

National Repentance Needed: Ezra's Example

National Prayer Day

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- Psalter 4: All
- Ezra 9
- Psalter 441:2-3
- Psalter 13:6-7
- America 1, 3

"I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice." -Ezra 9:4

Given the abandonment of scriptural norms in our nation, it is surprising, even humbling, that our government still calls us as citizens to a National Day of prayer and repentance. Sadly, however, few observe this annual day with earnest repentance and heartfelt prayer; still fewer realize that every day in our lawless times ought to be saturated with prayer and repentance. Who among us wrestles with how we are to live lives of prayer and repentance? Tonight we wish to consider with you how the godly priest Ezra wrestled for his nation. Our text you can find in Ezra 9:4b, only these words, "I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice." With God's help, our theme will be:

Ezra's Example For Us On National Prayer Day

1. His great astonishment because of Israel's sins
2. His penitent confession of Israel's sins
3. His acknowledgment of grace despite Israel's sins

I. His great astonishment because of Israel's sins

In Ezra 9, the priest Ezra serves as a remarkable example for us of how we ought to observe a National Prayer Day. Ezra lived during the last period of Israel's captivity in Babylon and the beginning of Israel's return from captivity. King Cyrus of Persia had given permission to the Jews to return to their native land, and had even provided money for the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. By the time Ezra came to renown as a counselor at the court of the new king of Persia, Artaxerxes, the temple had already been rebuilt and work was proceeding on rebuilding the

walls of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the opposition of many Samaritans.

Some of the God-fearing, however, had remained behind in Babylon to be a witness to the name of the Lord there. One of this remnant was Ezra. As a descendant of Aaron, Ezra was priest by birth. He was an educated man of considerable dignity and piety, who also served as prophet and scribe. The Bible says that he had prepared his heart to seek the Lord and sought to do good to Israel. His heart burned with holy zeal and genuine patriotism.

For some time, Ezra had desired to return to Israel to assist with the rebuilding of Jerusalem. One day he expressed this desire to the king. Artaxerxes not only granted his request, but also gave gold and silver to assist in buying materials for the walls of Jerusalem.

Ezra returned to Jerusalem with a number of his fellow Jews. When he saw the people worshipping in the rebuilt temple of Jerusalem, he rejoiced in Jehovah and was deeply humbled. The first thing he did was sacrifice sin-offerings to God — twelve bullocks, twelve he-goats, ninety-six rams, and seventy-seven lambs.

After Ezra had finished offering sacrifices, God-fearing rulers of the Jews approached him with sad news. They informed him that many of the Jews, priests, and rulers had married heathen women who lived in that area. The people of God, in direct violation of the express command of God (9:1), had mingled with the heathen — not only in trade and conversation, but also through intermarriage.

Ezra informs us of his reaction, "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished" (Ezra 9:3). Ezra was grieved at heart to hear that a nation called after the name of Jehovah had so violated the law of God. He was grieved that a nation which had encountered so much tribulation had learned so little about the holiness and judgments of God. It was painful to realize that the long Babylonian captivity had not been sanctified to the majority. Moreover, even all the blessings God had recently bestowed had not brought them to a heartfelt desire and conviction to serve God and walk in His ways.

Ezra was greatly troubled and perplexed. He was astonished at the dishonor done to God and because of the sorrow the people were about to bring upon themselves.

Why should that holy God, who did not spare their fathers, spare them when they were committing the identical evil for which their fathers felt the heavy wrath of God and for which they were sent into captivity?

Dear friend, when we consider this once great nation of ours, must not we also sit down astonished?

We have a rich heritage and peculiar privileges, Among America's early settlers, the Pilgrims and Puritans were, for the most part, godly men and women. They immigrated to the New World, motivated to live according to Scripture and with freedom from government-controlled state churches. They yearned for freedom to worship without persecution. Before leaving ship the Pilgrim leaders compiled the well-known Mayflower Pact in which they confessed that their primary purpose in settling in this new land was "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith."

The Colonies developed to such a degree that many settlers were attracted to the New World's promise of riches and freedom from political oppression. The pervasive influence of the godly began to wane and government increasingly fell into the hands of those who were not moved by the Biblical principle of God's glory.

Matters moved from bad to worse in the 1700s, with the exception of seasons of remarkable revival, especially in the 1730s and 40s. The age of Enlightenment and the skepticism of the Frenchmen Voltaire and Rousseau helped to propagate the naturalism and deism that permeated England and spread to the Colonies. Political ambition, greed, and the natural result of loose, unbiblical living had a disastrous effect on the morals of western civilization.

Today we face the outgrowth of the Enlightenment, that is, pragmatic, atheistic humanism. Humanism has permeated our public square, our public schools, and our courtrooms; it destroys our inheritance and our moral character.

Morality has dropped to an all-time low in our nation. Uncleaness and licentiousness abound on every hand. Adultery has become largely socially acceptable providing there are two mutually agreeing parties. Perverted relationships are increasingly gaining "rights" with the government.

Passion for wealth, properly called materialism, is regarded as prudence. Materialism feeds our quest for pleasure and gratification. We endorse gambling and lotteries for pragmatic reasons. Covetousness, the mother of so much sin, is encouraged through high-pressure advertising. Pride and selfishness are promoted as virtues rather than vices. For the most part, we use God's generosity for ourselves rather than for His glory, God's curse pronounced against Israel in Malachi 3:9 applies equally to us, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."

Violence has overwhelmed our civility. Crime threatens the personal safety of millions, Teenagers, even young children, imitate the murders they watch on television and in movies. Drugs are rampant nearly everywhere. Excessive drinking is regarded as an innocent pastime.

The baby-killing practice of abortion remains commonplace. Since 1973, when this nation legalized abortion, we have killed some thirty-five million babies, more than the population of the entire nation of Canada. The blood of unborn millions is on our hands.

Euthanasia, the deliberate taking of a human life, is proceeding apace. Sabbath desecration is the norm rather than the exception. The majority of our citizens no longer attend any church on a regular basis.

Neglect and contempt of God through swearing and taking His name in vain have become socially acceptable. We pretend to live as if there is no God, as if we have never fallen in Paradise, as if there is no approaching day of death and judgment. We live as if we are gods, daring to oppose the Lord's revealed will and Word.

Divorces on unbiblical grounds are a stench in God's nostrils, crippling our families and nation. Parental rights are increasingly denied.

Politicians appear more concerned about reelection than spiritual, moral, and fiscal responsibility. National debt is increasingly multiplied. Contrary to Scripture, national alliances are made with nations which do not fear God (Isa, 8:12; Ezra 9:14).

Worldliness — that spirit in which every man does that which is right in his own

eyes — is rampant. Self-centeredness, self-gratification, and self-love are the order of the day. Lust of the flesh, of the eyes, and of the pride of life is promoted. Worldly music, worldly partying, worldly friendship, worldly reading material abounds.

The power of the modern media, be it through television, rock music, or an illegitimate use of the VCR and computers, bodes ill for our future. Through the media, we worship at the shrine of professional organized sports without shame. We pay our sports-heroes more for six weeks of play than we do our president for a full term of service for four years.

Scriptural integrity and submission to authority are regarded as outdated and abhorrent, Prayer, church attendance, and religious duties are performed in a perfunctory manner, if at all. Parental Biblical instruction, family worship, private devotion, conscientious catechizing are all on the wane. Little esteem exists for the gospel and its privileges. The blessed Savior and the offered gospel are despised and slighted. Christ's blood is counted an unclean thing by millions.

