



THE PROMISE OF GREATNESS

This morning I'm going to preach a message which, if you take it the wrong way, could completely ruin your life. Then again, even if you take it the right way, it could (what a sales pitch!). Let's take a look at:

Zechariah 9:1-13

We live in a time when the motto of many a world leader is, "We're going to make this nation great again." But what is 'greatness'? When people think 'greatness' they often think success: movie stars, pop stars, sports stars, bestselling authors, self-made millionaires, celebrity chefs – even celebrity nobodies?! As Andy Warhol once said, "One day in the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes." How we wish it wasn't true!

Perhaps this definition of greatness makes more sense to us:

- At age 3, greatness is ... not peeing in your pants.
- At age 6, greatness is ... finding your way home.
- At age 10, greatness is ... having friends.
- At age 17, greatness is ... owning a driver's license.
- At age 21, greatness is ... acting like a grown-up.
- At age 30, greatness is ... having children.
- At age 40, greatness is ... making money.
- At age 50, greatness is ... making money.
- At age 60, greatness is ... having grandchildren.
- At age 70, greatness is ... acting like a grown-up.

At age 75, greatness is ... owning a driver's license.

At age 80, greatness is ... having friends.

At age 85, greatness is ... finding your way home.

At age 90, greatness is ... not peeing in your pants.

Some truth there, I feel.

So, what does Zechariah have to say about greatness? Well, in the first 8 verses we have a prophecy about the achievements of one of the greatest military leaders of all time – Alexander the Great. Young Alexander led 50,000 Macedonian soldiers against a Persian army of 1 million (plus chariots and elephants). And Alexander won! By the age of 33 he'd taken over everything from Greece to India, before turning back and dying in Babylon. But his legacy has lived on – in the languages we speak, the buildings we design, the politics we live under. All pretty impressive stuff.

But then, in vs9-10, Zechariah gives us another example of greatness – another King. This King was going to die at 33 as well, only His approach to things would look very, very different. Who is this King? Look at Matthew 21:1-11. Zechariah is describing the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem –

And in the process, Jesus' definition of greatness:

1) It's Something You've Got To Live Out. Zechariah describes this King as being a "righteous" King. The word *tzaddik* literally means 'just,' in the sense of doing what's right by the poor and the oppressed (Isaiah 5:16). Now in the ancient world kings weren't exactly renowned for their justice. The kings of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Greece and Rome – these guys were mostly interested in empire building, usually on the backs of slaves. But this King, He's the opposite. Jesus lived to demonstrate the righteousness of God every day of His 33.5 years – in the people He healed, the people He taught, the people He ate with. His entire human existence was about showing people that God loves them – and ours should be, too. Because *that's* greatness.

2) It's Something You've Got To Lay Down. Zechariah tells us this King comes, "having salvation" or *nosha* in Hebrew. That's why people in Jerusalem waved palm branches, a symbol of victory, and shouted *hoshia na*, which means "Save us now!" Problem is: to them salvation meant "Death to the Romans! Give 'em hell!" But Jesus is about a very different kind of salvation. Jesus came to save everyone – Jew and Gentile – and He did it by dying on a cross for every wrong thing that has ever been done, from beginning to end. And in the process, He turns our definition of success on its head. He's saying if you want to achieve you've got to be willing to fail; if you want to win you've got to be willing to lose; if you want to live you've got to be willing to die. Because *that's* greatness.

3) It's Something You've Got To Hold In. This King is referred to as "gentle" or *ani*, meaning 'needy, vulnerable.' But in Jesus' case, this was a vulnerability He *chose*. He *chose* to be born to a poor family; *chose* to do and say things that would alienate Him; *chose* to go to Jerusalem, to the cross. That's why He said to Peter, at His arrest, "Don't you realise I could ask My

Father for 12 legions of angels if I wanted to?" Hey, I would have done – angels armed with sub-machine guns (that would have scared `em back in the 1st century). But Jesus chose to hold it all in. That's what the Bible means by meekness – not weakness, but power under control. Are we willing to channel our God-given strengths, abilities, opportunities, in service to the King? Because *that's* greatness.

4) It's Something You've Got To Give Up. Alexander was famous for riding a magnificent black charger, name of *Bucephalus*. But this King, He comes riding a donkey - "even a colt, the foal of a donkey." A donkey! More than anyone who has ever lived, Jesus deserved to ride on a horse, to a fanfare, to be worshipped by the world. Instead, He rides on a donkey, a beast of burden, a symbol of poverty and humility, to be tried and mocked and tortured and executed. He gave up His glory and aligned Himself with you and me and everyone else in this screwed-up world so that we might be justified, even glorified (Romans 8:17). He gave everything for us ... He deserves us to give everything to Him. As the hymn says, He "demands my soul, my life, my all." Because *that's* greatness.

And The Prize Goes To ...

So true greatness looks like following Jesus. Not just because it will lead to a Kingdom that knows no end (vs10), but because that's what Jesus commands. When we stand before Him the question is not going to be:

- How did the exams go?
- How much money did you make a year?
- How far up the promotional ladder did you get?
- How big a house did you own?
- How many cars did you drive?
- How beautiful / buff was your spouse?

The question will be, "Did you believe in Me enough to follow Me?" I.e. "Did you live it out? Did you lay it down? Did you hold it in? Did you give it up?" That's Jesus' definition of *true* greatness.

And His opinion is the one that counts.