



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 51 – 52:12

“Salvation to Stricken Jerusalem”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer]...attempt at the great prophecy of Isaiah. May the Holy Spirit be our teacher, and may the things that concern the God-man in his preincarnate days and the great promises that pertain to the future become much clearer to us, as we read and study Thy word. We pray again to that this word may have its fruit in the heart and lives of each of one of us, and so we commit our hour of study to Thee for Thy blessing upon us again in Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject as we are seeking to study chapter 51 and the first 12 verses of chapter 52 is tidings of salvation to stricken Jerusalem. I must confess I have had a great deal of blessing in reading this section of about 35 verses; and as I have been reading the text, there are, it seems to me three great themes that keep recurring in this section, and the prophet exhorts Israel to live in the light of these three great themes. And the first one is the theme of Israel's gracious past.

Let me read a verse or two in support of each of these themes. Look at the first and second verses of chapter 51,

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord. Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you, for I called him when he was one, and blessed him, and increased him.”

Now that of course is their glorious past in election. Notice verses 9 and 10,

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Now Rahab is the ancient word for Egypt and the reference of course is to the way in which God smote Egypt in delivering the children of Israel. (Listen, verse 10.) Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; he is referring to the Red Sea deliverance; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

And there are other texts. So the theme of Israel’s gracious past keeps recurring.

The second theme that keeps recurring is the theme of Israel’s glorious future.

Now that is evident if we look at verse 3 of chapter 51.

“For the Lord shall comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. (Notice verse 11) Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

And then turn over to chapter 52 and listen as I read verses 7 through 10, one of the great sections of this middle part of Isaiah.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

So Israel not only has a glorious past, she has a glorious future. And this is the second theme that keeps recurring over and over in this section.

And the third theme that keeps recurring is the theme of Israel’s great present because God is with them. Even in the midst of their disobedience it cannot be said that he has left them; and you will notice that for example in the 12th verse of chapter 51, when he says, I, even I, am He that comforteth you, who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; or verse 16, and I have put my words in Thy mouth, and I have covered Thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, thou art my people. And particularly verse 12 of chapter 52, when he says, for ye shall not go out. He is referring to their leaving Babylon, but at the same time; remember, he is looking onto the ultimate deliverance from the four corners of the earth, as they go back to the land of Palestine. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight, for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rear ward.

Now these three great tenses: past and the glory of it; future and the glory of it; present and the glory of it, are tenses of salvation that we ourselves enjoy. We have a glorious past and all we have to do is to look back and remember how God, the Holy

Spirit, worked in our hearts to bring us to faith in him. We discover when we read the New Testament as Christians that we have been chosen, and long before we even knew God, we were chosen by him. We were chosen by him in the councils of eternity. We have a glorious past. A past of election, a past of calling, a past of justification; all of the blessings of salvation are ours, and if in the problems, in trials and perplexities of life, we meet things that disturb us and upset us.

One of the standard ways in which we meet the problems of life is to look to our glorious past, and remember that the God who has done this is able to take us through this present difficulty. But we also have a glorious future. And all we have to do is to think of the great chapters in the Bible that have to do with the coming of the Lord.

We read the other night, Titus, chapter 2 and verse 13, in which Paul states that we looked for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, and all of those wonderful truth that pertain to the fact that we shall be caught up to meet him in the air, and made like him and shall be called to rule with him over the earth, and then to enjoy his presence throughout all eternity. So we have the glory of the past, a gracious past; we have a glorious future and we have a tremendously great present because the Lord is with us now.

This is the God who has said to us, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. So the things that Israel is called to look at are things that we ourselves may look at in a slightly different context. You know this is a great cure for pride. If you think you are great, it is good to take a look to the gracious past and to recognize what God has done in your case. And then if you are filled with complacency, it is good to reflect upon all of the things that the Lord has done for us and all of the things that he desires to do and is going to do for us too.