Millions more rest in outward forms of worship or a shallow profession of Christianity. Millions build on the sands of false security, "easy believism," claiming forgiveness without repentance and salvation without ever becoming sinners before God. For the most part, Christianity has merged with materialism, humanism, and secularism. The result is that in America Christianity is 3000 miles wide, 1500 miles tall, but less than one inch deep.

We are backslidden. Iniquity abounds in all levels of society. The lives of the vast majority evidence little more than a pursuit after the carnal pleasures of this world. The corrective adversities God sends seem to profit us little; the blessings of prosperity only serve to move us further from our great Benefactor.

When neither blessing nor curse can do a nation any good, we must fear that we have been given over to ourselves as a nation. May not God say of us what He said of Ephraim, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hosea 4:17)?

Sin is no longer sin because our spiritual foundations are gone. As Senator Hatfield noted, "We witness a country torn apart by division and lacking the spiritual foundations which would restore its vision and purpose," ,

We too must sit down astonished beside Ezra. Like him, we must be filled with dismay, with holy anger, with earnest repentance.

The Bible says that Ezra sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. Until that time, we do not even read that he prayed. It appeared that the case of those for whom he grieved was beyond hope and repair.

But at the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra received fresh hope, as we will see in our second thought when we consider: ·

II. Ezra's penitent confession of Israel's sins

The evening sacrifice was offered daily at 3:00p.m. on the brazen altar as an offering of atonement, pointing especially to the Messiah to come who would sacrifice Himself in the place of sinners on the cross of Calvary. In the evening of the world, in the fullness of time, the Son of God would sacrifice Himself as a lamb without spot or blemish to atone for sin and to reconcile sinners to Himself. Many Jews gathered together at that time for an hour of prayer, beseeching God that as their prayers ascended with the smoke of the evening sacrifice to the heavens, the Lord Himself might hear and answer their petitions for the sake of the Messiah.

Now when the evening sacrifice was offered on this particular day of grief, and Ezra saw how the lamb was offered in the place of sinners, he recovered sufficiently from his astonishment to fall upon his knees. He placed himself in the posture of a penitent petitioner begging for mercy, and spread out his hands to God. He reached out as one who desired to reach God, to touch the hem of His garment. With an eye to God as a God of mercy who desires to reconcile sinners unto Himself by means of His Son's sacrifice, Ezra confessed Israel's transgressions and pleaded for mercy and pardon.

Dear friend, this is what you need also. If the Holy Spirit may enter your life and convict you of sin, righteousness, and judgment, you too will be struck dumb and not be able to rise up from your astonishment so long as your eyes are not opened to God's great evening sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself on Calvary as the divinely approved sacrifice for sinners. But if the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,"

and you receive grace to repent before Him and believe on Him as your only hope and refuge of salvation, then you too will be able to rise up from your heaviness. Then you too will stretch out your hands to touch the hem of the garment of the Lamb of God. Then you will be enabled to look away from your misery and guilt to see that though there is great power in your sins to condemn you, there is even more power in the blood of Jesus to save you.

Ezra's bonds were broken; his lips were opened. By faith he made confession, as it were, with his hands upon the evening sacrifice (Ezra 9:6-7). Two critical elements mark his confession. First, he took upon himself the guilt of Israel's sins. He spoke of "our iniquities" and "our trespass." He didn't lift himself above his people or nation, but realized that he was intimately involved in the nation's sins. And secondly, he was enabled to transfer at God's altar all those sins to Christ, placing them by faith upon the head of the evening sacrifice.

Only in this way can we make true confession before God. All Christless confession is ineffectual confession. Judas Iscariot also made confession, but without placing his hand by faith upon the head of the evening sacrifice. He had no eye for mercy, no heart for the Lamb of God. Without this faith in Christ, we cannot truly unburden ourselves before God and confess sin in His sight. Outside of Christ, God can only be a holy, consuming fire.

Oh, what a blessed, sweet reality confession is when it may be done at God's altar with an eye to Calvary's cross! Have you ever made confession in such a way? Have you ever experienced the sweetness of making confession at the foot of the cross of Calvary? Dear friend, there is no better place to be in all the earth than to confess sin at the feet of the merciful Savior.

There would be real hope for our nation and the entire world if true Christians throughout this land would come by faith to God's altar, confessing our national and personal sins with our hand upon the evening sacrifice. In fact, the opening verses of Ezra 10 teach us that this one man's blessed example reaped repentance and reformation throughout Jerusalem.

APPLICATION

III. Ezra's acknowledgment of grace despite Israel's sins

Our nation desperately needs to return to God. After all, what makes a country blessed? Geographical beauty? Military prowess? Unparalleled prosperity? Huge metropolises? Psalm 33:12 tells us: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance."

What does a country do with God and His Word? This is the critical question; everything else is secondary.

If this nation, yes, we ourselves, do not become Ezras before God -- repenting, pleading upon His Word, and fleeing to Christ — sin will ultimately reap divine destruction. The day or year of divine visitation shall come. God's patience will have an end. He has justly sworn that sinners and nations continuing in sin will not see His kingdom. He will not break His Word; His vengeance is unimpeachable.

We have squandered our rich heritage. We have multiplied our national debt, materially, morally, and spiritually. We have lost the greatest weapon of our armory, the weapon of prayer. We have turned our backs on God, His Word, and the fear of His Name. We have spoiled what our forebears have struggled to provide — a solid Biblical foundation on which to build a nation. Dark clouds righteously hang above us.

Our only hope lies in the intervening, sovereign grace of God's blessing the means He has called us to use. What are those means? What are we called to do?

First, we are called to seek the grace of repentance that Ezra received. Our nation needs neither more unbelievers nor more Pharisees. We need more men like Ezra. Blessed is the nation in whose midst are many who take the guilt of the sins of the nation upon themselves and who learn to bring that guilt to the cross of Calvary. If you desire to do a favor to your nation, church, family, and yourself, seek grace to bring the sins of nation, church, family, and yourself to the New Testament evening sacrifice, the cross of Calvary.

Second, we are called to pray earnestly for reformation and revival, to pray in the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." With idolatry, perversion, and lawlessness flooding our land, let us earnestly

intercede and pray that conviction of sin, repentance, the fear and truth of God, and the centrality of Christ and His cross may be restored. Pray that men and women, teens and children, may be turned from vain pursuits and entertainments to the living Triune God. Pray for the saving work of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon many through the preaching and teaching of godly men qualified to lead churches in the way of truth. Pray for the revival of the historic Reformed faith, which insists that Christianity move beyond church walls to embrace distinctively Christian worldlife views and actions in all areas of life, including education, politics, and business.

Third, be more active in alerting our political leaders to the evils of our day. We must admonish ourselves, each other, and them, in the spirit of Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Finally, let us be active in our local neighborhoods and at work by speaking and embodying the truth in every area of our lives. Communicate with others as opportunities arise about the need for prayer, revival, repentance, and truth. Pass out Bibles, tracts, and other Biblical literature, bearing in mind the truth of an early American adage: "The pen is mightier than the sword." If you claim to be a Christian, be assured you are being carefully watched by many. Pray daily for grace to be salt in the earth and light on the hill.

Let us ask ourselves: Am I contributing to the swelling of our large debt of rational sin? Dear friend, we must all be born again and flee to God's proffered mercy in Jesus Christ. May God grant that we may all search and try our ways and turn to the Lord against whom we have so deeply rebelled. He is able and willing to make us genuine disciples of Jesus Christ --- disciples who will not be part of the problem but part of the solution.

