The Son of David Who Heals the Lame

On Two Triumphal Entries and a Thousand Years of Waiting

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Wisdom and Knowledge, the Stability of Our Times

The longer I dwell in the word, the more stable my life feels. And I can see, in retrospect, that when I have entered seasons where I was too busy (too much going on, too much clouding the mind) I have lost the clarity I want most. Isaiah names this exactly:

"Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation . . " (Isaiah 33:6).

If you want the strength of your salvation to feel *stable*, the answer is the wisdom and knowledge God brings. A word can be a catalyst moment in our lives. We hear it, and we begin to head in a different direction. We begin to become a different person than we were before. *That* is what the word does.

Two Faces of David

I want to take a careful look at one moment in David's life, and then at one moment in the life of *the Son of David* who came a thousand years later. Held side by side, these two moments tell us almost everything we need to know about what kind of king God has actually sent us.

David was an amazing man. Scripture says he was *a man after God's own heart* (1 Samuel 13:14). There was much about his inner life that was genuinely powerful and good. *But there were things David did that were not good*, and one of them shows up at his coronation.

You know the David-and-Goliath story; everyone does. On that field, David was *right*. He told the Philistine giant: *the battle is the Lord's, and He does not save by sword and spear* (1 Samuel 17:47). David's confidence was in the God of heaven, not in his own armament. And the stone went where it needed to go, and Goliath fell. But then David grabbed Goliath's own sword, cut off his head, and, in an act of remarkable audacity, carried that head all the way to Jerusalem and planted it on a stake outside the city. Jerusalem was not yet Israelite territory; it was still inhabited by the Jebusites. David was, in effect, putting them on notice: *I'm coming back for you. Get ready.*

Twelve or fifteen years pass. David has been reigning in Hebron. Now he comes up to take the city, and the Jebusites are not impressed:

> And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, "You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you," thinking, "David cannot come in here." Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David). Now David said on that day, "Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites (the lame and the blind, who are hated by David's soul), he shall be chief and captain." Therefore they say, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house." (2 Samuel 5:6–8)

Catch the insult buried in the Jebusite taunt. They are saying, in effect: *David is so weak a threat that we will leave only our blind and our lame on the walls to repel him.* And David, stung by the taunt, decrees in response: *the blind and the lame shall not come into the house*. He

bans the very category of people the Jebusites had used to mock him. And, as the parenthetical note in this verse tells us, that ban was preserved as a permanent practice. The blind and the lame were excluded from the *temple precincts* for centuries afterward, because David in this moment declared them *hated by David's soul*.

Hold that decree in mind. It will matter in a thousand years.

The Promise of a Greater Son

Now look at the seventh chapter of 2 Samuel. David has settled into his cedar palace and wants to build a temple for the Lord. God says he is not the one to build it, *his son* will be. And then comes one of the great messianic promises:

> When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. (2 Samuel 7:12–15)

Historically, the son who built the temple was Solomon. But by the time you get to Jesus' day, everyone knew that Solomon could not have been the *fulfillment* of these words, his kingdom did not last forever; it fractured within a generation of his death. *The kingdom forever* had to be looking past Solomon to someone yet to come.

"The Temple, the Temple, the Temple"

And then the story goes badly. Three or four hundred years after David, the kingdom is in trouble. Jeremiah is preaching:

> "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? . . . Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the Lord. (Jeremiah 7:8–11)

Read that carefully. The people are coming into the temple and chanting *the temple, the temple, the temple,* confident that the building itself will protect them no matter what they do outside its walls. They are lying. They are stealing. They are committing adultery. They are murdering. And they are coming into God's house saying *we are delivered,* as if grace were an indemnity card that licensed everything else.

Our assembly believes in grace that is so extensive it reaches absolutely everyone, at every time, in every place, in every condition; there is no one excluded from the grace and mercy of God. But if you receive that grace and trample it, if you treat it as the *slippery grace* that cannot be offended by your behavior, then watch what Jeremiah does with the word *robbers*. The Hebrew here (and the Greek when Jesus quotes this passage in Matthew 21) is not just *thief*. It is *brigand,* a robber who *beats and steals*. Would you rather be merely robbed while you slept, or beaten and then robbed? *Beaten and then robbed* is a different kind of violation. Jeremiah is saying the religious leaders of his day were *brigands*. They had abused the people *and* taken from them. And because of that violation, the temple Solomon built, the very temple they kept chanting about, *was destroyed*.