These themes were designed to comfort God’s people when they came into captivity in Babylon and of course he is thinking primarily of the believing remnant, which was in Babylon. And it is particularly addressed to them because notice verse 1 of

chapter 51; hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord. Now no one seeks the Lord, except the Lord first seeks them. When we read, hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord. He is speaking to those who have believed in him. He is talking to the believing remnant and he is speaking primarily of the time when Israel shall be in Babylon 150 years from his time and he is seeking to encourage them there, but remember as we have been saying all along these chapters 40 through 66 are also written to reflect the final end times when Israel shall be scattered to the four corners of the earth in captivity throughout the world. And they are written against that ultimate, return and deliverance from that captivity.

And so when we read here, hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness; while the local situation of Babylon is in mind, in the author’s mind, we also may look far beyond Babylon and even beyond the present day to Israel’s return to the land. Now let us look at verses 1 through 11 first of all in this and our outline for tonight is the consolation of Jehovah. Actually as you read these verses, you probably noticed in some that I selected that a term comfort or consolation is a theme that pervades this section. As a matter of fact, as we have been saying all along the theme of the comfort of the Lord pervades the last 27 chapters of Isaiah from 40 through 66, but here we have a special stress upon it in these 11 verses, the consolation of Jehovah. Chapter 51 is really one great prophecy of comfort, but we are going to divide it at verse 11 because that is the mid point and after all if I do not divide it here, I would not have three points and who would think of preaching if we did not have three points.

So let us look at verse 1 now; “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord. Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.” What is the pit from which Israel has been digged? What is the rock from whence they had been hewn? Well the 2nd verse helps us to understand. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you, for I called him when he was one. Your text reads for I called him alone. I called him when he was one, and

blessed him, and increased him. The rock is Abraham. The pit is Abraham. Now Sarah as also mentioned and I think the reason for this is that our author wants to trade on the history of the great forefather of Israel.

You see when God chose Abraham; he was in effect choosing Israel, for Israel is Abraham’s seed. And remember that when God chose Abraham, he told Abraham that he was going to have a seed and that seed would be the means of blessing for the whole of the earth. And Abraham was married to Sarah. But Sarah was barren. She apparently could not have children and finally you remember in the story of Genesis, how Sarah and Hagar sought through with Abraham to bring about the promised seed by scheming, and how God rejected Ishmael, and finally when it became evident that Abraham was too old to have a child and Sarah was too old to have a child, God said that from Sarah, the seed was to come and Sarah remember laughed, and so in the Old Testament, there is that story of that long unfruitful marriage.

It is almost as if God has to bring something out of a stone, and so that is what happened. And finally Isaac is born and is born supernaturally, for you see Israel’s history is essentially a supernatural history. Now it was God’s way of showing that even out of a stone he could raise up a son unto Abraham. Remember when John the Baptist was preaching and the Jews and rejected his message. Among the things, he said was God is able of these, things not to say within yourselves. We have Abraham to our father, as if that is your boast that Abraham is our father.

God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham, and that is precisely what Abraham was, a stone; and Sarah too. They could not have children, but God supernaturally gave them Isaac. And so Israel is a miracle of divine power and grace. And the reason that God points Israel back to this is to try to impress upon them the fact that he who performs at mighty miracle in the case of Abraham is able to do that with the nation in the day of Isaiah.

You know it is a great thing to remember that the God who saved us in a miracle. Well let me assure you, it s a miracle that we are sons of God. The God who has performed this miracle in our lives is able to deliver us out of the problems of everyday living, and the reason that he points Israel back to the pit, and to the rock is to remind them of his supernatural action in the case of Isaac, and to seek them to set their faith and trust upon him. As a matter of fact, they are in a much better situation today than they were in Abraham’s day; for he say, I called Abraham when he was one; that is all.

All of Israel’s history in a sense was bound up in one man, one lone man, but now while the great majority of the nation has backslidden, still there is the remnant. There is a small company of people who have believed in the Lord far more than one, and though they have suffered, and though they have been diminished by warfare and though they have had a great deal of trial and trouble in Jerusalem, still things are a great deal better than they were when there was only one man, Abraham. So look unto Abraham, your father and unto Sarah, that bare you. I can bring a son out of stone. I called him when he was alone and blessed him, and increased him.