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7). AMEN.

The God of Reconciliation Seeking Lost Sinners

Rev. J. Greendyk

- Psalter 265:all
- Scripture: Isaiah 1:1-20
- Psalter 255:all
- Psalter 140;2-4
- Psalter 112:1-2

The text we wish to meditate upon with you may be found in the portion that we have read, Isaiah 1:18, where we read in God's Word, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

From the words of our text, we will consider:

The God of Reconciliation Seeking Lost Sinners

With the help of the Lord, we will examine three thoughts:

1. An Awful Indictment, which will center around the verses preceding the text.
2. An Unbelievable Invitation
3. A Gracious Promise.

The God of Reconciliation Seeking Lost Sinners. First, An Awful Indictment; secondly, An Unbelievable Invitation; and thirdly, A Gracious Promise.

Congregation, Isaiah is very well known as a prophet who is also labelled an evangelist. When you study the book of Isaiah, it reveals that his writings, especially from chapters 40 onward, overflow with the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Even before that, Isaiah is filled with desire for the coming of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit has inspired Isaiah, clearly revealing him to be the gospel prophet of the Old Testament. The book of Isaiah deals not only with the person of Christ, the offices of Christ, the grace of Christ, and the kingdom of Christ; it also speaks of Christ's coming in the flesh. He reveals to us how Christ has to be born in Bethlehem. He reveals that Christ has to suffer, bleed, and die. He reveals that Christ will rise again and be the glory of His Father, and that the gospel will

triumph throughout the whole world.

Many in the New Testament also spoke of this special prophet. John the Baptist speaks of him when he begins his ministry, He begins his preaching with a passage from Isaiah. Jesus Christ, when beginning His ministry, refers to the prophet Isaiah. Philip also preached to the eunuch from Isaiah.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived approximately 770 years before Christ. He lived 125 years, eighty-five of which he was a prophet. It is believed that he lived during the time of King Manasseh of Judah. The book of Isaiah starts in a very remarkable way. The Lord appears in a vision to Isaiah.

A vision, children, is not a dream. A dream is something that occurs while we are sleeping. A vision is something that occurs while we are awake. Let me give you a simple example. It would be like sitting in school and daydreaming while looking out the window. The teacher is continuing with the lesson and your mind is miles away on something else. You have all kinds of pictures and thoughts flashing through your mind, but you don't even hear your teacher talking.

I. An Awful Indictment

When God came to Isaiah with a vision, it was for a specific purpose. His intention was that the prophet Isaiah would take that message and reveal the mind of God to the people. That is exactly what is bound upon the heart of Isaiah by Jehovah. He speaks through the Word of the Lord. He is called to unfold that vision of Judah and Jerusalem to the people, but also to us. Remember, Isaiah was a prophet to the tribe of Judah and thus this vision has reference to Judah. What is so amazing about this vision is that it reveals a deep-seated grief in the heart of God against the people of Judah. In fact, there is such a deep grief in the heart of God regarding the rebellion of Judah and Jerusalem, that when the vision comes to Isaiah, he does not even want to speak to the people any more. Why? Because in response to all God's callings and warnings, Judah and Jerusalem have closed their ears. They have gone their own way. What does the Lord declare in this vision? He says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth."

What is the Lord trying to tell us? He is revealing to us that if these people would not hear, He would turn to the heavens and earth, and speak to them. God uses

something which we know with our human mind is impossible to be fulfilled. The earth cannot hear the Lord speak, because it has no ear. The heavens cannot hear the Lord speak, because they have no ears.

The Lord is telling us that the condition of Judah and Jerusalem is tragic, terrible, and desolate. The Lord becomes tired of calling and warning these people, tired of seeking to guide them for the good of their souls, for their prosperity as a nation. He not only calls the heavens and earth to hear, but then turns to the irrational creatures, irrational creatures which have to be trained by man to follow in a certain way. He also says as it were, "I have nourished and brought up children, and what have they done? They have rebelled against me."

Does the Lord also say that of us today? I have nourished these people, I have caused My Word to be preached or read, I have revealed the gospel of My dear Son in the midst of them. However, is there a deep-seated grief in the heart of God tonight because so many are disobedient and rebellious against the command of God to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? God says, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." How humbling God's declaration should have been for Judah and Jerusalem. It should have made them small. It should have shaken them awake to think that the Lord would speak to an ox or an ass, which are irrational. Indeed, it is true, that a farmer's voice is known even by his cattle, and an ass or a donkey knows where to get his food. That's what the Lord is saying. My people are seeking things that will starve them to death. And, my unconverted fellow traveller, you are doing the same as these irrational creatures whom God uses to illustrate how deaf we are to His callings, how dumb we are to what He desires to give us, and how blind we are regarding our great need. Do we not by nature seek our food in sin to fill our emptiness? Do we not seek our food in the world to satisfy our emptiness? Do we not seek those things that will destroy our body as well as ruin our soul, while the irrational ox and ass know where to get what they need to live?

Thus the Lord says today: "Congregation, you also have heard the gospel; you know that it is only by the gospel that you can have life in the midst of your self-made death, be delivered from all your misery and sin, and be reconciled unto Me. Oh why will ye turn away from Me?" Oh, what an awful indictment the Lord

utters against wicked, hard-hearted sinners!

The Lord reveals more with this awful indictment. What does He do? He increases the awfulness of the indictment. He goes from bad to worse. He says, "Ah, sinful nation." The word "ah" in Hebrew is an expression of profound grief, sorrow, and disappointment. Does God say that about you today? Does He say that about you who are unconverted, you, who have heard the gospel of reconciliation, you who are a rational creature? Ah, this people, how sinful they are, laden with iniquity, hardhearted, rebellious, stubborn, always resisting My Holy Spirit.

Oh, congregation, if we could see the face of God today, I think we would see grief in His face regarding our unbelief. He is deeply grieved with the hardness of our hearts. He is deeply grieved with our rejecting the gospel, the very life and food of our soul.

But, He goes further; He calls Judah and Jerusalem a seed of evildoers. What is the Lord revealing here? He is not only speaking of Judah and Jerusalem, but He is speaking of you and me in our total depravity. He is revealing unto us the fruitlessness of His striking Judah and Jerusalem any more. What does the Lord mean?

The Lord had sent other nations against Judah and Jerusalem with His judgments in order to bring them to repentance. Instead of their hearts being broken, like the people in the time of the judges, they hardened themselves under His judgments. They reacted in the same spirit of Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him?" What does the Lord therefore say? He says, "Why should ye be stricken any more? What good are My judgments and warnings?"

Congregation, what is the use of the Lord's giving us a minister to bring His Word, the gospel of life, as well as bringing us warning, if we turn not unto the Lord? Truly, we are no different from this people of Judah and Jerusalem!

Does the Lord view us as He viewed Judah and Jerusalem? Does not this awful indictment fit us also?

Next, the Lord says with all these judgments, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." your "head is sick, and [your) whole heart faint. From the sole. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but

wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (vv. 5-6). What does the Lord mean here? These people were content to go around with the wounds they received in warfare. They were no burden to them. It did not bring them to consider that these things were due to their disobedience to God. By means of all the judgments, the countries of Judah and Jerusalem became desolate, were destroyed and overrun, yet they still turned away from the Lord.

