

## Zedekiah's Ghost

Call to Worship: Psalm 146

1st Scripture: Jeremiah 38:14-28

2nd Scripture: Jeremiah 52:1-11

Hymn #678- *Christ Shall Have Dominion*

Hymn #218- *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*

Hymn #705- *Grace, Grace, God's Grace*

### Introduction

Probably most of us have seen the classic Christmas movie, "A Christmas Carol," taken from the best selling novel written by Charles Dickens. One of the sobering points of the movie comes early on, when Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by his late business partner, Jacob Marley, before, and as a prerequisite to, being visited by the three spirits of Christmas past, present and future.

Those of you who have seen the movie can recall the eerie sounds of rumbling chains and clanging weights, as Jacob approached Scrooge in his bedroom. And in the course of their interaction, where Jacob attempts to warn Scrooge to change his ways before it is too late, he explains that those heavy chains, weighted down by several weights, were the burden that he had to carry and bear everywhere he went, as he roamed the spiritual realm, to and fro, across the earth. The implication was that the greater the wrongs done in the body, if not dealt with by genuine repentance (when alive), the more weight that would be added to your already heavy chains, following death. It was some sort of a never ending purgatory, of sorts, I guess. And so, the ailing and moaning Jacob, came to warn Scrooge, whose chains would later be much larger and heavier (if he stayed on his present course), seeing that he was still alive and succeeded Mr. Marley by many years already.

In some illustrative sense, perhaps we can borrow that illustration, as we read the Bible and consider the lives of those revealed therein, since, though having long left this world, they speak to us today (through God's Word). Indeed, they are meant to do so, as their actions, and God's responses to their actions, teach us much about God, and about man's relationship and accountability to God throughout all ages.

This morning, I want you to imagine, that, in some way, one man; a man hardly spoken about (when you consider the hot topics and most well known characters in the Scriptures),

should speak to you today. In the pages of Scripture, we can tap into this one man's life, in so far, as it is here revealed to us, and hopefully draw principled benefit from it, for us today, as we continue to live and exist in this short life. That man is "King Zedekiah."

In order to hopefully, effectively do this, I want to begin by giving you a brief, super abridged biography of (as well as the historical background surrounding) Zedekiah, followed by a highlighting of certain specific facts, taken out of that biography, before bringing it home to us, as a relevant means of warning and edification.

### **I. Who Was Zedekiah?**

Zedekiah comes onto the scene of biblical history at a very unique and critical time. And when he comes onto this scene, he is given a tremendous privilege.

Many years prior to his reign, we recall that the kingdom of Israel, following the reign of Solomon, was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel (beginning under the reign of Jeroboam) and the southern kingdom of Judah (beginning under the reign of Rehoboam). The northern kingdom had immediately gone astray, worshiping the golden calves set up by Jeroboam, who was afraid to continue allowing his subjects to worship at Jerusalem (which was in the southern kingdom), fearing at some point that this would make him vulnerable to Rehoboam, who was eager to take control over the whole land. And so, every king that followed Jeroboam, walked in his idolatrous footsteps, leading the northern kingdom into irreparable idolatry and ultimately being exiled by God (by means of the Assyrians). This took place when Hezekiah reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah.

Although Judah had its serious faults and sins, God allowed her to continue on for many years after the northern kingdom had already been exiled. There are at least two reasons for this. First, whereas the northern kingdom had no godly king, who reigned over it, the southern kingdom did have a handful of godly kings, such as Jehoshaphat, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah...etc. The faithfulness of these men, did help to bring God's blessing upon the land at various intervals. And second, God had given great grace to the kingdom of Judah for the sake of his servant David, with whom God had Covenanted, to cause his seed to retain a throne in Israel indefinitely. All of the kings of Judah came through the Davidic line.

All of that said, especially because of the heinous sins of King Manasseh, God had eventually exiled the kingdom of Judah as well, by means of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (who had already defeated the Assyrians). Now, this exile took place in stages, revealing the tremendous patience of God toward Judah for the sake of David. You might recall that Josiah was one of the godly kings of Judah, the reign of which, God blessed, because of his obedient reforms, following the devastation brought about by Manasseh and Amon, Josiah's grandfather and father. However, while God blessed Josiah, He was still determined to bring judgment upon Judah for the heinous sins of Manasseh (which were also aggravated by the wicked and idolatrous acts of Amon).

At the end of Josiah's reign, against the command of God, he attacked Necho, the king of Egypt, and was killed in the battle (Josiah was shot by archers). Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, then reigned in his place. Not walking in the faithful footsteps of his father, Jehoahaz decided to turn away from God, doing evil, and this led to his being deposed, after reigning for only three months. Necho, the king of Egypt, took and imprisoned Jehoahaz and put a tax on the land of Judah.

The king of Egypt then took Eliakim (also called Jehoiakim), Jehoahaz's brother, and made him king in his brother's stead, anticipating that he would ensure that the tribute was paid. Jehoiakim (Eliakim) then reigned for eleven years, and likewise did evil in the sight of God. During this time, Babylon grew stronger and stronger, in accordance with the will of God, and eventually God used Nebuchadnezzar to depose Eliakim, who was carried off to Babylon, bound in bronze fetters. At this point, King Nebuchadnezzar had put Jerusalem under subjection to his throne. And so, he didn't destroy the city or the temple or the wall, as of yet, although he did carry off some of the valuable articles from the temple, and put them in the house of his own god in Babylon.

