

God in the midst of His people

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[0 : 0 0] Return with me now for a little time as we meditate together from a portion we have read from God's Word, the prophecies of Zechariah, on the ninth chapter, reading again at the sixteenth verse.

And the Lord, their God, shall save them in that day as the flock of his sheep, of his people. For they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.

For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty. The Church of God, my friends, is the constant object of God's concern and of his attention.

Every conceivable happening and event in time is directed towards the furtherance and the glory of the Church.

And when we speak of the Church of God, we are thinking of the cause of God, the cause of the gospel, the cause of righteousness, not of any particular denomination as such.

[1 : 2 5] Speaking with all reverence, we cannot conceive of God looking upon the Church in terms of denominations.

The Church visible at any time is not necessarily the Church of God, but rather the Church invisible, the Church as seen by the eye of God himself.

But this doesn't render denominations invalid, not for a moment. Denominations are what make up the Church Catholic, the universal, worldwide Church of God.

And we know, of course, that denominations have for centuries formed an integral part of the ecclesiastical system. Contrary to popular belief, the so-called divisions of the Christian Church are not scandals but blessings.

Never was the professing Church more scandalous than when it was largely a unity during the times of the Dark Ages, before the Reformation Day dawned.

[2 : 4 5] We are merely saying this in a passing to give the lie to those who are constantly harping on this theme of the scandals of our divisions.

God is scandalized infinitely more by heresy and unsound and immoral beliefs and practices than he ever was or ever is by ecclesiastical barriers.

These barriers have in very many cases been erected in order to safeguard the truth of God and the gospel of his grace. Now the terms of this chapter of Scripture were spoken initially to a people who had been delivered from physical captivity or who were in the process of being delivered from that captivity.

And here in the second part from verse 9 of this chapter, God speaks of an infinitely greater deliverance which he would effect for his church.

The deliverance that he would effect through Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And there he calls upon his church at every stage in history to rejoice in this matter.

[4 : 1 0] 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 Anath, and upon a court the fall of Anath.

And so it is against this background of the deliverance which God was going to effect for his church and for his people that we are to see and to understand the promises that follow in this chapter and particularly in the words that we have before us in these verses.

And so that is emphasized, I think for us, first of all, the greatness of the divine activity, the greatness of what God will do. You see, this is what is being taught that the church's king will come forth in the exercise of his kingly office and this is to call forth rejoicing and gladness of heart on the part of the church of God.

This is what the chapter is largely all about. It speaks of the comprehensive doing of God in his church and in the world.

We are told that he will subdue a people to himself, for instance. This is a picture that is being presented to us.

[5 : 53] The king here is riding forth, having salvation, and he says, I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem and the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall speak peace unto the heathen and his dominion shall be from sea to sea.

An echo of Psalm 72, his large and great dominion shall from sea to sea extend. His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

This, if you like, is the initial part of the kingly activity, the kingly office of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ as our Redeemer, says the Charyism, exercises the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in bringing men and women into subjection at his footstool.

This is the Messianic 45th. The psalm is a great exercise, the great activity of the king of Zion.

Thy narrows chargably pierce the heart of the enemies of the king and into thy subjection the people down do bring.

[7 : 15] The Zion, the church of God, cannot but rejoice when this happens just that she cannot but lament and mourn when there are scant evidences of this taking place within her borders.

We have this joy surely expressed in Psalm 126 to take but one instance where the church there is represented to us as going forth weeping but coming back with rejoicing.

The Lord saying, the Lord hath done great things for us whence joy to us is brought. And here is the promise that we have in his words that he will subdue a people unto himself.

The king in his authority and in his glory and power going forth to subdue and to make a people willing in a day of his power. And then we are told that he will reign over and fight for his people and for his church.

The Lord shall be seen over them and his arrow shall go forth at the lightning and the Lord shall blow the trumpet and shall go with full winds of the south.

[8 : 31] And this is precisely in accordance with the promise that he made to his covenant people when he delivered them from the bondage of Egypt.

The Lord your God goeth before you. He shall fight for you according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes. Deuteronomy chapter 1.

And when he goes before his people he blows mightily on the trumpet of his word and his trumpet never gives an uncertain sound and never gives false directions to those to whom it speaks.

And on his people we know that he lays the obligation he lays the duty to incline their ear to hear what God the Lord will speak because he will speak peace unto his saints.

Christ as our Redeemer exercises the office of a king in ruling and defending us. This is how he manifests his power and his glory on the behalf of his church.

[9 : 45] He shall reign over them and fight for them. We see too that he will defend and preserve his people. The Lord of hosts shall defend them.

Verse 15. He is he is the whole defense says the psalmist in Psalm 68. The Lord our God he is a sun and a shield he gives grace and he gives glory to the psalmist elsewhere.

The defending activity of the church's king is I think beautifully expressed in the 121st Psalm in these words behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is thy keeper the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand the sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night the Lord shall preserve thee from all evil he shall preserve thy soul.