Then follows an amazing text in verse 9. The Lord has been saying that He would utterly destroy them, forever forsake them as they had forsaken Him, yet listen, "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." What happened in Sodom and Gomorrah, children? Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire, God was revealing that He would not come with total destruction upon Judah. And why? Because there was a small remnant whom the Lord loved. There was yet a praying and begging people. They were praying for the return of Judah and Jerusalem to God's ways. . Congregation, are there also praying children of God who cry out to God for His mercy on such a disobedient and gospel hardened people? Perhaps they are only few in number in comparison to those who are unconverted, but are we laboring as a small flock, as a little flock, children of God, for the conversion of sinners, for the rich outpouring of Christ's gospel grace? Are we earnest for the souls of those who are perishing around us?

Then follows, "Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom." Do you know what that means? God is speaking of the office-bearers in Judah and Jerusalem. He includes them also as being like the people in Sodom. Dear office-bearers, is this what the Lord sees in our hearts? If the Lord were to come today, would He find even among us as office-bearers those who are like Sodom?

The Lord continues by saying, "Give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." He actually compares Judah's and Jerusalem's condition to that of Gomorrah before the Lord came with fire and brimstone. Do you know what is still worse? We see that these "people of Sodom" in their own eyes were a very religious people. They were full of self-made religion. This is revealed in the words, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the

LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings." In short, you know what God says? He says as it were, Your religion is not from your heart, but your religion only comes from your lips. Does the Lord have to say that of us also, congregation? Does He have to say that which He said unto Judah and Jerusalem and to Israel at large: "This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth, but their heart is far from me"? Are we like Judah and Jerusalem? If so, how terrible is our condition!

How remarkable that in all His sorrow, grief and disappointment with Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord comes and urges them to repentance. He says as it were: "Oh Judah and Jerusalem, even though you have destroyed yourselves, if you will but repent of your sins, if you will yet show true sorrow over sin; you will find that I am not a condemning God, but the one and only God who delights in mercy! You will find Me unwilling to pour out My wrath upon you, but most desirous to be the God of grace in whom dwelleth fullness for wretched sinners."

Sinner, the Lord urges you to repentance. Children of God, He calls us to repentance because of our shortcomings, because of our sins. Why is it that there are so few converted in our day? Children of God, is it not because we are not storming the throne of grace for more true conversions, for more of the Spirit's mighty and convincing work? Let us now go to our second thought and examine God's unbelievable invitation.

II. An Unbelievable Invitation

How amazing, the Lord comes with an unbelievable invitation! He does not come only to people who are convinced of their sin, but He comes with a free invitation to sin-laden, hard-hearted, and rebellious sinners. He comes to sinners who are steeped in sin and determined to go the wrong way.

Why does God come with this unbelievable invitation? To make His grace more amazing when He unfolds it; for when He reveals His grace, it causes the sinner to exclaim, "Amazing grace!"

There is another Biblical truth that is equally true. Judah and Jerusalem would not heed God's warnings and would not hearken to His invitations; thus they would make themselves ripe for God's just condemnation.

Congregation, we do the same when we refuse God's invitation. I hear someone

say, "But I can't refuse it. The Lord has to give it to me." Does not the Lord say in Proverbs 1:24, "I have called, and ye refused"? Ye refused! "I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded?" The fault of our condemnation cannot be charged to God. The fault lies entirely with you and me. If you are saved, you will indeed say, "Salvation is of the Lord," but if lost eternally, you shall forever say, "Damnation was my own making." Therefore, my dear friend, the Lord comes one more time today and says, "Come now, let us reason together." The Lord is sincere and earnest, and reveals that He desires salvation more than condemnation. He desires to unfold to us His way of salvation. He has given an answer to sin-laden man; for man who is full of iniquity, who is sin from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet; who has wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. The Lord says that there is remedy by Me for you, sinner. He desires to unfold it. He invites you to come and experience that there is a fullness of salvation in Him. He comes with a sincere invitation, with a sincere offer; and the rejection of that olive branch of peace held out to sinners will be their self-made doom. God comes in the sincerity of His heart, despite His profound grief. He still says today, "Oh people, you are rebellious, you are hard-hearted, you are an enemy, yet, 'Come, let us reason together,'"

This portion of the text can be compared to a conference with two opposing parties sitting down at a table. At this conference, however, we have nothing of our own to bring. We have no merits; we have no true religion of our own; we have no goodness at all, Is it not amazing that despite our wretchedness, despite our sinfulness, despite our total depravity, God still wants to have dealings with lost sinners? God still desires to reconcile sinners? And is there such a people who are in need of God's grace and salvation today? Our problem is that we do not realise that we are an enemy of God. Our problem is that our heart is hard and unbroken. But the Lord sees that as no obstacle. He says, "Come just as you are. Come with all your sins, Come with all your guilt. Come with all your wretchedness. Come with all your enmity. Come with your list of crimes, and I can make it well. I can perform a mighty work upon your soul which no man can work, which you cannot work." But "Come now, sinner." Why? Because the matter is urgent, the time is short, death is certain, and eternity is forever. God says, "Come now, let us reason together." Oh, how amazing that God reveals in this text His desire to

communicate with a sinner, but on His and not on the sinner's terms.

Oh congregation, we will not come nor do we have to come with a long list of demands to the Lord. Oh no, the Lord is going to tell us, "Listen to Me, sinner." He will speak with such a gracious, loving, tender, drawing voice, convincing us of His desire to do us good rather than destroy us. "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord." It is not Isaiah speaking; it is the Lord. It is God who has created us, God whom we have left, God to whom we have said, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." The same God who would be just in casting us away says, "Come now."

Oh congregation, how deaf we are to this unbelievable invitation! How hard our heart is if it is not broken under this gracious invitation! He reveals that His heart beats for our salvation. Therefore, He says just the opposite of what you and I have said to Him. We have said, "Depart," but God says "Come now." Oh sinner, would to God that such an invitation would break your heart. "Come now, let us reason together."

About what is the Lord now going to reason with us? You can find the answer in Isaiah 55:6-7 "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Congregation, the heart of God is revealed today in the midst of us as a heart not seeking our destruction. He is not seeking to pour out His wrath upon us, but He is seeking the good of our souls. Young people, here is a God as no other god. This God says, "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." There may be some here who say, But if you knew how sinful I am, how wretched I am; if you knew my hard heart and the blasphemous thoughts I have of God; if you knew how I have cursed God, taken His Name in vain, broken His Sabbath, oh, if you knew what a criminal I am before God, surely you would say to me, 'God cannot deal with you.'

My dear friend, God can deal with such sinners as you are because of Jesus Christ. Why? Because of Jesus Christ who hath borne the iniquities which sinners should have carried. Has not Jesus Christ come in the flesh? Was He not

circumcised the eighth day? Did He not submit to the holy law of God and fulfil all righteousness for disobedient sinners? Is there not sufficiency of righteousness in Jesus? Is there not plenty of satisfaction in Jesus? Is there not plenty of love in Jesus for loveless sinners? Is there not plenty of grace in Jesus for graceless sinners. Is there not plenty of mercy for wretched sinners? Is there not plenty of riches in Jesus for poor sinners? Is there not plenty of power in Jesus for helpless sinners? Is there not plenty of hope in Jesus for hopeless sinners? Are there not plenty of blessings in Jesus for cursed sinners? Surely there is, sinner. If it were not so, God would not say, "Come now, let us reason together." Despite our mountain of sins, the Lord excludes none from His invitation. If we are excluded, the blame for our damnation lies at our door.