Now he said also in that first verse, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. You know, I think this has a great deal of practical application to us in our Christian life in this sense also. Now I am going to tell you some things about myself, which are probably known to you, but not perhaps to all of you. I must confess that there are times when I lose the joy of the Lord. There are times when it is very difficult for me to sit down with my Bible and really get a blessing from the reading and studying of holy Scripture. I do not think there has ever been a time in which I did not receive a blessing, if I really applied myself to the Scripture for some time. Sooner or later, I get awfully thrilled over the study of the word of God. Sometimes I get up out of my chair and my study and walk around my desk and just really thank and praise God for the things that he has revealed to me and I cannot wait until Sunday or Monday, so I can

share them with you, but I must confess there are lots of times when I do not even want to go out and sit down with an open Bible.

There are times when I do not want to pray. If you came to me and said, do you think I ought to; I would say, of course I ought to, but I do not want to. There are times when I must confess that my spiritual life dwindles and becomes like a little fire that it seems to me from my standpoint is about to go out. Do you ever feel that way? Two people do, in addition to me in this room.

What is the remedy? Well one of the remedy is the remedy that is set forth here. Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn. Look unto the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Take a look over the past, remember what God has done. Go over and over again the things that had transpired in your life. This was one of the thing that cometh good when he used to say. He used to say when I felt cold and felt that I could not bring the word to the God to the people of God, I used to take a run up and down over my past sin, and how God had forgiven them and then I found that my heart began to warm again.

It is always good to look towards the God’s gracious past in your life. And so Israel is exhorted to take a look back to the choice of Abraham. Take a look back to the way in which he blessed Abraham and made him fruitful. Take a look back to the way he brought Israel out of the land of Egypt and brought them through the mighty Red Sea by that mighty miracle into ultimately the Promised Land.

Verse 3, he continues, for the Lord shall comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden. As Sarah after years gave birth to a miracle son, so Zion, a second Sarah shall bring forth a joyous multitude of people in the glorious future that is before them. He looks of course to their deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, brought back into the land as a remnant, but beyond that to the time when they are gathered from the four corners of the earth, brought back into the land and they are blessed throughout the kingdom of God. He will make our wilderness like Eden,

and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. And verse 4, hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people, that should be.

In other words, the great work that God is going to do in the future touches the whole of the world. Notice the reference to the law in verse 4. A law shall proceed from me. Do you think that is the Ten Commandments? Do you think that is the law of Mount Sinai? No. This is the law in the future. Remember back in the second chapter, he spoke about the law of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem. What is the law of the Lord that shall go forth from Jerusalem during the kingdom age that is to come? Well it is the gospel of redemption in all of its manifestations. It is what Luke calls the knowledge of salvation.

Now the fifth verse continues,

“My righteousness is near, my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath, for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner or shall die thus, but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.”

Isn’t it interesting that he says that heaven shall vanish away like smoke? I was reading a commentary on this the other day, and do you know what the commentator said based on the Hebrew text? He said this means that the heavens are going to be resolved into atoms. Do you know when he wrote it? I think a hundred years ago. In other words, in his mind, the Hebrew construction was what we might have used to express a kind of disillusion that takes place when the elements are dissolved by nuclear

fission. When we turn over to the Book of 2 Peter and read in 2 Peter, chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, we have words that while no one knows whether there are reference to scientific disillusion by nuclear fission, nevertheless they are in harmony with it, for Peter says,

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heaven shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be loosed or dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”

I think that it is foolish to say that Peter predicted a destruction of the earth by nuclear destruction, but I think it is very striking that his language is in harmony, so as far as we know with that type of destruction. And even in the Old Testament, for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, shall be resolved into atoms. Notice the 7th verse, “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment and the worm shall eat them like wool, but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation.”

