



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Zechariah 9:1-9

“Alexander the Great and Christ the Lowly”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We have been studying the prophecy of Zechariah, and we’re reading today a passage from Zechariah and then a passage from the New Testament where we can watch the fulfillment of one of the important verses in this section. Zechariah chapter 9, verses 1 through 9.

Now when we come to chapter 9 of the Book of Zechariah, we are coming to the third and final section of this book. The first six chapters contain apocalyptic visions, which the prophet was given. The 7th and 8th chapters record an answer to a question that was raised by a delegation which had come from Bethel to the city of Jerusalem, and those chapters give the answer to the question.

Now in chapter 9, we come to the strictly prophetic section of the book of Zechariah. It contains two burdens. One in chapters 9, 10, and 11; the second in chapters 12, 13, and 14. And you can see this division very easily because the word “burden” occurs in the first verse of chapter 9, it occurs again in the first verse of chapter 12. So we are looking at two prophetic burdens over the last six chapters of the book. Now we begin with verse 1,

“The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD. And Hamath also shall border thereby; Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the LORD will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: (the reference here, of course, is to the idolatry of the Philistines, their worship which involved the blood in the mouth and the abominations or the idols between his teeth.) but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite (you have to know a little history to know the meaning of some of these clauses. And I must confess that frequently when I read the Old Testament, I have to take my Bible dictionary down and look up some of the words again. A Jebusite, of course, is a reference to one of the original inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem. And so an Ekron like a Jebusite is designed to mean that Ekron, a Philistine city, shall someday be like the city of Jerusalem. Verse 8,) And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

Now will you turn with me to the 21st chapter of the 1st book of the New Testament, the gospel of Matthew, and we begin reading with the 1st verse of Matthew

chapter 21. You will recognize immediately that this passage is the climax of the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9 and verse 9. The Lord Jesus is now ready to make his triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem.

“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass (now you’ll recognize that this passage is a citation from Zechariah chapter 9 and verse 9). And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”

May God bless this reading from his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank Thee that the King has come, and that by faith in him, Thou has brought us to the knowledge of Thyself. We thank Thee that through the knowledge of the King, there comes life. And, oh Father, we pray for each one in the audience this morning that, if they should be here without Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and as their Lord, that today may be the day when they

find him. And then Lord, we pray for each one of us who have known him and who know him. How much we need Thy care, and how much we need Thy strength and consolation, and how much we need Thy comfort. And Lord, we pray that through the ministry of the word we may be strengthened today and enabled this week to do Thy will, to the glory of the Lord Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us.

We would especially remember, Lord, some families who are troubled and distressed because of illness. Some who have relatives who are very seriously ill, seemingly at the point of death. And, oh God, we pray for the Dunlap family, we pray for that one who is sick, and we ask, oh God, that Thy perfect will may be done. If it should be within Thy will, Lord, wilt Thou put Thy hand upon her and restore her to health and strength. We pray, oh God, for the [name redacted], and we ask that Thou wilt minister to them and that Thou wilt uphold them. We know, Lord, something of the terrifying fear that has gripped the hearts of mother and father and brother. And so, oh God, we pray that Thou wilt minister in that home and show Thyself to be what Thy word hath said that Thou art, the God of all comfort and the God of all strength. And so, Lord, we commit Tonya to Thee and ask Thy blessing there. And for others, Lord, we pray, oh God, that Thou wilt minister in Thy own unique and effective way. Enable us, oh God, to be submissive to Thy will.

We thank Thee for the privilege of giving forth the good news concerning Jesus Christ. And may Thy blessing rest upon this meeting, upon each one present. Wilt Thou, Lord, undertake to direct us and lead us as a local church. Enable us, oh God, to perform Thy will. Draw us together in love, in fellowship, in the common participation in Jesus Christ, which we enjoy. And may, oh God, we exhort one another and help one another in the things of the Lord.

We pray that Thou wilt lay Thine hand upon those who have been called to serve as elders and deacons. And may, oh God, Thy strength enable them to carry out their functions effectively.

And so we commit this meeting to Thee, we commit the offerings of this assembly to Thee, and we commit the preaching of the word to Thee today wherever it may be going forth. May Thy blessing rest upon it. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today as we continue our series of studies in Zechariah is, “Alexander the Great and Christ the Lowly.” I think if we had just been studying the book of Daniel, we could look at this particular passage and call it, “The Great and Notable Horn and the Meek and Lowly Lamb.” For there is throughout this opening part of Zechariah chapter 9 a very definite contrast between the earthly king and his conquests, Alexander the Great, and the ministry of our Lord Jesus who comes “riding upon an ass and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.”

