

We live in a very evil time, Christians. Dark days that make us uncertain about what the future may hold. And I'm sure all of you can remember a time probably not all that long ago when things were better, when things were generally brighter than they are now. And that can leave us wondering: how did we get to this point? Because we certainly never expected this to happen. We never could have predicted that we would end up where we are. And yet here we are. How did this happen? What hope can we find for the future? What days are ahead of us? And it is this uncertainty, Christians, about our future that leaves us wondering and even leaves us afraid, prisoners of fear in the face of an uncertain future. Where can we find hope in the midst of all of it? And it's not that we don't trust God. We know that God can do great things, and we know that he has done great things for us in the past. We know that he's quite capable of doing something about it. But the question we have to ask ourselves is, will he do something about it? Is he going to do something about this situation that we find ourselves in? It is that question, is God going to do something, that can leave us fearful and afraid of what the future may hold.

And that is certainly the situation that Israel finds itself in our Old Testament reading for today: wondering what God was going to do, wondering what the future was going to be like. They knew everything that God had done for them. They knew all of these wonderful things, but they were still prisoners of fear. Because consider where they are here in the book of Zechariah. The people of Israel have just come back from exile. God has brought them back from all of these far countries just like he said he was going to. Things seem to be looking up. The Babylonians are gone. The Persians have been raised up in their place. And it was Cyrus, the first Persian king, that God used to keep his promises to bring his people back to their homeland. Things are looking positive. Things are looking great! And even more than this, they've started to rebuild the temple so they can worship God just like their fathers did, worship God the way that he wants to be worshiped. Everything seemed to be looking pretty good.

But then it all starts going downhill. Because it turned out that the kingdom they came back to was nothing like the kingdom they remember. It was much, much smaller. They can probably remember their fathers telling them of the days of Solomon when the kingdom was huge, when it covered all of this land and Israel ruled over this whole area. Those were the glory days. Those were the wonderful days. But they're all gone. Now the kingdom is much, much smaller. Is this the future that God was going to give to his people? Is this what they had to look forward to? And to make it worse than that, the people who possessed of that land that should've belonged to Israel were all of Israel's enemies. The Philistines, Sidon and Tyre, and Syria, Israel's enemies from ancient days, were the ones who were living where Israel should've been. What a disaster that must've seemed to them! To not only not have their kingdom, but have all of their enemies be the ones who had it instead. Was this the future that they had to look forward to? But it was worse than that still. Because those same people, the ancient enemies of Israel, were also attacking Israel all over again. It was because of them and their constant harassment that all work on the temple has come to an end. They're not building it anymore, because the people just won't leave them alone. Is this the future that Israel had to look forward to? Where was the hope in the midst of all of this?

And this is why in Zechariah here the people of Israel are described like people hiding in a waterless pit, hiding in a dry cistern, hoping to not be found, hoping that their enemies won't

discover them, caught up in being prisoners of fear, fearful of what could happen, fearful of the days ahead. Where was their hope? What would God do for them?

And Christians, do we not also find ourselves in a similar situation, wondering what the future might hold? Maybe you're wondering and worried about the growth of evil in this country. Things we never would've even talked about, let alone thought of, a few years ago have now become commonplace, as if it's the most natural thing in the world. What kind of future do we have to look forward to? What kind of future do our children have to look forward to? Maybe you're fearful of the loss of community which seems to be happening in our nation. People just don't get along with one another. We're always at each other's throats. We're always fighting against one another. We never seem to do anything together as a community anymore. What kind of future do we have even for our local community? Maybe you're worried about the government and how it seems to be always trying to get more and more power for itself, how it seems like our freedoms are slipping right out of our fingers. What kind of future we going to have to face with that kind of a thing? What will we have in the days ahead? Or maybe we're even worried about a coming economic collapse. Because I can tell you pretty honestly that if we keep up these patterns we been doing up to this point, especially with our government, we're going to have to pay the cost sooner rather than later. Hard times may very well be ahead of us. Are we prepared for that? Are we ready for what may be difficult days ahead? Where is our hope in the midst of all of this? Where do we find hope in the face of such a future?

