

Hidden from Your Eyes

Zechariah 9: 9-10 Luke 19: 37-48

There are two famous books about “invisible man.” One from the late 19th century by H.G. Wells is the more magical one that was made into a movie with Claude Rains in 1933. It was titled ***The Invisible Man***. It describes a scientist performing an experiment on himself and being unable to survive the consequences, driven by a kind of egotistical madness that seems to overwhelm him to his death.

The one lesser-known, perhaps because no movie of it was ever made, is the award-winning 1952 book by African American author Ralph Ellison titled *Invisible Man* (no “The”). Ellison’s work found fans and critics alike from every corner, because as the book’s narrator explains: “I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either.” Literature from black authors of the time bemoaned the condition of the black person living in the American apartheid world, calling for protest and liberation. Not so with Ellison’s book which portrays the narrator, a black man, at various stages of life and in different circumstances in both the American South and North, but never gets to be himself. Instead, he is relegated to acting as a tragic character in the agendas and dramas of others, like the nameless extra in a movie, hardly visible, a non-entity, no matter how pivotal his role may be.

The invisibility of people happens in many ways. Like Ellison’s narrator in *Invisible Man*, they may be caricatured to suit an agenda, made into heroes or demons to fulfill the ambition of a story-line, but never more than a stand-in to make a point. Or they may be disregarded, neglected, or even ignored, giving rise to a group like “Black Lives Matter” because by all accounts, it has been evident that black lives didn’t matter. Or like Palestinians in Israel who are considered non-entities by the government. Or like refugees dislocated from their homeland, herded into the abysmal conditions of camps where they might spend a decade or more, largely forgotten by the world, largely hidden away from the view of Western eyes by the millions.

From the 700,000 Palestinians displaced into refugee camps in 1948 by the creation of Israel, today that number has swelled to 5 million living in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Let me help you with the math; that’s a period of 70 years, better than 3 generations in a refugee camp. [[Click here for source.](#)]

It is rather amusing to realize that God and God’s will have a problem with visibility, too. A big part of the reason is that the human creation is constantly, stubbornly putting itself in place of God and/or believing with absolute, resolute confidence that it knows the mind of God and acts and believes based on its own pronouncements about God and God’s will.

God has not been out of the picture in any of this. The biblical record is one episode after another of God trying to reveal God’s will to this maddeningly irritating human creation which always has other ideas – its own ideas – about God’s will.

The prophet Zechariah is one of these messengers of God's will. Our selection is from the opening to what scholars recognize as Second Zechariah, written much later than Zechariah 1-8, or First Zechariah. We hear the familiar text that was cited in the gospels to explain why Jesus was riding a small, young donkey into Jerusalem. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves and into the era of Jesus, let's allow Zechariah's words to be understood without the Jesus-Christian references right now.

This passage in Zechariah comes long after the return from Babylon. Our selection today was preceded by a vision of God's subduing those nation-states around Judah who had recovered more fully and enjoyed greater prosperity and security. In this vision, God has disrupted the political alignments and upended expectations, bringing to Judah the security, peace, and prosperity it has long sought.

Zechariah's vision cites the blessing of Judah in Genesis 49 as coming to reality. The prophet is saying that promised blessings of ancient times are to be fulfilled. On one hand, it's about a human king, but not of works done by the human king. Rather the promises made before God come into being thanks to God's acts for his people in fulfillment of God's promise. The donkey image directs attention away from the king and instead toward God.

The achievement of peace, freedom, and restoration is to be made complete. But note the language: *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. [The king] will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.* God will act to simply snatch away the weapons of war from neighboring nations, and then the king will pursue God's will, unlike every king since forever.

This is the righteous king who obeys and fulfills God's will and not their own will. This is the prince of peace who brings about the Kingdom of God, not yet another version of kingdom in the world, born and wedded to violence, power, greed, injustice, oppression, and exploitation. This king comes not as a heroic warrior on a war horse with a flashing sword, but as the expressed agent of God's will for justice, righteousness, and peace for all.

But what do you think the people see? Is it hidden from their eyes, even though it's in plain sight?

Here we find the gospel of Luke answering that question.

It is already a tense time since the Passover season has brought pilgrims from throughout the Mediterranean region and beyond to swarm in the streets of Jerusalem. The Roman military is on high alert. It's in times like these when the wackos come out of the woodwork and start trouble. There will be little patience for those who fail to toe the line.