One of the things that the New Testament sets forth for us as one of its great and certain truths is the ultimate overthrow of the kingdoms of this world. There are several unconditional covenants in the Old Testament, four of them to be exact, which say beyond a shadow of a doubt that the day is coming when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Messiah, Jesus Christ. Political and religious liberals will not believe this, in spite of the clearest testimony of God's word. The political liberal hates it because the second coming of Jesus Christ proclaims the incapacity of political systems and political leaders to set the house of the world in order. And that is why, when we as Christians proclaim the second coming of Jesus Christ, we do not get any hearing in the day in which we live. It is not to be expected that men who think that the answer to the problems of the world rests in a new view of social welfare, that they shall respond to the truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not so long ago, there was a meeting, a public meeting, in a particular place, and the speaker, a socialist, was speaking. And he, in the midst of his sermon said, “Socialism will put a new coat on a man.” And a Christian in the audience yelled out and said, “Jesus Christ will put a new man in the coat, and that's better.” And we, as we read the

New Testament, we notice that that is the remedy that God has set forth in his word. The remedy is not a new social ethic, the remedy is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the meantime, the new birth through him, which changes our lives.

The religious liberal hates the second coming of Jesus Christ and the thought that one day the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of God, because it seems to say that all of his social activity, all of his ecumenical involvement, and all of his ecclesiastical plans are useless. And of course he does not like to be told that it is necessary for Jesus Christ, God's Son, to come and to set the house of this world in order.

Now you will not believe it, and I'm particularly speaking of the religious liberal, he will not believe it, even though it is set forth in the very words which he opens up to read on Sunday morning in his church. It's a rather surprising thing that still today in our churches, we open up the Bible, and we read the Bible, but the remedies that are set forth in the Bible which we reverence and which we read are not followed. And so in the same Scriptures which we open up and which we read and from which we preach, these same Scriptures tell us that the second coming of Jesus Christ is the remedy for this world's ills. But we will not follow this. In fact, it almost seems that we are set and bent upon ignoring everything that is in the Bible. And sometimes, when you have been engaged in the preaching of the word for a number of years, you wonder if there is any hope at all. Because it does seem that men are just bent on believing what they want to believe, and no matter how much the evidence may be, they will not respond.

This past week, I was reading a new little book. It was a debate between two men, and it was over the “God is dead” controversy. One of the men, Dr. John Montgomery, who is a professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Seminary, when the time came for him to speak, he stood up. And in the course of his opening remarks, he told a little story. And this story I think illustrates the fact that when men do not want to believe something, they will not believe it. No matter how much the evidence may be before their eyes.

He said there was a man who began to believe that he was dead. And his family was very much disturbed because he thought he was dead, and so they took him to the friendly, neighborhood psychiatrist. And so he went in to speak to the psychiatrist and the psychiatrist listened to him as he affirmed the fact that he was dead. And the psychiatrist thought, well now the thing that I must do is to convince him of something that absolutely contradicts the fact that he is dead. And so he determined that he would convince him that dead men do not bleed. And so he had him read medical books, and he had him observe autopsies, and finally after a series of proofs both experimental and as a result of his reading, finally the man cried out in the presence of the psychiatrist, “Alright, alright, you’ve convinced me. Dead men do not bleed!” And with that, the psychiatrist reached over and picked up a needle and he plunged it into the man, and he began to bleed. The man looked down and he said, “Good lord! Dead men bleed after all!” [Laughter]

I wonder sometimes if that is not the kind of thing we run up against when we attempt to proclaim the fact that the remedy for this world is the second coming of the Lord Jesus. If a man does not wish to believe it, he will not believe it, no matter how much the evidence may be.

Now Zechariah has given us eight apocalyptic visions. These visions have been designed to give us some of the details between the day of Zechariah and the day of the second coming of Jesus Christ. They have covered a long period of time. They have taken us from that day to the time when Christ returns and sets up his kingdom upon the earth.