The preserving grace of the king is a most marvelous reality in the experience of the church and people of God. And he will have he will secure his people utterly.

[11 : 03] This is also what we are told in this context. This is his ultimate purpose of grace to secure their salvation completely and utterly to save them to the uttermost.

And this says the prophet is what he will effect the Lord their God shall save them in that day in the day of the consummation of all things as the flock of his people.

The Old Testament scriptures you remember conclude with this beautiful and confident note namely they shall be mine says the Lord of hosts in that day when I shall make up my jewels and I will spare them as the father spareth his own son that serveth him.

They shall be secure they shall be brought with gladness great and mercy on every side into the palace of the king and there they shall abide.

So we have an emphasis laid here on the greatness of the divine activity in the church the greatness of what God is doing. There is a constant emphasis throughout the word of God the glory of what he is doing and the glory and the excellence of his work.

[12 : 31] But then too we see I think in these words the greatness of what this activity will effect in the church and in the people of God.

Here in these words he speaks of his church and he says concerning them they shall be as the stones of a crown lifted up as an ensign upon his land.

As a result of the divine work the divine activity this is what will be effected in them says the prophet by the spirit.

This is what will result from God's hand having been laid upon them and God being actively engaged for them and in them. And in effect these words are saying that God's people are esteemed precious by him.

The stones of a crown are of course the precious and the valuable stones which are inserted into that crown in order to beautify it and in order to magnify its beauties.

[13 : 44] And the people of the church of God the believing church of God they are as jewels they are represented to us as jewels in the crown of the Lord Jesus Christ.

the crown is placed on the head of the sovereign in this country when as you know the latter is crowned and is reputed that the gems and the jewels which are in the sovereign's crown are of priceless value.

Now that the Lord esteems his people precious is the clear teaching of the holy scriptures. God looks upon them and God says concerning them by the mouth of the prophet since thou wast precious in my sight thou hast been honorable and I have loved thee.

And again through the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations chapter 4 he makes reference to the precious sons of Zion comparable to fine gold.

God reckons them as precious on the basis of what they are not in themselves of what they are in the head in Jesus Christ their head and what he has accomplished in them and what he has accomplished for them by his grace.

[15 : 13] But then too it is evident I think from these words that they shall display or manifest their brightness for they shall be as the stones of a crown says the prophet lifted up as an ensign upon the land verse 16 and you know yourselves that when a sovereign is in residence in any given place immediately the royal standard is hoisted and flies during her time there if she goes if she motors through a city through a city or any other city the royal standard is flown from her car so that all will know that a royal personage is passing by.

You see my dear friend what we are to read into that when the king of kings is in residence within his church and with his people and in his people his standard ought to be displayed in them and by them.

You see they are the glory of the king himself for he has been pleased to make them so and he reckons them as such.

he sets them up as an ensign upon his land and he has given to them a banner that they might display that banner because of the truth and to which one of his believing people he says let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven.

the great and constant danger is that the jewels God's jewels become tarnished and dull so that their brightness does not catch the eye as was intended by himself.

[17 : 16] This of course is the insisting and the untiring aim and activity of the adversary to so tarnish them in their lives and in their witness that their brightness does not shine forth as it was intended by God himself to do.

But here he says that they will display their brightness they shall be as the stones of a crown lifted up as an ensign upon his land would to God that this were true of ourselves as a church as individual believers that the brightness that grace has wrought would so flow forth from the people of God as that they would be lifted up as an ensign upon his land.

But then too I think the words indicate that they shall shine forth in brilliance forever and ever.

For it says Daniel the prophet in verse 12 they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.

And it's also I think it's suggested in Malachi chapter 3 in words we have already quoted they shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels.

[18 : 44] He is there clearly referring to the day of the consummation of all things when he shall bring his church home to an eternal abode.

And surely one of the outstanding characteristics of the day of the church's coronation or the day of the church's glory is the brightness of that day.

And we have this I think underscored by John in Revelation 22 where he says there shall be no night there and they need no candle neither light of the sun for the Lord God giveth them light and they shall reign forever and ever.

There will be no dimness in themselves for all that occasion dimness in them in this world. has been removed they will have been made perfect in holiness and have entered into glory.

They shall appear and before him and be like him for they shall see him as he is. This then is the greatness surely of what God's activity will effect in the people and in the church of God.