But maybe all you want to do is just hide in your own kind of cistern, right? It's not my problem. It's someone else's problem. Let the world deal with itself. I will go on living the way that I always have. Then it can be somewhere else. I don't have to think about it. But does that really give us hope, Christians? Is that really an answer to the problems which we face? It's actually not an answer at all. Because what will we do when we can no longer hide? What will we do when that problem is in front of us and we can't get away from it? Then we will need a real answer. Then we will need a real hope.

But Christians, God gives us hope. God gives us a real answer. He gives us hope even for an uncertain future. And that is exactly what he is doing in our reading for today: giving the people of Israel the hope which they needed in the face of all of their problems. This is why he says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you." The king of Israel would come to his people, and he would bring to them a kingdom unlike any other kingdom they had ever known. They could look forward to this, knowing that God would give them victory even in the face of their uncertainty, that God would give them victory even over their enemies. "Righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." This king would not be like a king they had known. He would be something new, something totally different. Not coming with might and with power, coming in war, but coming as a humble king mounted on a donkey, one who would be a king from above and not a king of this world. "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations." Think of it! This kingdom would not be established by battles and wars. This kingdom would be established by peace! He would come speaking peace. And he would not only speak peace to Israel, he would speak peace to her enemies as well, so that they would not be destroyed, but transformed! Changed so that together as one people, they would come to worship

the Lord in spirit and in truth. All of these problems which were around them would be changed into praise and the worship of the Lord. "His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." What a kingdom it would be! Far greater than anything they had ever known, greater even than Solomon. It would be a kingdom which would not only be over the land they remembered, but the whole earth would come to worship the Lord. Every nation would bow before this king. Every people would come before him. "As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit." God would do this. God had promised it, and he would carry out that promise. And they knew that this would happen because he was bound by blood. By the blood of that covenant, God was saying, "I will not fail to do what I have promised to do. I am bound. I cannot change my mind. This will happen. And I will set you free from your waterless pit. No longer shall you be prisoners of fear, but prisoners of hope." Hope for the future. Hope for what God would do for his people. Hope because God is faithful to his promises.

And Christians, God fulfilled every one of these promises in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who came riding into Jerusalem on this day mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Jesus comes speaking peace, speaking the Gospel, the Gospel which transforms, the Gospel which changes, the Gospel which brings all the world together. And that victory will come through peace, but it will be a victory which is complete, a victory which will be over all things. And Christ's kingdom over all the earth shall go on forever. That is the hope that God gave to his people, the future which they had in him.

And Christians, your King comes to you today speaking that same peace, speaking that same Gospel. All things that you struggle with now will be put under his feet. And the victory of Christ will be complete. No longer will we have to be wondering about what the future might hold. Because God will overcome all things. And he has bound himself to this promise by a greater promise, by a greater blood than that even which he gave to his Old Testament people: the blood of his Son Jesus Christ, the blood which has been poured out upon you for the forgiveness of your sins and the same blood which is given to you to take within yourself for that same of forgiveness of sins. By that blood God has sworn that he will give us peace, that he will give us victory through his Son Jesus Christ.

So all of these problems that we face today, the things that we worry about and that the future that we worry about, we can speak up against it. We can work, do something about it, because we know that Jesus is victorious. We know that no matter what happens Jesus will reign over all things. The world will fail, but Christ will be all in all. So return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope! The Lord declares to you today that he will restore to you double. God has bound himself by the blood of Christ. He will not fail in his promises. Jesus will be victorious over all things, so that we have a hope and a future.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we give you thanks that you have given us your Son Jesus Christ to be king over all things. Help us always to trust in you, not being anxious about what the future may hold, but knowing that your Son Jesus Christ will have all things under his feet and that he will be all in all on the last day. In his name we pray. Amen.