And then in the 7th and 8th chapters of the book of Zechariah, the delegation came from Bethel with a question about fasts. And Zechariah ultimately gave his answer by saying that fasts are of no value whatsoever if they are not genuine. We have too much hypocrisy in Israel today, and we have had too much hypocrisy in Israel down through the years. But finally he answered the question directly by saying; the time is

coming when the fasts shall become cheerful feasts. And that is the time when the Lord Jesus comes again and establishes his kingdom upon the earth. And at that particular time, the earth shall not be anti-Semitic, but shall actually be, because of the great blessings which have come to the Jews, it will be anti-Gentilic, if anything. For, “ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.”

Now with the 9th chapter of the book of Zechariah, we go back and we cover again much the same period of time, the period of time from Zechariah’s day down to the second coming of Jesus Christ. But this time not in apocalyptic language, not in the historical inquiry that came from Bethel, but in prophetic language. In other words, not the prophet delivers some burdens that are upon his heart. These burdens have been planted there by the Holy Spirit of God. And as a result of these burdens which are upon his heart, and as a result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who gave him this message, we have recorded for us now prophecies that outline the great future that lies in front of the nation Israel and the nations of the earth.

And again the same themes emerge. The theme that the kingdoms of this world shall be overthrown, and that one kingdom shall come, and that one kingdom is the kingdom of God upon the earth. It is not something that men bring in, it is the kingdom of God. And because it is the kingdom of God, it is a kingdom which he brings. And so now we begin to consider the burdens upon this man’s heart. Zechariah the Prophet.

Before we look specifically at these verses, let me remind you of the great outline of prophecy which Daniel gave in the 2nd and 7th chapters of his book. Well remember Zechariah was a prophet who prophesied after time book of Daniel. We know that he read very well the prophecy of Isaiah, for there are without question definite references to Isaiah in his prophecy. We also see evidence that he read the book of Daniel. He was a man who knew those truths, and he wrote out of the experience of that knowledge.

Now the Holy Spirit guided him so that his writings were in harmony with Daniel. In the 2nd chapter of the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar was given a dream of a great image. And you'll remember that this great image was mighty and that the image contained, as Nebuchadnezzar saw it in his dream, four metals. Its head was of gold, its breasts and its arms were of silver, other parts were of brass, and still finally there were parts that were iron and parts that were clay. So we have four metals. We have the gold, the silver, the brass, the iron, and in the latter stages the iron should be mixed with clay.

Now in the course of the explanation of that dream, which Daniel was given by the Spirit of God, he is told that these four metals represented four kingdoms which should come upon the earth. And that throughout the times of the Gentiles in which they have dominion over the land of Palestine, one of these kingdoms would have dominion over the land of Palestine. The Babylonian Empire was represented by the head of gold. The Medo/Persian by the silver. And then the Grecian by the brass. And finally, that great and terrible fourth empire, the Roman, by the iron.

Then in the 7th chapter of the book of Daniel, Daniel was given another dream. This one was quite a bit different. It was a dream of four wild beasts. You see, when man looks at human dominion, he looks at it as if it were rather great. And so we read of Alexander the Great, or we read of Julius Caesar. We love to attach titles to human beings to signify our high regard for their greatness. God does not look at human dominion in that way. He looks at human dominion as if the leaders were wild beasts.

And so Daniel went over the same ground. And this time he saw the Babylonian Empire, not as a head of gold, that which would amaze humanity. But he saw it rather as a lion. And then he saw the Medo-Persian Empire, and he saw that as a bear. And he saw horns that rose up out of that bear. And finally when he came to the Grecian Empire, he saw a wild, rough he-goat, which had a very notable horn. And that notable horn is defined as the king of Greece. And finally he spoke of a fourth beast that was so terrible and so different that it could not be described. And that, of course, is a reference

to the ultimate form of the Roman Empire, a form which we seem to be rapidly approaching in our present day. And so Daniel was given this view of world history. He saw these four great world empires, and then he saw in each one of these that the time would come when a stone would smite the image or when the Ancient of Days would give the kingdom to the Son of Man, and the Son of Man would come and establish his kingdom.