Pontius Pilate is likely already in the city, having traveled from the imperial capital in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. He would expect to be on-hand for

official duties during the holiday period. We can imagine that he arrived in a caravan of military guards, servants, pack animals and carts, and the like. Surely it would have been a very impressive procession coming through the gates and through the streets of Jerusalem. Coming from Caesarea, we would have approached the city from the west passing through Emmaus.

Jesus comes from the opposite direction, through Bethany from the east. Jesus has no caravan; he has no need of a caravan. He represents the poor and powerless. A donkey is fine for his ride. Moreover, the donkey hearkens once again to the blessing of Jacob on his son Judah as well as the prophecy in Zechariah. It's the fulfillment of God's ancient promise through Jacob, recast in Zechariah, that the true king comes to the holy city, to Zion, the city of God. Here comes the righteous king who fulfills the will of God, who does not corrupt God's will with his own worldly agenda.

Jesus has entered the city of God that is occupied by the empire and God's people are forced to submit to Caesar's agenda. It is quite confrontational.

The cheers of his disciples, *Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!* Some Pharisees are alarmed at such shouts. These are words of treason that could bring a swift, vicious, unrestrained response by the Roman guard. Jesus scoffs at these fears. God's actions would provoke such praises from the stones, if need be. They cannot be helped. The disciples understand that Jesus is acting to fulfill God's promise.

The mention of palm branches recalls the victory celebration when the Maccabees drove out the Greeks, putting the power of governance in the hands of God's people for nearly a hundred years until Pompey takes Judea for Rome. The palm branches heralded the victors in a war for liberation. So, this is how they understand the arrival of Jesus, even if he is on a donkey and pointing to the prophecy of Zechariah. They want liberation from Rome, and they see this figure from the countryside as their political and religious champion.

The nature and spirit of their celebration is not lost on Jesus. He stops and weeps over the city. The city's past – the devastation at the hands of the Babylonians – will come again to this generation. God's people once again will refuse the peace of God which Jesus incarnates, which Jesus teaches and practices. Unable or unwilling to see God's coming – “hidden from their eyes” as Jesus says – or to believe that God would come and fulfill God's promise with his people, then the ultimate destiny of the city is clear.

Luke's gospel has Jesus' scene at the Temple taking place in just two verses. All the other gospels dwell on it quite a bit. Not Luke whose gospel paints as pleasing and non-controversial of a picture of Jesus and his followers as he can. Luke doesn't want Jesus to be seen as the radical disrupter, but it's pretty difficult to wade into the Temple area during a pilgrim season and cause a ruckus among the moneychangers, and not call it a big disruption.

The incident with the moneychangers at the Temple is best understood as Jesus' affront at selling and marketing God's grace and peace. By changing currency from various regions and providing exchanges, the moneychangers facilitate the purchase of mandated offerings and sacrifices and the like at the Temple. Of course, they take a cut for themselves. The whole idea that God's love for his people could be bought and sold threw him into a rage.

Here again, God and God's will are 'hidden from their eyes' and Jesus' actions tries vainly to awaken them to recognize God's will, God's love and grace which has been reduced to money-changing and mandated offerings.

But the passage closes with Jesus returning to the Temple to teach. What he was teaching wasn't necessarily contrary, but it's clear that he was stirring up trouble, emphasizing things that the priests and scribes would deal with differently. The leaders wanted to catch him in a corrupt or compromised teaching, and maybe they did. But it says that the people were so enrapt by his teaching that the opportunity to cart him off never came about. They didn't want to cause a scene.

These radical types usually rambled on and on and eventually people would tire and move on. Once the audience was gone, a couple of guards could whisk away the offender, never to be seen or heard again. But with Jesus, the people stuck around. Too many were there to make any confrontation. To act now could provoke a riot.

Jesus doesn't teach about obedience to the Law, to be Law-abiding people, about the right performance of sacrifices, or about need to be righteous and scrupulous in one's dealings with others. He teaches about love and compassion, about justice and peace, and about the new life promise of God. His teachings are powerful, accurate, and contradict the approved message.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem begins the countdown to his arrest and crucifixion. The powers of the empire and its beholden servants are keeping their eyes upon him. His disruption is intolerable and he must be stopped. There is only one way that such figures get stopped.

Amid the parade of palms and procession of exuberant disciples, we should remember him weeping for Jerusalem. We should always remember that Jesus has come to disrupt the party, not to be its entertainment. Let our eyes be open during this Holy Week for God's good news promise, for the king has come and the kingdom faces the empire.