Have you ever come to own your just condemnation? Have you ever come to see yourself as that criminal who deserves to be in the prison of darkness forever? Have you ever seen the enmity in your heart against God, as Scripture reveals in Romans 8:7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"? What is the enmity a sinner will learn? It is the enmity against the free grace of God. It is the enmity against Christ's work as the only work that counts with God. It is an enmity against the fullness of salvation for an empty sinner and this the sinner will learn by the Spirit of Christ as teacher.

When it becomes real in one's life, that he has rebelled against God, that he has hardened his heart against God, that he has transgressed His commandments, then the sinner will say with Ezra, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." Will God then say you are too great a sinner? The blood that My Son has shed is not sufficient? No, a thousand times no! He says, "Though your sins be as scarlet," though you be the chiefest 'of sinners, the worst of the worst; the biggest criminal, the greatest enemy; the most ignorant fool, and one dead in trespasses and sin; "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Let us consider this in the third thought, but before we do, let us sing Psalter 140:2-4.

III. A Gracious Promise

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." What a gracious promise is revealed from this God who would be just to destroy us!

What does God want to reveal to us? He wants to reveal a full and free salvation. He wants to reveal to us that no matter what kind of sinner we are, whether old or young, whether big or small, whether the worst one in this church, town, or country or world, the Lord says "Come now sinner, let us reason together." The Lord says as it were: "I know you are a criminal, but I have called you. I know you are an enemy, but My Son reconciles enemies. I know that you do not love Me, but I have loved a people for Myself. So deep, rich, and broad is My love that it can even come unto you, sinner. The blood of Jesus Christ is all-sufficient; for all your sins, for all your guilt, for all your disobedience. My Son Jesus Christ has perfectly obeyed God's law and fully satisfied His Father's justice. He has paid the price for a sinner's debt and there is a *free*, a totally free salvation, available to you. Believest thou this?"

Congregation, that's the wonder of the gospel. That's the good news of the gospel! God desires to reconcile sinners. Has your being reconciled to God ever become impossible from your side? Has the Lord ever opened your eyes to see that your fleshly religion is a stench in God's nostrils and that all your righteousnesses are as filthy rags? Have you ever learned that soul-despairing lesson that all that you did to move the heart of God to have mercy on you, only made the burden of your sins greater and the condemnation of God more just? If so, was not the result greater sorrow and grief, but also a sense of holy despairing in self?

Yet what does the Lord reveal in this gracious promise? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." What does this mean? God is revealing a completeness in His dear Son. He is revealing the fullness of His salvation, a perfection in Jesus' work and a full satisfaction for divine justice. He is revealing that the attributes of God the Father are glorified through Jesus' suffering and His death. He is revealing that there is a Mediator between Himself as holy God and a guilty sinner. There is a bridge between God and your soul. And that bridge is the only Mediator between God and man.

My dear friend, what good news that is for a sinner who is broken, and comes before God with all his guilt! That's what the Lord is telling us here. He wishes to make it clear that we don't have to clean up our act before we come; we may come just as we are. There are people who think that we must first make ourselves right and good before we can come to the Lord, but that is contrary to the Scriptures and this text. That's impossible; have you learned this stripping truth? When we try to come before the Lord with our works, tears and prayers in order to move the heart of God, we are making the ground of our salvation our works and thus despising and rejecting Christ's perfect and accepted work. You and I are so foolish in thinking that our works are acceptable; this shows our enmity and sinful pride against God's gracious remedy. But how wonderful that God will also strip a sinner of this great problem and bring him, with nothing, to His feet. In what way? With the cry for mercy, pure mercy, for all his wretchedness. If God would allow a sinner to present himself to the Lord with something of his own, then God would have to acknowledge that the sacrifice of Jesus then will you the Holy Spirit to take away. Will not the Christ on the cross is lacking something. However, this is impossible because the Father has declared of His Son that He is well-pleased with Him.

Oh sinner, learn to despair of everything in self for only then will you experience Jesus to be precisely the Savior you need! Beg for the Holy Spirit to take away every obstacle and stumbling block you would put in the way. Will not the Holy Spirit teach a sinner that when he tries to clean up his life and seeks to make it better, in reality, and experientially, it becomes worse? Do you know what the Lord's purpose is? It is to bring that soul to die with all his works, to die with all his law efforts, to die with all his righteousness. This is a painful lesson, but an essential one. Those who have learned it know how painful it is to have to stand condemned, guilty, bankrupt, and naked before a sin-hating and sin-punishing God.

Dear congregation, if you have not yet learned that lesson, then you are far from that well of salvation. Yet I must say, God has set before us an open door, today. In what way?

Is not the gospel preached unto you? Does not the Lord declare: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that

thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:18, 20)? Is not the blood of Jesus Christ declared to be sufficient to wash away every sin of the sinner? Is not His sacrifice proclaimed to be the only atonement for sin? Oh congregation, what privileges! Do not our privileges far exceed most of the people who walk past this church, or that drunk who lies on the street? Are we not sitting at the gospel door and around the cross? What is the Lord saying to you, sinner? "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," which reveals that His salvation goes far and wide, but also comes so near. God declares in Romans 13:11, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." God the Father's heart is desirous that this full and free gospel will be unfurled for the good of our souls; and how wonderful that the work of salvation is designated to the Holy Spirit, This guarantees the fact that the work will not fail. He will make room in the heart. He will apply from the Word of God that which is needed to bring a sinner down from his pride, down from his self-righteousness, into the valley of humiliation, into the valley of self-abasement, into the valley of self-condemnation, into the valley where the sinner justifies God and condemns self.

God says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." So purifying and purging is the blood of Christ that not only does it atone for all sin, but it washes away the deepest stains of sin. "Though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool." Not only is there sufficient blood in Emmanuel's veins for every sinner here today, but there is also a righteousness available for our disobedience. And God says as it were, "I desire to give it to you for the good of your soul. I desire not your death, nor your destruction, but that you would turn unto Me and live."

Do you know who appreciates such a message? A brokenhearted sinner, a condemned sinner, a bankrupt sinner, who has learned that he cannot bring anything to the Lord. He is gladdened with such a message.

If there is a soul here today that says, "Lord, my sins are higher than the

mountains, I see not any way whereby they could ever be washed away," the Lord says to you, "Though they be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." Sins, in the plural, point to every sin being cast into the sea of eternal forgetfulness, God declares: My Son has humbled Himself so low, has gone under the whole burden and mountain of sin and has borne it upon His back to Calvary's hill. There He has laid Himself down, and has shed His blood, sinner.

Oh, dear soul in our midst who stands afar off, who sees no possibility on your side, who has to say that everything seems cut off, here is the way of salvation for you. Here is the door which is open before you, today. May God's blessed Spirit pull you through that door and show you the fullness and sufficiency in Christ Jesus, and the power of His cleansing blood.

Congregation, the gospel message comes to you today, and will God still say when we leave this place, and when He sees us this week in our various ways and activities, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity"? Today He has said, "Come, let us reason together," but tomorrow He may say, "Depart from me ye cursed." AMEN.

Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem

Palm Sunday

Dr. J. R. Beeke

- Psalter 227: 1,3
- Read Luke 19:28-44
- Psalter 246
- Psalter 143:1-3
- Psalter 4

Our text words you can find in Luke 19:41-42: "And when He was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

With God's help we want to consider with you Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem. We will see:

1. Christ's love manifested in these tears
2. Christ's peace revealed through these tears
3. Christ's judgment pronounced during these tears

Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem — (1) Christ's love manifested in these tears; (2) Christ's peace revealed through these tears; (3) Christ's judgment pronounced during these tears.