Now Zechariah, in the 9th chapter, writes of that third kingdom, the Grecian Empire. And he writes particularly of Alexander the Great, who shall come and in the midst of his journeys shall take the land of Palestine in its outward perimeter, but who shall not take the city of Jerusalem. And then as the prophet looks into the future, suddenly the scene becomes dim. And out of it, he sees this glorious picture of a king that comes to Israel, but not like Alexander. A king who comes “riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

Now this is prophecy. This is something that God gives by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore to be read as prophecy. And so we want to look at it just briefly this morning and then turn over to the book of Matthew in the New Testament and see the fulfillment of the prophecy which Zechariah was given five or six centuries before the time of Christ.

Now a burden is a burden, or a prophetic message of judgment. And so apparently as Zechariah was given this tremendous message of the future and realized that it meant judgment, it became a burden to his heart. And so he speaks of the burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach.

Now the land of Hadrach is an expression, which up until a few decades ago we would not have understood. It so happens that we had no reference to the land of Hadrach in ancient literature. But only recently it has been discovered that this place, Hadrach, is to be identified with the land of Syria or the land about Damascus. And so the first burden, or the first part of the burden which Zechariah is given, is a prophecy

against Damascus and the outlying territory. Damascus had been a terrifying enemy of the children of Israel, and so now the burden comes against that community. For you see, God always ultimately overthrows those who overthrow his people. And they had been responsible for the persecution of Israel, and so now they must bear the judgment of God. And the one who shall carry out this judgment is Alexander the Great.

Alexander was one of the most remarkable of ancient men. In fact, I think we can say that probably no man has influenced ancient history as much as Alexander the Great. He has influenced ancient history far more than the Caesars, in reality. And so Alexander the Great is most likely the one that the prophet has in mind. Alexander as a young man had wondered what would be left for him to do after Philip of Macedon, his father, had engaged in such conquests. And finally the time came when Alexander crossed the Hellespont, went over into Asia Minor. He stopped first at Troy, for he believed that he was a descendant of the great Trojan, Achilles. And he stopped there in order to do a little romantic worship of that which he believed was in his background. He began to engage in warfare with the Persians. And finally the time came when Alexander came to the place called Issus, and there won one of his great victories. As a result of the first battle that he fought at Granicus, the whole of Asia Minor became his. And then when he won his battle at Issus, all of Syria and Palestine and Egypt became his. And during this time, Damascus was overthrown, Tyre and Sidon was overthrown, and the cities of Philistia were also overthrown. And so Zechariah, by the Holy Spirit, is enabled to look into the future, two to three centuries into the future, and give us here, as prophecy, the work that Alexander did.

Now Alexander is a remarkable man for several other reasons. He was a person who finally when he came to Egypt, and hearing there of a certain god, Amon, in Egypt, and hearing of the worship of Amon at a place considerably to the west of Egypt where he was, he made a special journey to that place and he talked with the god Amon there. And after that time he came out, and rumors began to circulate that Alexander the Great

thought that he was a child of heaven, or the son of Amon. But he wasn't satisfied with this. And as these legends of his divinity began to circulate, of course they began to influence many in the ancient world. He wasn't satisfied with this. Alexander did everything that he possibly could to harmonize all of the kingdoms that were under his control. And so like Sophocles, he enjoined men to join in loving one another. And finally, Alexander became involved in a one-world view. In fact, most of our one-world economics and politics and philosophy go back to Alexander the Great. He's in the direct line of this tradition of man's desire to have one great world in which all of the nations of the world are united together in a peaceful dominion. And I wonder if it is not because of this that the beast of the book of Revelation is likened, not to a lion, but he is likened to a leopard. Because the characteristic that marks out the antichrist of the future is a characteristic that is joined directly to Alexander the Great.

Well now the prophecy of Zechariah tells us how he came into the land. After the battle of Issus, he came to the land of Damascus, and he took that land. And then he moved down against Tyre and Sidon, and Zechariah describes it. He speaks about Tyre, this great city that was known for its wealth and for its culture and for its power. Tyre, the city by the sea, the strength of the sea, Isaiah calls the city. And he describes how Alexander is to come and how he is to take Tyre and Sidon. I wish we had time to talk about the way in which he finally took this city, but we do not have time to do it. Let me hasten to say that this is not the only place in the Old Testament in which the overthrow of Tyre is given.