This is a very, very striking description of the ultimate destruction of the evil. The smallest little power is sufficient to overthrow the forces of evil; a moth, a little silver moth. What damage it can do to a beautiful garment. Just as you can think of our garment and it is now worthless because of the nibblings of the moth, so God is going to destroy the wicked, and he is going to destroy it in that way. In other words, the smallest expression of the power of God is sufficient to overthrow all of the forces of evil. O what a tremendous God we have.

I think there is something else in that text too. It seems to me that by this reference to the moth and the worm, we are taught that God’s destruction is a destruction that goes on before we know it. Have you ever notice that about garments that are overtaken by moth? You never notice it until it is too late it seems. There are working but you do not see them, and is it not true and true to the text of Scripture that the forces of evil are already or the forces of destruction I should say are already working in men.

What does Paul say about this? Well he says the word of the cross is to them that are perishing in foolishness. You know the principle of death works in us from the moment when we are born. That is a discouraging thing, isn’t it? As I look out at you, every one of you, as within you the principle of death; even those of you that seem to be in the flush of health and youth and strength, death is already working in you. Not seeing him. It is like a moth, like a worm, but it is working. That is a great thinking. It is the one that scares you too I think. We carry our death within us, wherever we go.

Now as a result of these great promises, the prophet responds,

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art not thou it or we could he because the arm of the Lord of course is figurative for the Lord. Art not thou he that had hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon and delivered us from Egypt? Art thou not he which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; so that we pass through the Red Sea and on over to the land on the other side, that have made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over. Therefore the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

Now promises beget prayer and so as a result of these promises, the prophet breaks forth in this wonderful, awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord. The

work is the work of Jehovah. His arms it seems is now sleeping, that is why he says, awake. For as the prophet looks out, it appears as if the God is not really doing anything for Israel. And so he calls upon God to awake. I think it is rather striking too that he says awake. He does not say come back to life. While a man sleeping, he may be motionless, but at least he is alive.

Now I went out this morning and played 18 holes of golf. I do not know what I shot; unfortunately I picked on one hole, so you will not know what I scored. But I want to tell you that I played the last hole nicely. I looked like Arnold Palmer for the last two. I did not look like Arnold in some other spots and I assure you, but anyway when I came home today and just before supper I flopped down upon the bed and told my wife I am going to take a nap for 15 minutes. When you have a clear conscience, you can just fall asleep just like that, and you know I fell asleep just like that and she awakened me in 15 minutes, and I want to assure you I was motionless, but I was still living. I do not know whether I would be living tomorrow, but I was motionless but I was living.

Now of course the reason that God chooses this figure is that while it may seem to us that God is dead because he is motionless, it appears. We are in difficulty and we are in trouble. He is not dead. He is alive. And the prophet speaking out of the aspirations of his heart says, awake, awake, O arm of the Lord. Demonstrate the fact that you are alive. Of course, the reason that he seems to be motionless is because Israel has not been responsive to him. It is not his fault, as he says in a moment. Well now at verse 12, we are going to stress the theme of the deliverance of Jehovah. And that is chapter 51, verse 12 through the end of the chapter through verse 23; that is point number two.

Now let us read the second half of the prophecy. It begins here. You will notice that comfort still predominates, but there seems to be a more distinct reference to the oppression of the exiles and the sufferings of the city of Jerusalem itself. So let us begin reading with verse 12.

“Even I, am he that comforteth you. Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that is man, which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord Thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?”

Isn’t it a sad thing that we can be so afraid of some of the things that come into our lives when the God who is at our disposal is the God who has made everything, who stretched out the heavens above and laid the foundations of the earth? How great on God we have and how little are our problems in the light of that. Verse 14, “The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail, but I am the Lord Thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared. The Lord of hosts is his name.”

