and until we find our rest in God, there is no rest for the soul.

On one hand, you know you need God, but on the other hand God often seems so distant and out of reach to you because you are trying to reach God on your own. But look what our passage says. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!”* Why? *“Behold!”* Look! Take it in! Can you believe it! *“Your king is coming to you!”* God comes to you in the person of Jesus! What makes Jesus so special? How is Jesus our hope and joy? Look what it says. He is *righteous*. Unlike Israel, Jesus keeps covenant with God because he is God in the flesh. So guess what he can bring to you. It says of him, *having salvation is he; humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. Of course, we fast forward to the New Testament and Matthew 21 and we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and we know full well that his face is set like flint and he is heading to the cross where he will bear the judgment for your sin and my sin so that we can be forgiven. This is why Zechariah calls us to *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!”* Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That is our joy.

Sy Garte grew up in a home that didn't believe in God. They were atheists. Early on in life he developed a great love for science. The notion of God was like a fairytale to him. But the more he pressed into the world of science, the more he discovered the limits to science. He began to wonder, “Where did the universe come from? How did life begin? What does it mean to be human? What is the source of our creativity—of art, poetry, music and humor? Perhaps, he thought, science can't answer everything.” He met some Christians, who to his surprise, were part of the science world. He attended a church and was surprised by the power of the message of love. He read the Gospels and found them beautiful and inspiring. He read the book of Acts and was struck by how rooted in history it was. And yet he was afraid and hesitant to give his life to Jesus.

One day, he was driving on the Pennsylvania Turnpike he was listening to the radio and stumbled upon a preacher and he was mesmerized. He said, I began to imagine what it would be like if I began to preach. Laughing to himself, and preaching in the car, the first thing that came out of his mouth was, “if there were a God, he might have used science to create the world.” He said, all of a sudden he felt a chill go up his spine and the next thing you know he vividly imagined standing in front of a crowd and he began talking about how God loves them and that no matter how great their sin might be, it was no worse than his, and that because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross we could be

forgiven. He was actually preaching the gospel to himself. He could see himself sitting in that crowd listening to him preach. At some point, he had to pull the car off to the side of the road and he was crying uncontrollably. Even some of the things he was “preaching” were not completely familiar to him, but they were coming out of his mouth, nonetheless. His only explanation was that the Holy Spirit had come to him in dramatic fashion. Between sobs, he said, “I believe! . . . And I am saved. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ.” And then he said, “When I recovered my composure, I was aware of a great feeling of JOY and release . . . From that day forward, my life has been devoted to the joyful service of our Lord.”¹ Jesus and joy go together because with Jesus comes salvation. That is the Christian message. God comes to you! Jesus comes to you! Turn to him in faith and know the deepest and most profound joy that can not be tampered down by a virus, the loss of a job . . . and not even by death. Jesus and joy go together.

Rejoice! The Reason we Tell the Story

This morning we conclude our journey through the Old Testament. We are using the acronym CASKET EMPTY to tell the whole story of the Bible. CASKET stands for the outline of the Old Testament: Creation—Abraham—Sinai—Kings—Exile and this morning we were at “T” which stands for temple. Now you know why the word “Temple” is used for the last part of the Old Testament. Or at least, you know partly why that is the case. When the people returned to Jerusalem from exile, they rebuilt the temple. It is one of the first things they did. But that is just a small part of the significance of the letter “T” for Temple.

The prophet Haggai encouraged the exiles to build the temple and in doing so he promised them that *the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.*” Zechariah, like the prophet Ezekiel saw a day when a river will flow from the temple and out of Jerusalem and it will bring life to the world. He says in Zechariah 14:8, “*On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of the to the western sea. And it shall continue in summer as in winter.*” So in spite of Israel’s failure when they return to their homeland, the Old Testament ends with great hope as it points us to the New Testament and the ministry of Jesus.

The Hebrew version of the Old Testament arranges the books of the Old Testament a little differently than our version which is based on the Greek version of the Old Testament. The Hebrew version of the Old Testament ends with 2 Chronicles and it ends with an invitation to return to Jerusalem. “*Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him.*” Then there is this great invitation of hope. “*Let*

him go up!” You can to go the city of God! Anyone who wants to go can turn to God. There is hope in that invitation.