In the book of Ezekiel, in the 26th chapter, a very minute description is given of the overthrow of Tyre. And not long ago, a science teacher who had taught college students for a number of years had his students begin to compute probability with respect to the fulfillment of prophecy in the Bible. And the subject of the prophecy about Tyre was taken up, as well as a number of other cities. And over a period of time, the science teacher tabulated his results. And he said, “I tried to do this on the conservative side. But

we went into the prophecy on Tyre in the book of Ezekiel and the other references where Tyre is mentioned, in which certain things are said about the overthrow of this city, and we computed the probability of them. And finally we came to the conclusion that the chance of this prophecy coming to pass was one in seventy-five million. And then he went on to describe various other prophecies, which they had investigated in the same way.

Prophecy is the product of the foresight of God. And consequently, it comes from the hand of God. And Zechariah is enabled by God to speak of the future. And he does. He speaks also of the overthrow of the cities of Philistia. Philistia, of course, was arrogant in its pride and independence, in its religion and in its culture, in its nationality, but Zechariah says it shall be broken. And yet out of this breaking of Philistia, there shall rise a remnant for Jehovah.

And finally, in verse 8, the prophet speaks about Jerusalem's deliverance. But he speaks about Jerusalem's deliverance as a harbinger of the future. Notice the 8th verse, "And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth." And let me stop here for just a moment and point out the historical fulfillment of this. When Alexander came to Jerusalem, he had not yet taken Tyre. And so when he came to Jerusalem, he demanded of the Jews that they pay the tribute which they had been paying to King Darius' empire. The high priest refused to do it. Alexander was incensed at this and said that when he had finished with Tyre he was going to come and take the city of Jerusalem. And so he went down to besiege Tyre, a city which he took in seven months. And when he came back, the high priest, according to Josephus the Jewish historian, had received word as a result of prayer from God that they should go out to meet Alexander. And so they did. And a procession went out to meet the great emperor from Macedon.

And as they went out, the high priest led the procession and he led it, of course, in his garments of glory and beauty, and he had about his head the miter, which had the

name of Jehovah and the words “holiness to the Lord” upon it. And Alexander, as he drew near to the city of Jerusalem, no doubt met the strangest procession that he had ever seen in all of his life. And surprisingly, he stopped. And not only did he stop, but he went down over before the Jewish high priest and knelt before this high priest, so Josephus said. And then the Macedonians and others who were with Alexander said, “Why do you do this? You’ve never done this to any other emperor.” He said, “I’m not doing it to the high priest, I’m doing it to the God whom the high priest represents.” He said, “At Dios in Macedon, many years ago, I had a vision from God. And at Dios, I saw in a vision a man who was dressed exactly like this man. And this vision told me that I was to go to the East, and that I would overcome Darius and I would take the Persian Empire. And now I see the one whom I saw in that vision many years ago.”

Now the truthfulness of all this we, of course, cannot prove. Josephus, the Jewish historian, is not known for extreme accuracy. But nevertheless the facts remain, that in Jewish history there is an account of how they were spared by Alexander the Great. And that is what we read in the 8th verse of Zechariah chapter 9. But now also in this eighth verse of Zechariah chapter 9, we read, “and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.”

Now the moment we read here that “no oppressor shall pass through them any more,” we know, of course, that far beyond the days of Alexander the Great. For as a matter of fact, Jerusalem has been besieged forty-six times in its history. It has been taken a number of times, and oppressors have gone forth back and forth over that land since the day of which this chapter speaks.

And so it is obvious that the prophet, as he looks into the future, has now looked on to the end of time. And he looks now with the foresight that enables him to see the ultimate deliverance of the city of Jerusalem from the forces of the antichrist, which shall be arrayed against it in the last day. And in the 14th chapter of this book Zechariah, we read of that great event, when Jerusalem shall be besieged in the last days. And then the

Son of Man shall come and stand upon the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem shall be delivered from the [unintelligible] of the nations that are about them. And it's very interesting to notice too the nations that are about the land of Palestine in that day are some of the same nations that are mentioned in the last day. There is Egypt. And there is Philistia. And there is Damascus. And it's very striking too to notice from our newspapers today that Damascus has suddenly become important in the daily news. That Lebanon has become important. That all of the area to the south has become important. In other words, as so often in God's word, the situation is becoming so arranged by God that ultimately a similar type of scene shall be enacted in the future, when the nations about Israel shall be opposed to her and they shall be delivered only when the Lord Jesus comes.