What does he say to us in 1969? Why he says of course the same thing, “I am the Lord Thy God that divided the sea, whose waves roared, the Lord of hosts is his name, but further he says to us today, I am the Lord who raised up Jesus Christ from the dead; the greatest miracle of all.” If you want to know the measure of the power that is at your disposal, then reflect upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verse 16, and I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered Thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, thou art my people. From the historical point of verse 12 and verse 16, we have come to the eschatological order, prophetic point of a new heavens and a new earth, and as we go through Isaiah and reach the climax of chapter 65 and chapter 66, we are going to reach that prophecy in which in the Old Testament preeminently above all other prophets, Isaiah is the prophet of the new heavens and the new earth. And that is what he is speaking about here in verse 16, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, thou art my people. And this is the

future. Now again verse 17, awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out.

Jerusalem you see has been taken. The children of Israel had been taken into captivity in Babylon in the prophet’s vision, 150 years in the future, and so as the promises beget exhortation, so here Jerusalem is pictured as a woman lying on the ground in the sleep of a drunken stupor of judgment. God has judged her. Jerusalem seems wrecked and it seems as if there is no hope, and so the prophet cries out, awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury. We cannot escape the fact that in the Bible, Israel is looked at as under the judgment of God. Last week I received a very strange letter. In fact it was not even a letter, it was just a paper. It was from a lawyer in Chicago. It was a paper of perhaps 30 pages. It was written by a Hebrew Christian, who is a lawyer in the city of Chicago. And it began and gave something of his Christian experience and then began to speak of how troubled he was over some things in the United States and also in the Christian world. He began by saying how he was converted and how he joined a Baptist church or two. He was in two Baptist churches, I think in the city of Chicago. I know one of them was a very evangelical church at one time. And then he spoke of the ways in which the Gentile world had wronged the Jews, and then he launched into a long discussion, which went for page after page, in which he sought to prove that the Jews had nothing to do with the death of Jesus Christ; that it was all Pilate and the Romans fault. It was a most amazing document.

In the course of it, he began by speaking of his evangelical conversion, but at the end he was talking about the faulty and mistaken documents of the New Testament. And you could see that he was anxious, if he possibly could, to lay all of the blame upon the Romans for the death of Christ. It cannot be done. The Romans were guilty. The Gentiles were guilty. But the Jews were guilty also. The human race is guilty. And if

there is one thing that the Bible teaches plainly, it is this that Israel is scattered to the four corners of the earth, because of her rejection of Jesus Christ. It also teaches just as plainly as they, that we are dead in respossession sins, we Gentiles and that we have rejected our Lord Jesus also. We have not come to the foot of the cross in sympathy.

Well the remainder of this chapter is an expansion of this and I am going to take the liberty of passing on to chapter 52. And here we have the emancipation of Jerusalem stressed, the emancipation of Jerusalem. The first 12 verses of chapter 52. You know, it is going to be interesting next Monday, we are going to take the great prophecy of the suffering servant of Jehovah, the five strophes and try to give you a fresh treatment after just about two months ago, having given some of you five messages on that section. It is going to be interesting to see how I can say something new, but that is such a great section. My, I cannot wait to get to it.

But now we are in chapter 52, verses 1 through 12. Here are the glorious promises that reach out to the First Advent and on to the Second Advent are set forth, and the background of this passage is the word gospel. Do you know what the word gospel means? The word gospel means good news. Anggelo means “to announce, to bring a message,” *eu* in Greek means well; it is an adverb. So that *euangelion* means a good message, good news. The gospel is not new news. The gospel is good news.

Did you notice in the Old Testament that the word gospel finds perhaps its fullest exposition right here? Do you notice about the Greek word? It is a very interesting fact, but the Greek word gospel was used very little before the time that our gospels were written. Did you know that? Did you know that the idea of good news is the secondary idea of that word? It really referred to the reward that was given to a person who brought good news. For example, if someone should come to me and say, “Dr. Johnson, I just went over your scorecard, today you shot a 68.” That isn’t what I shot by the way. I wasn’t trying to get in my score in the backhanded way. Well that would be good news, and in ancient times I would say, that was I might reach down in my pocket and say you

know I want a reward you with good news. *Euangelion*, gospel; that is what it meant. The reward that was given to someone who brought good news. It came to me the good news itself.