They went into Babylon for seventy years. And the proverb says, *in the day of adversity, consider* (Ecclesiastes 7:14). It is in adversity that people dig in and rethink. Most of the Old

Testament was either written *during* the Babylonian captivity or *just after*. Hard times produce considered words.

Zechariah's Vision: The King and the Priest

One of the prophets who came out of the captivity was Zechariah. The remnant has returned. The Persians are giving money to rebuild. Things seem to be coming back together, but it is a mixed bag. *Are these the corrected people God called them to be?*

In Zechariah 3, the prophet sees the high priest Joshua *clothed in filthy garments*, with Satan standing by him as the opposing accuser. (And isn't it always so? When you want to take strides for the Lord, when you want to do a work for the Lord, it seems that right at the moment of motion you get *buffeted*, tempted, drawn away, accused.) The filthy garments are removed. Joshua is reclothed in priestly garments.

Then in Zechariah 4, the vision shifts. The prophet sees a golden lampstand, a seven-branched menorah, with two olive trees on either side. Back in the day, light came from olive oil burning in lamps. Here the vision shows continuous oil flowing *directly* from two olive trees, through golden pipes, into the seven lamps. The light never goes out because the source never runs dry. And the lampstand represents Israel: Israel which had been *dried up*, with no light to shine. *But now two olive trees are pouring continuous oil into the lamps.*

Who are the two trees? One is Zerubbabel: the king, the descendant of David. The other is Joshua: the high priest. The king and the priest, together, are pouring the inspiration of their ministry into the people, and the people are being *lit up*. And the word that comes through the vision is the famous line:

"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

But notice something the New Testament makes explicit. In Zechariah, the king and priest were *two men*. In the New Testament they collapse into *one*. Hebrews tells us Jesus is a priest *forever after the order of Melchizedek* (Hebrews 7:17, quoting Psalm 110:4). And who was Melchizedek? *He was the king of Salem and the priest of the Most High God* (Genesis 14:18). Salem is the ancient city of Jerusalem. So *the king of Jerusalem* and *the priest of the Most High* were, in the figure of Melchizedek, *the same person*. And Jesus, fulfilling that order, is *both* the king Zerubbabel pointed to *and* the priest Joshua pointed to. The two olive trees collapse into one Christ, whose Spirit-pressed oil pours continuously into the lampstand.

Are you in darkness? Has one door closed and the next not yet opened? Are you in the corridor between them, the hallway with no light? *Tap in to this king-priest.* See what he does. The one who is both king and priest is constantly pressing oil down into the candlestick of your life.

The King Who Disarms

Zechariah keeps building the portrait of this coming king. From the ninth chapter forward, his prophecies are the most heavily quoted block of the Old Testament in the second half of Matthew's Gospel. Listen to Zechariah 9:

> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be "from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9–10)

Look at this king. He comes *lowly and riding on a donkey*, not on a war horse. And then he does something almost no king in human history has done. He *cuts off the chariot. He cuts off the horse. He cuts off the battle bow.* He is so confident in the God of heaven to bring salvation that he *destroys his own war machine*. He sends the army back to their wives and children. He turns the war horses into plow animals. He makes a *covenant of peace* with the nations.

Now, this is a hard verse for people who think strategically about international relations. Imagine (and I am going to keep this generic, but you'll catch the picture) imagine a sitting head of state walking into a summit with two rival heads of state and saying, *Here's our plan. We're going to eliminate our weapons. We're going to destroy all our nuclear armaments. Because we want peace with you.* Most listeners would respond: *That's insane. You have to negotiate from a position of strength.* In the logic of the ungodly world, that may be right. But *this king does not operate by that logic*. He *destroys* his own armaments and stakes everything on a covenant of peace. That is the manner of the king Zechariah is announcing.