Now at this point the prophet, in true prophetic fashion, looks not at the circumstances but looks to the God of these circumstances and we have the prophecy of the first coming of the Son of Man. And so against the background of this world-conquering military ruler, there emerges the all-conquering King of Kings, but oh, what a contrast. One is human, the other is divine. One comes with fear and dread for the nation Israel, the other comes with Joy and rejoicing. One comes upon a prancing steed; the other comes upon an humble ass. One comes as rich and powerful; the other comes as poor and meek. One comes as a foreign tyrant; the other comes as our Messiah, thy King. One comes as a slayer of his foes; the other comes as a Savior not only of his friends, but a Savior also of his foes. One comes as a man who seemed to have ideas that he might be divine; the other comes as a God who first of all was the Son of God who has become man.

And Zechariah calls out here, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem.” And you notice immediately the lively vigor of the language, because now we have the language of direct address. It's as if the prophet were reading the text of Scripture and now suddenly, he looks up at his audience and he says, shout,

daughter of Jerusalem; rejoice, daughter of Zion, “behold, thy King cometh unto thee.”

Would you notice that expression, “thy king?”

Now apparently, this king is of Israel because he is her king. But he is really not of Israel because he comes to Israel. And so here is a strange king, one who is of Israel and yet he is not of Israel. Very much like the prophecy in the book of Micah in which we read, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” One who comes of them, but yet one who comes to them. And so our Lord Jesus is one who comes of Israel, for he was born of the Virgin Mary, and yet at the same time he is one who comes to them as the great Son of Man. It is, of course, the God-man of whom Zechariah speaks. And he describes him as just, as having salvation, and as lowly. He is just, because he himself is demonstrated to be just by the temptation and by the holiness of his life, and ultimately by the perfect obedience manifest in his death. And he is also just because he is one who conveys justification to those who believe in him. He is one who possesses salvation; not only personal salvation, but national salvation as well. For it is through this one that all Israel is to be saved. And so the Lord Jesus is just, and he has salvation, and he is lowly. And that is the thing, of course, that is the identifying sign. The identifying sign of the king of Israel is the fact that he comes upon the ass.

It’s rather striking that our Lord prefers the noble ass to the prancing charger of the kings of ancient times. Our Lord Jesus’ life was characterized by lowliness. It was characterized by lowliness from the time of his birth, throughout his life, and ultimately to his death. I do not think that anyone dignified poverty more than our Lord Jesus Christ. If anyone was a candidate for the poverty program, he was. And yet you will notice that there was no complaint. There was no violence. Our Lord Jesus accepted the poverty that came to him as part of his life. And when you read of our Lord’s life, sometimes you may feel like I do. Sometimes I’d like to be poor just to understand what it is. And you

thought I was poor. Well I am, I guess, but I'm not poor like he was. Our Lord Jesus came into this world, was born in a borrowed cradle. All throughout his life he lived in borrowed places, he didn't have any place where he could lay his head. Finally he died, and he was even placed in a borrowed tomb. From beginning to end, his life is characterized by lowliness. And so the prophet sees the one who is responsible for the deliverance of Israel as a lowly king who rides upon an ass.

Now will you turn over to Matthew chapter 21 for just a moment as we look at the final step? And here we see the fulfillment. The Lord Jesus is now to make his triumphal, it was never triumphant, it was his un-triumphal entry. But he is to make his entry into the city of Jerusalem in order that he may fulfill the prophecies and die. And so in Matthew chapter 21 we read of it. And he comes to the city amid the shouts of the multitude, which had come with him from Galilee. And while it seemed to be triumphant, it was un-triumphal. It was only triumphant in the world of the spirit.

I think that G. K. Chesterton has captured this so wonderfully in the poem called, “The Donkey.” And may I read it for you this morning? And listen to it, because I think it has a real message. “When fishes flew and forests walked and figs grew upon thorn, some moment when the moon was blood then surely I was born; with monstrous head and sickening cry and ears like errant wings, the devil's walking parody on all four-footed things. The tattered outlaw of the earth, of ancient crooked will; starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb, I keep my secret still. Fools! For I also had my hour; one far fierce hour and sweet: there was a shout about my ears, and palms before my feet.