I. Christ's Love Manifested in these Tears

We read, dear congregation, in John 1:11 that Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not." That was true already at the beginning of His sufferings, in Bethlehem; it was true in the continuation of His sufferings, in Nazareth; and it would again be true at the end of His sufferings, particularly on Palm Sunday as He draws near to Jerusalem, where He would give His life as a ransom for sinners. It was true from the beginning to the end of His life, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

Today is called Palm Sunday — the day Jesus entered the final week of His life and sufferings on earth. He had arrived in Bethany, as perhaps you know, boys and

girls, on Friday, one week before He died. He probably spent a quiet day on Saturday at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, but on Sunday morning He entered for the last time into Jerusalem triumphantly yet weeping. Jesus was going to celebrate the Passover, but He was also going in order to die. He had told His disciples before, as recorded in Luke 18:31-33, what things were going to happen to Him and their purpose: "Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death." And so, on that Sunday morning Jesus, knowing everything that would come upon Him, having loved His own and determined to love them to the end, went forward to face the great suffering that was awaiting Him in Jerusalem. And we must emphasize, congregation, that His foreknowledge of His sufferings in itself greatly increased His sufferings. For example, if you were to look back over your entire life, and think of the possibility that as a child, or as a young adult perhaps, you would have already known all the sufferings that would come upon you in God's providence, would you not acknowledge that it would have been too much for you to bear? But "Jesus...knowing all things that were to come upon him, *went forth*" (John 18:4). He, the innocent one, went forth to suffer, to agonize, to die. He went forth on a lowly colt, the foal of an ass, not only to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, but also because a colt was associated with the pursuit of peace rather than with the pursuit of war.

Most of the people missed the rich symbolism of Jesus' coming on a colt, an animal of peace, not to establish an *earthly* kingdom by way of war and victory, but a *heavenly* kingdom of eternal peace. Being moved by Jesus' miracles, they began to cry out as He came closer to Jerusalem, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Lk. 19:38).

No doubt there were some in the multitude who were confessing these truths from the heart, and were looking more for a sin-bearing Mediator than a political deliverer, but the majority were looking for deliverance from the Roman yoke. Thus, they took off their coats, cast them in the road before Jesus and carpeted the

road with their outer garments. Others cut down palm · branches and cast them before Him, paving His way. Still others waved large palm tree leaves. Even the children shouted, "Hosanna." *Hosanna* means save now; save we pray Thee. Hosanna is a word of supplication and adoration; it mingles prayer and praise. They said, "Hosanna: Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." At first glance, it appears they finally recognized Him as the Messiah, but then we read something astonishing. In the midst of all this praise and acknowledgment of Christ as Messiah, Jesus burst into weeping, The Greek word literally means that he *sobbed aloud*. He sobbed, as it were, *uncontrollably*; He broke into profuse weeping. What a remarkable scene: a shouting, praising multitude, side by side with a weeping, sobbing Jesus!

Three times in the Bible we read of Jesus weeping. We read of Him, as you know, weeping at the grave of Lazarus. We read in Hebrews 5:7 of His weeping, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears..." And we read of His weeping in our text as He came around the Mount of Olives, descending toward the city. About two-thirds of the way down, when He came in full view of Jerusalem, which was spread at His feet across the valley, He broke into loud weeping

Today a chapel, called "Chapel of the Tear," is erected on the place where Jesus wept. The entire chapel is in the shape of a tear. We have stood in that chapel; it is a remarkable view as you come around the Mount of Olives, right to that place where all Jerusalem still today is spread out before you in its beautiful splendor and with its ancient walls. Jesus saw Jerusalem with its magnificent temple. He knew the altar of God was there. He knew the mercy seat was there. He knew that Jerusalem had had unique opportunities to be saved and to serve God. He knew that the very people, who were crying out "Hosanna" early on this Sunday morning, by Friday would be crying out, "Away with Him; crucify Him, crucify Him." And Jesus knew the cruelty, the stubbornness, the proud character of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He wept; He sobbed because He loved the city. He loved the people and He knew that many of them were delaying, and hardening their hearts, refusing to be converted, and would die in their impenitence. While they were shouting and crying out, "Hosanna," He came near the city, beheld it, and

wept over it.

Jerusalem was and is a unique city. It had been a city particularly favored by God. It was called the "city of David," the "city of God," the city of the Lord." Jerusalem was the city to which the Lord had sent more warnings, more invitations, more prophets, and upon which He had bestowed more labor than any other city on the face of the earth. He had established His temple there. The altars of God were there, and yet that same city had slain His prophets with the sword, had stoned the messengers He had sent to them, and was now ready to crucify the Messiah, the Son of God. Is it any wonder that Jesus wept? We might well imagine that Jesus would weep when He came to Jerusalem, because of His own impending, unparalleled sufferings that would soon take place there. But that is not what our text says. He wept, not over Himself, but over it — over the city; over the souls of the people of the city. He wept tears over His enemies; He wept tears over lost souls. Oh congregation, what love is manifested in the tears of Jesus! He wept over a city whose people would crucify Him; He pitied a people who would not pity themselves; He wept over souls that would not weep for themselves! He wept over it.

II. Christ's Peace Revealed Through these Tears.

When God comes to us with His Word today, to you and to me, my dear friends, He comes with invitations; He comes with warnings; He comes with sovereign grace truth; He comes weeping over our souls. And must *you* not have to acknowledge, must *I* not have to confess, that He has more pity upon us than we have upon ourselves; that He weeps more over us and labors more upon us than we weep for ourselves and our children? Oh, do you not feel the love of God in His bringing His Word into your homes, on the pulpit, and into the schools? The Lord is taking pains with us, congregation. He is taking pains with you, my friend. He is calling you through His Word; He is weeping over you. "[Oh, that] thou hadst known...the things which belong unto thy peace!" Jesus wept, and as He wept, His words expressed what His tears contained. He said, "If thou hadst known," oh Jerusalem, "even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!" Oh, if only you had known; if only your blind eyes were open; if only you could see what you are doing, Jerusalem, in rejecting the Messiah and spurning the

gospel! Jesus' tears and words are full of reality and sincerity. These were no artificial tears, congregation. Jesus' heart was burning within Him. He sobbed over Jerusalem. He longed for Jerusalem's peace; not so much for peace from the Roman yoke which was secondary, but for *peace with God*, the inward peace of reconciliation through the blood He was about to shed.

John Calvin said the word *peace* here means all that is essential to true happiness. And oh, dear congregation, when the Lord labors with us by whatever means He does so, the same call goes out to us and says as it were, "Oh that thou hadst known, that thou couldst see the things that belong to thy peace!" Peace does not consist of comfortable platitudes, congregation. Rather, peace first begins with realizing that though we were created in a state of peace, we have chosen in Paradise to declare war against God. Shall we ever be brought back to peace with God, we must first come to realize that we are in a state of war with Him. "The carnal mind," said Paul, "is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

But Jerusalem would not see that in the gospel of Jesus God was coming to them, a warring, rebellious people, with love, with thoughts of peace and not of evil. Yes, and to us as well — to wretched, fallen sinners He proclaims His marvelous peace. Through Isaiah He offers peace to them that are afar off, and to them that are near; He proclaims peace through the cross. In the preaching of the gospel, God declares to every hearer, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).