Our version of the Old Testament ends with Malachi and it too ends with a note of hope. The temple has been rebuilt but the glory of God has not descended upon it. Malachi ends with the promise of one who will come to prepare the way. And he says in Malachi 3:1, *“And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to the temple.”* It is interesting to me to see in Matthew that after Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he goes and clears out the temple. Did he not say, *destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.* So with great hope, we come to the end of the Old Testament and we look over to the horizon at the New Testament where we see Jesus as the fulfillment of all the promises of God. From Jesus will flow the promised blessing of God that will go to the nations. We are testament of that today, are we not? Next Sunday, on Easter Sunday, we will begin our journey through the New Testament.

Listen to the hope of Zephaniah 2:10. *“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.”* God is going to do it! He will restore this broken and fallen world and he will do it through Jesus. This is why we tell the story! That your joy may be full.

Conclusion

The Mouk people were a primitive tribe in Papua New Guinea. Mark Zook and his wife were sent there by New Tribes Mission to learn their language, teach them how to read and to share the gospel with them. How do you share the gospel with a primitive tribe when they have no orientation to the Bible? You start at the beginning and you tell the story. Once they gained the trust of the people and learned their language, Mark gathered the village together—all 310 of them—and he began at the beginning of the story. For two months he made his way through the Old Testament, never mentioning Jesus. He was laying the foundation. But by the time they got to point we are at—ready to cross into the New Testament—they anticipated that God would keep his promise by sending his Son, Jesus. But what they didn’t expect was that Jesus would have to die. That is kind of like the people who line the street going into Jerusalem singing *“Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* But after Mark told them about the cross, he told them about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. One by one, people began to say, “I believe” EE-TAOW! Which means “it is true.” And then Mark said to them that the promise is that if you believe in Jesus, God’s Word promises that

your sins are forgiven. And then something amazing happened. (You can see it if you watch the video. <https://ethnos360.org/mission-videos-and-mission-photos/ee-taow-the-mouk-story>) The entire tribe erupted in spontaneous joy and for two and a half hours they jumped and hugged and shouted and celebrated the joy that was theirs in Jesus. It is a sight to behold. It was exuberant joy! And every time I watch it, it is like I was watching it for the first time. Tears flow from my eyes. For one, I am joyful for what the story of God has done for them. But, more so, I am forced to ask myself—is this where my joy rests?

As you step into holy week this week, make sure your eyes are on Jesus and what he has done for you. This is welcome news for weary sinners. It is the fitting response to Jesus. It is why we tell the story. Jesus and joy go together. And if you know that joy, it will follow you this week no matter where the virus takes you. *“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.”*

The joy of the Lord is your strength!

¹Sy Gart “The Mysteries Science Couldn’t Unlock” *Christianity Today* March 2020 p. 87-88

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. How is the coronavirus changing the way you celebrate Easter? What will you be missing? What will you be gaining as a result of the virus when it comes to celebrating Easter?
2. Looking back on our journey through the Old Testament (CASKET) - what is one thing you learned or saw that resonates with you?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Zechariah 1:1-6 and 7:8-13. What do you learn about what God requires of us? How does this bring us to a point where we know we need Jesus? How does this produce joy within us?
4. Read Zechariah 9:9 and Matthew 21:1-11. Meditate on the phrase, “your king is coming to you.” What insight and encouragement does this bring to your heart?
5. Read Psalm 98. What is the cause for their song? What lesson do you take from this Psalm when it comes to your joy? What robs you of joy? How does this Psalm help you?
6. Consider watching the video EE-TAOW. If time is an issue, watch the last 8 minutes of it (start at 12:50). What struck you about this story?
<https://ethnos360.org/mission-videos-and-mission-photos/ee-taow-the-mouk-story>

Taking It Home

7. What do you want to do this week to cultivate a spirit of joy?
7. What do you want to do this week to keep the story of Easter in front of you?