And then Zechariah 14 takes the same king forward to a final moment:

> And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley . . . (Zechariah 14:4)

The Mount of Olives will be split in two: a *seismic* event, an earthquake at the king's appearing. And the chapter ends with this:

> In that day "Holiness To The Lord" shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts . . . In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite [or trader] in the house of the Lord of hosts. (Zechariah 14:20–21)

When this king comes, *everything becomes holy*. The common bells on horses' tack: *holy*. The ordinary cookpots in households: *holy*. And specifically: *no more traders in the house of the Lord*. The buying and selling will be over. The covenant of peace will reshape commerce as well as warfare. Everything that was profane will be drawn into the holy.

Hold that picture. A thousand years of waiting follows Zechariah. The prophets fall silent. Four centuries of silence between Malachi and Matthew. And then, finally, the king arrives, and his arrival fulfills, in precise detail, the vision Zechariah set down.

Two Blind Men Outside Jericho

Now look at Matthew 20–21. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem for what will be his final week. He has just left Jericho:

> Now as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" (Matthew 20:29–31)

Hold the resonances. *A great multitude following a leader through Jericho on the way to the promised inheritance.* The last time we read about that in the Bible was the children of Israel coming into the promised land under Joshua. Now, a millennium later, *a greater Joshua* is leading another great multitude through Jericho, but the inheritance this time is something far larger than a strip of land.

And on the road sit *two blind men*. Crying out: *Son of David, have mercy on us!* The crowd tells them to shut up. They cry louder.

Now ask yourself the question Matthew wants you to ask. What did the original David do with the blind and the lame? He hated them in his soul. He banned them from the house. The Davidic decree was: the blind and the lame shall not come in. The crowd around Jesus is, in effect, applying that ancient policy: Get them away from the king. They're an offense to him.

But this Son of David is not that kind of king:

> So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him. (Matthew 20:32–34)

Moved with compassion. That phrase in Greek (*splanchnistheis*) names something deep, a movement in the inward parts. Something deep within Jesus reached out to something deep within them. And he *touched* them. That is why I am cautious about thinking we have done our duty by sending a check in the mail. (Now, I am not against sending a check; sending a check is fine as far as it goes.) But *touching people who have needs* is where the kingdom actually moves. This king touches. This king is on his way to his death, and he stops for *untouchables* the crowd would have rather kept away from him. *Something deep in him reaches out to something deep in them.* Two blind men receive their sight and follow him toward Jerusalem.

Is there something deep within you that needs to connect to something deep within this Jesus today? The king is on his throne. *You are not his enemy.* You are the *target of his love*. If you have felt yourself among the nations far off, *he wants a peace treaty with you*. Those that are afar off, he wants to bring near.

Behold, Your King Is Coming

Now Jesus approaches Jerusalem. And Matthew very carefully tells us where he stops first:

> Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me . . ." All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Matthew 21:1–2, 4–5)

At the Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14 said the king's feet would stand there. Matthew puts the king's feet there. And he is *on a donkey*, exactly as Zechariah 9 had said. Go back and look at Absalom, David's rebellious son, and the war horses he gathered to himself. Go back at the kings of the ancient near east: the chariot was a *military* display, the standard piece of royal weaponry. This king takes none of it. He comes lowly. He fulfills Zechariah 9 to the letter.

And the crowds know what is happening:

> Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!" And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:9–10)

Notice the verb *moved*. The Greek is *eseisthē*, the word from which we get *seismic*. Matthew is saying *the whole city shook*. The same city Zechariah said would shake when this king's feet touched the Mount of Olives, *shakes* the moment he rides in. Matthew is putting

Zechariah 9 and Zechariah 14 right on top of each other and telling us *this is the king*. The mountain has been climbed. The thousand years of waiting are over.

Flipping the Tables

Then Jesus enters the temple and does the next thing on Zechariah's checklist. Remember: *In that day there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord*. Watch:

> Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" (Matthew 21:12–13)

My house shall be called a house of prayer, from Isaiah 56:7. *A den of thieves*: straight back to Jeremiah 7:11, the very passage I read you earlier. The exact two prophets being executed in real time. Zechariah 14 said *no more traders*; Jesus flips the tables of the traders. Jeremiah 7 said *the house has become a den of brigands*; Jesus uses exactly that word.