God declares a gospel of peace. That peace, however, is not a peace upon our terms, but a peace upon *God's* terms. And what are God's terms? God's terms involve repentance and surrender. God's way of peace is the way of faith in a crucified Savior. But how can a sinner find peace when the sword of rebellion is still in his hand? This is possible only when and because the Holy Spirit comes and strikes the sword of rebellion out of a sinner's hand. He finds that sinner in a state of enmity with God; He shows a sinner his iniquity; He exposes his sin until the sinner confesses, "Yes, I have been saying all my life to God, 'Depart from me for I

have no pleasure in the knowledge of thy ways.'" But then God overpowers all that enmity. The sinner's sword is cast from his hand, and he bows in evangelical repentance, in a contriteness and complete surrender. He flees as a poor sinner to the Lord, asking, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" And then that sinner begins to realize what things belong to his peace — surrender to Christ, faith in Christ, and repentance before Christ. His eyes are opened to see his sin in God's sight; along with David in Psalm 51 he confesses, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned..." He laments his misery; he flees to God for pardon; he pleads for grace, God the Holy Spirit reveals to him in that way of peace that there is a Prince of Peace who came on a lowly colt, an animal of peace, who came meek and lowly to pay the price of sin. And oh, when the sinner's eyes go open to that precious, lowly colt-riding Jesus; when a sinner sees what Jesus has done in Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha, congregation, and the Holy Spirit reveals to that sinner that the things that belong to His peace are in Jesus, then a door goes open in the Valley of Achor, in the valley of his misery. He then hears the voice of God, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Oh, then the message of the gospel — sometimes suddenly, sometimes more gradually — warms that soul. All forms of self-righteousness are relinquished; the sinner sinks away as poor and needy at the foot of Calvary. Then he longs to hear in every sermon of the way of blood, of the way of peace, of the way of redemption, yes, to hear in the apostle's words, Christ "is our peace." And what joy the sinner then has when the Lord Jesus, by His Spirit, speaks unto him with divine power and authority, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give thee rest"! It is a wonderful experience to see Jesus displayed before the eye of faith, through the power of the Word of God, and received by gracious faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. Then that wounded soul gazes upon his wounded Savior and experiences in that moment that the law has lost its curse, Satan has lost his rights, and justice has lost its power of condemnation. The soul may believe and truly experience in that moment that there is a peace which passes all understanding. Then there will be, congregation, such an amazing degree of peace that it seems that even all of nature is in harmony with God.

And yet, the sense of even that revealed peace may not be abiding. For some, it

may well be: For some, when Christ is revealed, He may also be immediately applied. For others, when Christ is revealed, their joy is great, but when the conscious nearness of the Lord diminishes, they fear that though the way of the purging of guilt has been opened, guilt itself has not yet been discharged. They learn to cry for a fresh application of that blood upon the doorpost of their consciences. The blood has been revealed, but the peace treaty must be signed and must be sealed to their consciences. To that end, the Lord leads His children back to Paradise to show them how they had willfully broken His covenant, how they had become full of sin, yes, that their whole being is therefore corrupt. And there at the scene of crime — where they have spilt, as it were, their blood in breaking the covenant of works — there God shows them that there is no hope of peace in anything of them. There He reveals to them the blood of the covenant of grace so that *Christ's* blood, His pure blood, becomes their salvation. All their own sinful efforts are washed away by the powerful cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

In a word, God enters into a peace treaty with a sinner. The Holy Spirit. imprints God's forgiveness upon the soul. He takes a gospel promise, whichever one it may be, and dips that promise in the precious blood of Jesus, applies that promise to the soul, and pronounces and seals that sinner free in accord with a pronouncement of God the Father as holy Judge for the sake and righteousness of Jesus. This sinner experiences that the Father declares on grounds of satisfied justice that He will no longer be angry nor wroth with him. Divine rebuke is cast behind the Father's back, fear and anxiety disappear for a time, and the believer confesses with Paul in Romans 8:1, "I have heard Him speak through His Word, that 'there is...now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'" Oh, what a blessing, congregation, to know the things that belong to our peace, to know the application of the finished, atoning work of Jesus! That is something that every sinner must covet. Blessed are they who know the power of that blood.

But Jesus must conclude with tears: These things "are hid from [Jerusalem's] eyes." The people saw the miracles and received the bread, but they did not see with the eyes of faith the Prince of Peace, the way of peace, the beauty of peace, the fullness of peace, nor the glory of peace. They were blinded in that they would not see that they were at war with God. They never acknowledged they had need

for peace with God through Jesus Christ. Since they did not see their malady, they had no need for the remedy. And that is exactly, congregation, our dreadful state by nature. When we are unconverted, our greatest obstacle is not our past, actual sins, but our greatest obstacle is our blindness to our misery and our unbelief, our refusing to believe in Jesus Christ. Our greatest obstacle is precisely that we think our own merits are the foundation of our peace. The unconverted are often convinced that they have peace, but the obstacle is that they are resting upon false peace. That's the misery of our misery — *false peace*.

Dear flock, there is no true peace outside of Jesus Christ and His cleansing blood. If you insist on continuing to embrace false peace and find a foundation for the soles of your feet apart from Jesus, you will be sorely deceived in the Day of Judgment. Oh, I fear there are many who are standing on the brink of hell thinking that all is well! But when that Day of . days comes, all peace which does not rest upon the blood of Jesus will be eternally shattered. That is what Jesus says in verses 43 and 44: "For the days shall come upon thee, that .. thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." But we will consider that in our third thought, *Christ's judgment pronounced during these tears*, after we first sing.

APPLICATION

III. Christ's Judgment Pronounced During these Tears

Jesus wept over Jerusalem not because of the sufferings that He saw coming upon Him in the next week, but especially because He knew that the consequences of Jerusalem rejecting and crucifying Him as the Lord of glory in that week would bear disastrous eternal results for them. Jesus knew with the eye of divine omniscience that which was awaiting Jerusalem in 70 A.D., some thirty to forty years after He was to die. He foresaw what is recorded in verses 43 and 44.

We know from Josephus what actually happened in that terrible time, when Titus came to destroy Jerusalem. He surrounded and trapped the city. Six hundred thousand died of starvation. Some family members went so far as to eat one

another. In all, 1,100,000 died by the time the city was taken by Roman swords. Three hundred thousand were crucified all around the city, so many that Josephus said they could scarcely find sufficient wood in the area to make the crosses. Another 97,000, especially women, were carried into captivity. Jerusalem was left a heap of ruins, a blood bath. The whole city was leveled except for three towers and part of the western wall. There was scarcely one stone left upon another.