But when you search through the Greek literature and you find very little reference to good news, except in a few passages in the Old Testament before the writing of the New Testament. Did you notice that? Did you know that? There is very little evidence of the common knowledge of good news until the time that our gospels were written. And when you read in the New Testament about the gospel, for example in Mark, that Jesus came preaching the gospel that the kingdom of God was at hand, repent and believe in the good news.

Did you know where Jesus got that message? Did you know where John, the Baptist, got that message? They got it from Isaiah. Will you turn back to chapter 40, and verse 9, that word gospel was the word that Greek translators of the Old Testament used to translate the Hebrew word that meant to bring good news, and in Isaiah, chapter 40 and verse 9, we read; O Zion, that bringest the gospel, get Thee up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, that bringest the gospel, lift up Thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God!

Now that is gospel. That is where we get the term gospel when we read the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Mark opens his gospel; he is relying upon Isaiah. Isaiah used the Hebrew term, but that was translated by this word gospel, which was I say not used at all, except in this biblical literature and here only in a few places relatively speaking. But it is picked up now and it is made the bases of the New Testament message; and the gospel is, behold your God.

Now notice in chapter 52, verse 7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, gospel, that publisheth peace; that bringeth gospel of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” Notice, behold your God, Thy God reigneth! That is the good news. Why do you think then John the

Baptist said when he came repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand? Why do we read that Jesus said, repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand? Repent and believe in the good news.

Now you see the good news was that the King was here. The King promised by Isaiah. The King promised in chapter 40 and verse 9, “Behold your God! Thy King cometh.” That is the gospel, the king is here, and that is what they preached, and they made a new word out of gospel and it is just as common as any word in the language now, gospel; everybody uses gospel. That is the gospel truth, we say. Everybody uses it, but it is related to the fact that the message of Jesus Christ was good news for men, that is where we really get it.

Now beginning with the first verse,

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy City, for henceforth there shall no more come into Thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. (In other words, Jerusalem is going to be delivered. She is going to be a city, which puts on the garments of holy, freedom and beauty.) Shake thyself from the dust; arise and sit down on Thy throne, O Jerusalem, is the meaning. Loose thyself from the bands of Thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith the Lord, ye have sold yourselves for nothing.”

What he means by that is that you have been given into the hands of a foreign power and I have gotten nothing out of it. And then he says, ye shall be redeemed without money. You are not going to be able to pay for your salvation. I am going to perform that mighty work myself.

“For thus saith the Lord God. My people went down four times into Egypt to sojourn Thee, and then later he says the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Now

therefore, what have I here, saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nothing? They that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord; and my name continually every day is blasphemed.”

He speaks about the fact that they were caused to suffer in their captivity, and everyday the God of Israel is blasphemed because the heathen said, look they have a God Jehovah but they are in our hands. We own the God Jehovah now. Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak and behold, it is I. And remember this is the term by which God manifests himself, I am He. In other words, I am the self-existent God. I am the God who has within myself the seeds of eternity.

It is out of expressions like this that Jesus in the New Testament said, I am the way, the truth, and the light. I am the bread. I am divine. I am the light of the world, etc. He was trying to trade on the language of the Bible and cause those who listened to his words to realize that he was God. And when he said I am the bread of life, he meant he was divine sustenance for us. Then in the 7th verse, the good news of the kingdom of God and his manifestation and power is proclaimed. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God has begun to rule, reigneth!

Now the last of the chapter is a chapter in which the exposition of the blessings of the future are set forth, but I want to close tonight with a few words on that last verse and the last few clauses. Because here, as these great prophecies of blessing are given, there is a practical exhortation to depart from the wicked city. He says in the 11th verse, depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. That is a tremendous practical application here. What he means is simply this, that those who are the objects of the

choice of God, of the blessing of God, should demonstrate the character of God and their lives. Those who really say that they are the children of God ought to be holy just as he is holy. Those who are really the children of God ought to be free from sin.