And there are at least two things upsetting Jesus at this moment. First, the poor are being taken advantage of by the money changers: every time you convert currency, the poor end up holding the short end. Second, *all of this commerce is happening in the Court of the Gentiles*. The Gentiles (the unwashed masses, the outsiders) could not enter the temple proper. They had to stay out in the outer court and pray. *Lord, have mercy on me a Gentile*. But how do you pray in the middle of an auction? *I'm trying to pray over here.* The money changers had taken the one space the Gentiles had to seek God, and turned it into a cattle market. *The dividing wall of hostility had been monetized.*

So Jesus drives them out. And then what happens next is the line that gathers the whole chapter into a single homiletical point:

"Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them" (Matthew 21:14).

The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. Read that next to David's ancient decree: *the blind and the lame shall not come into the house.* Read it next to the long centuries during which the Jewish blind and lame had been kept out of the temple precincts because of David's word at the Jebusite gates. And then read it again. *The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.* That is the reversal. The Son of David has come, and he has *undone* the Davidic decree. He has welcomed in the very people his ancestor had banned. And he has done it *in the temple itself*.

This is the last miracle Jesus performs before his death. Matthew has been building toward this from the beginning of his Gospel. If you trace the miracles of Jesus from Matthew 4 to this point, you find a pattern: He has been healing *the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the demon-possessed*. And in the prophetic literature (Isaiah 29, 35, 42, 56, 61) *those are exactly the categories named as the signs by which the Messiah would be recognized when he came*. Healing the blind. Opening the ears of the deaf. Making the lame walk. Freeing those bound to idols and unclean spirits.

The kings of Israel, when they came to the throne, would tear down the Asherah poles and the high places where Baal had been worshiped. *They cleansed the territory.* But Jesus does something more permanent. He does not just tear down the external altars. *He reaches inside the people who have been violated and heals them from their idolatry.* He cleanses the temple of their hearts.

Praise as the War Machine

And then watch how the religious leaders respond:

"But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant" (Matthew 21:15).

Blind men and children can see what is happening. The religious teachers cannot. *That* is heavy. We can be the very obstacle to people coming out of their bondage. The church should not be the biggest obstacle, but it can be.

And Jesus answers their indignation with a verse from Psalm 8:

"Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" (Matthew 21:16, quoting Psalm 8:2).

Now notice something interesting about this quotation. The Hebrew (Masoretic) text of Psalm 8:2 actually reads *out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength*. The Greek Septuagint translates the same verse as *You have perfected praise*. Jesus is quoting the Septuagint here in Matthew. Both versions are pointing at the same truth from different angles. *The ordained strength of the Hebrew is the perfected praise of the Greek.* They are the same thing in two languages. *Strength is praise. Praise is strength.* God's victory in the world is *enacted through worship*.

Do we get the point? The defender, the war machine of the kingdom of God, is *praise and worship. Our victory is through worship. Our victory is done on our knees.* What an upsetting of the tables that is. God is not a warmonger. He does not want to see his enemies destroyed. *He wants to see his enemies saved*. And the means by which the kingdom advances against the powers of darkness is the means Zechariah and Isaiah and the psalmist all named: *the disarming peace of a king who comes lowly on a donkey, and the perfected praise of children crying out his name in the temple courts*.

If the church of Jesus Christ could come to understand that, could lay down the war machinery we have inherited from the wrong David and pick up the worship that flows from the right Son of David, the world would shift on its axis. Break the sword. Beat it into a plowshare. Turn the spear into a pruning hook. Disarm. *And worship.* That is how the kingdom comes.

And those of us who have come into the temple courts of his presence; *we are not the enemies he came to destroy*. We are the targets of his love. We are the blind and the lame the original David would have banned but the true Son of David welcomes in to be healed. He is on his throne. He is touching every one of us at the depth where our wounds live. He is not finished with us yet. *The kingdom of this world is becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ* (Revelation 11:15), and the means of that becoming is not might, not power, but the Spirit of a king who came lowly, and a body that has learned to praise.