Isaiah speaks about animals that understand God better than the people of God. The animals understood better than Israel that day when Jesus came. Palm Sunday was a day of wild rapture of enthusiasm. It was characterized by the delirium of eager welcome, but it was a misguided zest. For the Galileans did not really understand him. They had responded to him, and they had a measure of faith in him, but they were a little band. The Jerusalemites in the big city did not understand him at all. And so the Lord

Jesus makes preparation to enter the city. He knows the prophecy from Zechariah. He knows that he must enter upon the ass. And so as he draws near to the Mount of Olives and begins the ascent. And just as he begins the descent, he still cannot see the city yet. He has sent the disciples off to get the animal. And they have come back, and now people have heard in Jerusalem, and they come out. And as they come out, the Lord Jesus is placed upon the animal. And as he begins to make his way toward the city of Jerusalem, the disciples cut down the palm branches, and they put them before the Lord Jesus, and he makes his way toward the city.

And Matthew says that when the Lord Jesus sat upon that ass, the Scripture was fulfilled which said, “Behold, thy King cometh to thee.” In other words, it was as if our Lord Jesus intentionally acted out a piece of prophecy for Israel, in order that they might understand exactly who it is that is coming to them. And so this piece of Messianic symbolism is carried out right before their eyes. I think that was the strangest royal parade in history. A man upon an ass. Ignorant Galileans or uncultured Galileans shouting, “Hosanna in the highest.” They shout, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” And this motley crowd makes their way toward the city of Jerusalem. As the Lord Jesus comes up and as a view is caught of Mount Zion, to the south of the center of the city. In Luke chapter 19 we read that there they said, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest,” for they saw Mount Zion, which was David’s place. And as they moved along, finally they came to the place, as on the descent now, they were able to see the whole of the city. And the text says in Luke chapter 19 describing the same event that when Jesus beheld the city, he wept. And he said to them, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day...”

Why was this their day? Why, Daniel in the prophecy many hundreds of years before had said after forty-nine years, and after four hundred eighty-three years, some things would happen. After forty-nine years the city would be constructed again, and after four hundred and eighty-three years Messiah would come to Israel. And now on the

fulfillment of the sixty-ninth week of the prophecy of Daniel, the King of Israel comes to the city of Jerusalem. And he rides upon the very animal which prophecy had said that he should ride upon, this lowly ass. But instead of responding to him, they do not understand. And so the Lord Jesus weeps over the city, which has scorned the identifying sign of the ass. The entry then becomes not only the rejection of the Lord Jesus, but of Jesus' rejection of them. And as Matthew describes, it he says when this crowd came into the city, the city was moved. That word is a wonderful word in the Greek text. It's a word that comes from the Greek word that means, “an earthquake.” That city was shaken! There were tremors that came of the strange, eerie anxiety that was brought by the coming of the Son of Man. And I think that the response that is given in Matthew chapter 21 and verse 11 is one of the most anticlimactic statements in all of the Bible. We read in verse 10, “And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?” And you can sense as it goes up and down the streets of Jerusalem, “Who is this? Who is this that is come on this animal? Why all of this shouting?” And then there comes the reply, “This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”

James Stalker, one of the great students of the word, has said that, “The reception that the Lord Jesus had gained in the province of Galilee did not gain national assent.” In other words, the Galileans had responded to him, but the nation had not. And as a result of their lack of response, it's just a few hours after this that the Lord is hanging upon the cross. All is not lost, however. The Lord Jesus before he dies, in the 39th verse of the 23rd chapter of the gospel of Matthew says, “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” The time is coming when again about the cities of Palestine and about the city of Jerusalem, the outlying territory shall be gathered, and men from the various nations that exist, some perhaps as they exist today in our present day. There shall be a great company of nations gathered against the city of Jerusalem. And then again, when finally the city cries out to God in faith, the Lord Jesus shall come a second time and they shall look upon him whom they pierced. But this

time, he does not come upon the lowly ass. He comes out of heaven in his great, glorious second advent to destroy the enemies and set up the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Today we live in the age of grace. We live in a day in which we may respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. A day in which we are told over and over again that the Lord Jesus has died for our sins, and that it is by his death that we may have redemption. We may be justified by the one who was lowly, just, because he has salvation.

If you are in this audience this morning and you have not put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we urge you to turn to him who has died for you and put your trust in him that you, too, may have life. May God give you grace, if you desire to be saved, to turn to him. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, abide with all who know him in sincerity. And, oh Father, for any who may be here who do not know him yet, we pray that they may see him as the lowly King of Israel who died for them. And may they turn in their hearts and say; “I thank thee, Oh Lord, for dying for me.” This we ask in his name. Amen.