Now we possess the old nature and we can never be completely free from sin. A Christian is not sinless, but he surely should sin less. And men should know us as holy, genuinely holy, not pass in the hypocritical sense, but genuinely holy. Hence should really have the sense of the presence of God when you and I are around, and by the way it should not just be when the preacher is around. You are expected to be as holy as I. I am not the model of holiness because I am a teacher of the word of God. This is something that is an obligation of every Christian that we be holy.

But now notice the last. When they go forth, notice the divine blessing. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight, as you did at the Exodus; for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rear ward. That is one of the greatest texts in all of the Bible. Look at it again, when you go forth, the Lord will go before you and the God of Israel will be your rear ward. What does that mean? By means when the children of God move out and of course against the background of Babylon, he is referring to the future, when they shall come from the four corners of the earth, gathered by the Holy Spirit, they shall go with God leading them and God defending them.

And my application; it seems to me that this text is a text that says just as vividly and graphically as it is possible to say, love I am with you all way, even to the end of the age. For you see, you and I, are on a journey. We are on a journey to the City of God. We have here no continuing city, we seek one that is to come; the writer of the epistle of the Hebrews says, life is like a battle. Life is like a journey on a ship, but life is also like a march. And as we march to the City of God, it is the Lord Jesus who is our vanguard and it is the Lord Jesus who is our rear guard also. So when we march, we have someone before us and we have someone behind us to defend us.

What is he thinking about? Isaiah was a great student of the word of God and the reason God could use him was because he was a student of the Bible. What is he thinking about? Well what has he been saying in these two chapters? He is saying, look to the past. Remember what I did for you. Look back to the pit, look back to the hole, look back to the way I pointed the sea, look back to the way I smote Rahab. What is he thinking about? Well he is thinking about how he led the children of Israel out of Egypt, and how there went above them the Pillar of Cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night, and he is thinking about how by means of the blood he smote Egypt and he led the children of Israel out of Egypt right to the Red Sea, and what happened then.

Well in Exodus, chapter 14, and verse 19, when we read that Pharaoh and the enemy is pursuing, we read that the cloud that had lead them out, moved from before them; now that they are by the sea to the rear and guarded them. And so the God who led them out was the God who went before them, but he was also the God who guarded their rear as well.

Many years ago when Napoleon made his faithful march to Moscow and finally it came home to him that it was either retreat to Paris or lose his whole army. He made the decision to return. He called in one of his marshals. It was Marshal Ney, and he said marshal, we will never get back if you and your man do not hold off the Russians. Marshal, I want you to be the rear guard. And the armies of Napoleon turned around and went back toward Paris, and Marshal Ney in the midst of that terrible cold fought the Russians, kept them off, and enabled a great number of the French army to escape.

There is a story that some of those French officers were playing cards in a room in Paris after they had reached home, and some weeks later the door suddenly opened and there stood an emaciated looking man in tattered garments, unshaven, and they looked at him and they said, “What are you doing here?” And then they looked at him again and one of them said, “It is the marshal, Marshal Ney.” They saluted him and greeted him,

and they said, “By the way Marshal, where is the rear guard?” He said, “I am the rear guard.” He alone, so the story goes, escaped.

And you know when we think of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ - finally, when the faith of all of the redeemed came down to the cross of Jesus Christ, as Isaiah says in this very same book, in the 63rd chapter, in the third verse, I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me. In the final analysis, all that we are and all that we have depends upon one person, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the one who puts his sheath forth, but goes before them and who also guards us as our rear guard. Isn’t that wonderful to have a savior like this? Lord I am with you always and when we go, he goes before and he is behind, as our rear ward as well. Let us bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these wonderful words, which speak so eloquently to us of the ministry that thou hast to us through Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for Israel’s great promises and we thank Thee that the God of Israel is also our God. And that thou doest always act in accordance with Thy attributes, and thou art eminently and eternally faithful.

Now as we go, as we go tonight and as we go in the march of light toward the City of God, be our vanguard, and be also our rear guard, and enable us to know in truth that great Scripture Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age for Jesus sake. Amen.