Jesus saw this day approaching. He saw that this would be the fulfillment of what His own Jewish people would say later in the coming week: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). Is it any wonder that Jesus wept? That His human nature was sorely oppressed? "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

And then Jesus concludes, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." What does that mean, boys and girls — "Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation"? Well, the time of God's visiting us is that time when His offers of mercy are still with us. Jerusalem had had a special season of offered mercy. God had sent her more prophets than any other city. He had put His throne, His mercy seat, in that city. He had provided them altars dripping with blood that proclaimed the gospel. He had sent them priests who instructed them in the law. Moreover, He sent John the Baptist as a forerunner of Jesus, and ultimately sent the Son of God Himself, the Messiah, to visit Jerusalem and preach to them about the gospel, the good news, and the kingdom of heaven. The greatest miracles the world has ever seen were done in Jerusalem, The most wonderful preaching that ever transpired was delivered in Jerusalem. The clearest calls to repentance that were ever heard were heard in Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,... how often would I have gathered thy children...as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Instead, highly privileged Jerusalem would cry out, "Away with Him; crucify Him." Oh, how solemn are Jesus' words, "Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Congregation, this is a very deep and mysterious subject; yet it is a clear message in the Bible. There are special seasons when the Lord visits a nation, a church, a family, an individual, with special manifestations of His presence; there are special invitations, special times and places where His grace is peculiarly

offered, or times when special warnings and admonitions are given. And eternity will reveal — that is what Jesus is implying here — eternity will reveal that those who have rejected and neglected such seasons often face turning points in their lives, which, if glossed over, will lead them to ultimate and eternal ruin. There are millions, boys and girls, young people, fathers and mothers, even now in hell who must say, "There were special times in my life when God came near with His Word, when He came close with the overtures of the gospel, when He drew near with serious warnings to my conscience or with serious afflictions in my life, but I pushed them all away, and now those special seasons burn in my agonizing conscience as a fire that cannot be quenched." Oh dear congregation, rejected times of visitation, rejected overtures of the gospel, of peculiar offers of mercy and privileges from God, will be the heaviest charges of a righteous God which a never-dying soul in hell will have to bear for all eternity! Oh, what shall it be to have to confess in hell, "Lord, I have to admit that my own soul — by refusing thy special seasons, Thy special times of offered grace — has provoked Thee to leave me alone forever"! This is what Jesus is weeping about over Jerusalem. Jerusalem had rejected the day of her visitation; she had rejected the prophets, rejected John the Baptist, but most of all, rejected Jesus Himself.

Oh congregation, the tears of a weeping Jesus on the lower part of the Mount of Olives will do more to damn the souls of Jerusalem sinners in hell forever than all the threatenings of Mount Sinai! The tears of Mount Olives shall be more vengeful on the Day of Judgment than the threatenings of Mount Sinai. Tears of Jesus have a more condemning power than all the curses of the law. Jesus says as much, doesn't He, when He says, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation"? Oh, what a sight, congregation — a weeping Jesus, weeping over sinners who would not weep over themselves! This alone will cause all Jerusalem and every unconverted sinner who has lived under the proclamation of the gospel to say in the Day of days, "Mountains, hills, cover me from the wrath of the Lamb of God." Did you hear it, congregation? *The wrath of the Lamb of God*. In our text the Lamb is meek and lowly, riding upon a colt, a symbol of peace to proclaim peace to them that are far and to them that are near. But on the Day of days, upon those who rejected Him and used Him for earthly deliverance, but never needed Him for a spiritual Mediator and Savior, the wrath of the Lamb shall fall! The tears of Jesus,

the overtures of the gospel, and the special seasons of visitation shall be a hell within hell to those who have rejected the unconditional gospel of grace.

And so, my dear friends, I cannot close this sermon without a personal application, May I ask you, does Jesus weep over you because of your rejection, or by grace, may He rejoice over you because of your surrender? When, in the past, He has come into your life in special seasons, has it led you to repentance? Many say, "Well, there was a time in my life when nothing went right; everything went wrong," and yet they do not turn to God in these special times when He visits them with affliction; rather, they cast away these times of divine visitation. Dear friend, let us never forget that times of great trial, times of great affliction, times of multiple needs, are times of divine visitation. They are particular times when God calls us to repentance, to dependency, to take refuge to Him.

Boys and girls and young people, the time of your youth is a time of special visitation. It is a time when God comes to you tenderly, when His rich promises are placed before you, promises that adults do not have. Proverbs 8:17 promises you that "those that seek me early shall find me." When you are a boy or a girl, a teenager, it is a special time, before you are ensnared with all the cares of the world. Children, teenagers, are you seeking God in this special time, when your heart is still tender? God draws near to you and in Mark 10:14 says to you, "Suffer the little children, [the young children, the tempted teenagers], to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

It is a special time, too, when God begins to work in our relatives, when others are being saved around us; when friends and family whom we have known for years begin to fall under the power of the gospel, Oh, it is God drawing near then also to us, saying, "I am mighty to save." Dear friend, bow before it is too late.

Again, it is a special season of visitation when God sends an ambassador, a minister, to proclaim death in Adam and life in Christ. No matter who or what or how many faults or sins cling and cleave to that ambassador, the *Word* goes out, congregation, and it is that Word of which you and I have to give an account one day. You have been invited from this pulpit by reading and preaching services; by present and past servants you have been urged to flee to God while it is still the day of His visitation. Must Jesus yet weep over you?

God has done wonders in our midst, congregation, also in these past years. We have seen great trials, some self-inflicted. We are unworthy and yet we cannot deny that God has been at work. Some of you have had a father or a mother convicted and converted by the Word. Others of you have had a child who has abandoned worldly ways and is crying after the Lord. Oh congregation, do not cast away the hour of visitation! Do not despise the day of small things. Do not reject the movements of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the flock, but pray to God Almighty, "Oh God, Thou who art working here and working there, come in *my* heart, come in *my* life, and cause me to bow beneath the power and the authority, the warnings and the invitations of Thy Holy Word." Oh, what a question this is, "Does Jesus rejoice over me, His work in me, or does He weep over my rejection of Him?"

Maybe there are some in our midst who say, "I fear that the time of visitation is past for me. My hair is gray, my years are numbered, my season of privileges is past. In the past my conscience has spoken loudly. I had times in my life when the Word of God came near to me. But now I fear that I have not remembered and did not know the time of God's visitation. Now all is hard and cold, and the day of grace, I fear, is past." Oh, my dear, elderly friends, what must I say to you? This I will say to you: There were those whose hands were red with the blood of Jesus on Good Friday, but who some weeks later were in the multitude of three thousand who cried out, when they realized what they had done, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter, oh that restored Peter who was commissioned to feed poor little lambs, beginners in grace — he did not pick out the elderly in that multitude and say, "Your day of visitation is past." He did not say, "There is nothing to do because the door of mercy is shut." But Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ." He preached the name of Jesus to them, even to hardened, aged, Jerusalem sinners who had counted the blood of Jesus an unclean thing. And today, congregation, I cannot close this message without saying to Jerusalem sinners in our midst: Perhaps there are deep scars of sin, perhaps secret sin, perhaps tragic sin, but oh, today I declare to you, Jerusalem sinner, you had thought the gospel was too impossible for you, that God could never have mercy upon you, but today I say to you, "It is still, this very hour, the day of your visitation. Even as God spoke to His people in Ezekiel 33:11, still

today God declares to you as it were, 'I have as yet, sinner, no pleasure in your death, but that ye should turn from your evil ways and live: for why will you die?'" Oh my elderly friend, do not be a Felix; do not leave this place trembling, saying to God, "Go thy way...when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee," but hear the Word of God, hear the invitation of God, "*Today*, [it is never too late] *today*, when ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

And dear child of God, who has made you to differ? Who has drawn you for the first time or by renewal to the blood of Jesus? What hast thou that thou hast not received, and if thou hast received it, wherefore dost thou boast? But oh dear believer, ask that God may turn you into a weeping intercessor, to be like Jesus, to weep over the lost souls around you, in' your household, among your friends, in the midst of the congregation, but also in our society. May you feel like the apostle Paul: I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart for my brethren. And like Jeremiah, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9:1).

Young and old, the Prince of Peace is still willing to save sinners, even chief sinners. You cannot convert yourself; you are dead; you are unable; yes, you are even unwilling. That is all true, but ask God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Plead for grace to bow before Him, to flee to Him, to surrender *all* to Him. Strive to enter in at the strait gate, Who can tell? Who can tell if a sovereign electing God might not bless it? Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not? AMEN.