[20 : 03] The greatness of God's work cannot but have a great result and that result while it ought to be seen in this world in a measure will not be fully seen until they are brought with gladness great and mercy on every side into the palace of the king above.

but then we have to hear the in the third place the greatness of the grace that will do this the greatness of the grace that does this and this in effect is what we have I think in the exclamation of the prophet here in verse 17 how great is his goodness and how great is his beauty you see my dear friend the grace of God is both the goodness and the beauty of God both things are embraced within this there is goodness and there is grace in fullness there is goodness and there is beauty in fullness in the grace of our king one thinks for instance of the sacrifice which God's goodness made you know the grace of our

Lord Jesus Christ if you like you know the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for you's sake he became poor that ye through his poverty might be made rich and again the apostle Paul says writing to Titus the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men teaching us a denying ungodliness and worldly lust we should live soberly in this present world there you have the goodness of God the sacrifice which the goodness of God made and showed forth in the world we had of course in the very first promise that God made to his church that of the seed of the woman there would come one who would bruise the head of the serpent and greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends but God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners

Christ died for the ungodly the sacrifice which his goodness made but also one thinks of the extent to which his goodness extends in respect to a world lying in its sin you see it is the extensiveness of this goodness I think that grips the prophet in this context when it refers to the grace of the king as extending from sea to sea and from the river even to the ends of the earth they shall come in other words from the north and from the south and from the east and from the west and they shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of our God the word of God refers to the company of the redeemed as a great company which no man can number from every tribe and kindred and people and nation and so we think of the extent to which his goodness extends how great is his goodness one thinks also of the barriers which his goodness overcomes in effecting a true work of regeneration in the hearts and lives of men

I think we have the essence of this in those familiar and scriptural words by grace are you saved through faith not of yourselves it is the gift of God you see my dear friends the greatest barrier of all to the goodness or the grace of God is simply man's own naturalness he will not have this grace he will not have this goodness the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God why why does he reject him why does he repudiate him because they are foolishness to him the cross is an unmitigated folly it is a stumbling block and an embarrassment to this man to the natural man but by the power of God his objections are often overborne the barriers which his goodness overcomes in the operation of his grace how great is his goodness we think of his goodness we think of the duration to which his goodness lasts if we can speak in such terms if we can speak of eternity as enduring our goodness as the prophet

[25 : 36] Hosea observes in chapter six it's as a morning cloud and as the early dew would go away it vanishes from view ere it makes its appearance it evaporates in a moment of time and is no more how like man and how like everything pertaining to man but in contrast the mercy or the goodness of the Lord endureth forever it is from everlasting it is to everlasting it is surprising then as prophets to say how great is his goodness and his grace is also his beauty one thinks for instance of the beauty of his character as the one who is supreme the one who is holy harmless undefiled separate from sinners

God is the holy other as it has been expressed in so far as the glory of his character is concerned he is high above all things that are on this earth he is glorious in holiness he is fearful in praises he does wonders you remember how the prophet Isaiah how he saw him as high and lifted up with his strain filling the temple above his glory fills the immensity of heaven and of earth the Lord the psalmist calls upon a church in beauty of his holiness oh do the Lord adore and so then we think one thinks very properly I think of the beauty of his character for that is what we have in his grace his character revealed his character demonstrated his character in the most unique manner made known to those who are unworthy of the least of mercies from his hand one thinks of the beauty of his faithfulness it is said that a man's word is his bond and you can overlook many faults in a man when you can overlook when you are assured that he is a man of his word and whatever else may fail that his word will stand and yet we know my friends that the very finest characters among men are frail they are subject to failure in his direction as well as in every other direction and they may fail us when we least expect it but not so the one whose word is himself and when he says

I have betrothed thee unto me forever yea I have betrothed thee unto me in faithfulness that is as sure and as certain as the very throne upon which he himself sits I have betrothed thee unto me in faithfulness we are presented there with the beauty of his faithfulness the immovability of the faithfulness of God and here we have of course his grace again being made known his grace shining forth and flowing forth in that faithfulness which he has made known concerning himself love and one thinks of course of the above all perhaps one thinks of the beauty of his love for there is nothing in heaven above or upon earth beneath of such glory and such excellence as the divine love

God is this he is love supremely and he is love essentially he is love eternally and he is love unchangeably he is love unsearchingly and he is love uncomprehendingly he is love infinitely and he is love exhaustively this is the essential beauty of God this if you like is the Godness of God this is the eternal vision which his glorified church will have of him through the timeless ages of eternity the love of the God and the love from which everything stemmed in her experience thine eye shall see the king in his beauty in the beauty of his love in the beauty of all that he is thou shalt see the land of our distances and as one has so beautifully and poetically put it the bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegroom's face

I shall not gaze on glory but on my king of grace of grace not on the crown he giveth but on his pierced hand the lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land how great is his goodness how great is his beauty as we have this so magnificently expressed in what he has done in what he is doing and in what he will yet do in the fullness of his own time how great indeed is his goodness and how great is his beauty how glorious his grace may God add his blessing to our meditation upon his word shall we pray O Lord our God open our eyes we beseech thee so that we each one of us may behold wondrous things out of thy law wondrous things concerning thyself our king and our lord our saviour and our redeemer for the wonders of what thou art and the wonders of what thou hast done and are doing and will yet do are constantly passing before our eyes in thy truth but yet

[32 : 44] O God apart from the spirit's illuminating activity we remain blind to them open thou mine eyes O God that I may see wondrous things out of that word be with us we beseech thee as we go from this place come forth again into our midst in the evening as we meet and make thy glory known as thy word is proclaimed here unto the ends of the earth and thou shalt have the praise and the glory both now and forever Amen