Following this, Jehoiachin, the son of Eliakim, was made king of Judah, but he (also being evil) only reigned for three months and ten days, before King Nebuchadnezzar summoned him to Babylon, also taking more valuable articles from the temple. And this is where Zedekiah comes onto the scene of biblical history.

Zedekiah was the brother of Eliakim, and the uncle of Jehoiachin, both of whom were already imprisoned in Babylon for their wicked acts, and for failing to subject themselves to King Nebuchadnezzar, in accordance with the will of God, who was now bringing just and proper chastisement upon His people. That said, Zedekiah had a very unique and privileged position. For one, he knew very well the judgment that had already come upon Jerusalem because of the ungodly kings, who had reigned before him. Two of them were still alive and sitting in a Babylonian prison at that very time. He saw the very real judgment of God, enacted against them and against the people of God, firsthand. And he had the constant warnings from prophets like Jeremiah, cautioning him about the path that he would choose going forward.

Furthermore, we are told that King Nebuchadnezzar himself had appointed Zedekiah to be the king in Israel, and if he respected the king of Babylon and kept his edicts, he could have enjoyed a very peaceful and prosperous reign, even under the King's protection. And again, this was the will of God for Israel, at this time. And again, the prophets, and especially Jeremiah, reaffirmed this over and over again. However, if he disobeyed God, greater judgment would come upon him and the city of Jerusalem. For then, the temple would be destroyed, the city burned with fire and the wall torn down.

And so, at that moment of coronation, as it were, he had two roads in front of him. One could lead to peace, joy, success and restoration. And the other, to utter destruction, sorrow and regret, for him and for all of Jerusalem. This map was laid out before him, from the beginning of his reign, and all throughout.

What then did Zedekiah do? Which path did he choose? Well, of course, we know very well what happened to Jerusalem following this, don't we? Zedekiah rebelled, first against God, and then against King Nebuchadnezzar (God's instrument of judgment), rejecting the very clear commands of God, given through the prophet Jeremiah. In fact, Jeremiah himself, was set in a prison because of his faithfulness to proclaim the Word of God, concerning the judgment that would come upon King Zedekiah and Judah because of their sins. And so, here's how the rest of his story ultimately played out. [Read Jeremiah 52:1-16].

## **II. Highlighted Facts Surrounding Zedekiah's Reign**

Having considered a short, biblical biography of Zedekiah, let us now highlight some important facts, which surrounded his reign:

1) Again, Zedekiah was a privileged man, given a very unique position, at a very critical time in the life of God's Old Covenant people, Israel. Judgment had already come, but it was yet still in a manageable form for Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem.

With an example of God's present judgment right in front of him, and with a fresh and new opportunity to carry things in a positive and restorative direction, he was blessed by God, and that blessing was exhibited in time, by King Nebuchadnezzar's decision to spare Jerusalem and to choose Zedekiah to reign over her. Indeed, he was given a golden opportunity!

2) Furthermore, he had the Word of God, constantly proclaimed to him, instructing him in the right way, making clear God's revealed will for Zedekiah, going forward. In other words, Zedekiah wasn't given a kingdom in a darkened state, having to figure it out for himself. The instruction book was continually set before him, as it were. All he had to do, was trust God and obey His Word. (Jeremiah 44:1-6 -Following the utter destruction of Jerusalem, God stated this to those who fled to Egypt, having themselves disobeyed the command of God).

3) Zedekiah rebelled against God, and this led to a foolish decision to rebel against King Nebuchadnezzar, who (like God) had shown mercy and grace to Zedekiah. (Jer. 52:1-3).

4) While Zedekiah did get to reign for eleven years (two of which were with Jerusalem suffering from a God-ordained drought, while the Babylonians surrounded the city), the consequences of his rebellion were absolutely catastrophic!

After fleeing the city through a break in the wall, he was caught by the Babylonians and brought before King Nebuchadnezzar in judgment. King Nebuchadnezzar bound him in bronze fetters and put him in prison until the day of Zedekiah's death. However, this was only after he had taken every one of King Zedekiah's sons and had them killed right before the very eyes of Zedekiah. All of the princes were killed by the king of Babylon! Zedekiah had to watch his own sons die, because of his rebellion. And, in fact, that was the very last thing he saw! Right after this, King Nebuchadnezzar had his soldiers put out the eyes of Zedekiah, such that he would

never see another sunrise or sunset for the rest of his life. Again, the last thing he saw was the cruel death of his own sons!

5) Imagine, whatever time Zedekiah had left, in that cell in Babylon, bound in bronze fetters, without the ability of seeing anything, having plenty of time to think...what might he have been thinking about for those long, hopeless, despairing days, prior to his death? What level of regret filled his languished soul, during that time? Certainly, he looked back and considered his ways, didn't he? Certainly, he could hear the voice of Jeremiah (and others) warning him, over and over again. But now, it was too late. He couldn't change the past. He couldn't undo the damage that he had done. He was reaping what he had sown, wasn't he? Judgment caught up to him, and that, without any hope of relief or release.

### **III. Zedekiah's Ghost Speaks to Us**

Having highlighted some of the general facts surrounding the reign of Zedekiah, friends, we bring all of this to the great relevance that this has for us. You see, in a very real sense, through the Scriptures, Zedekiah speaks to us, as it were, doesn't he? It were as if his ghost were standing up here, telling us of the paths he had in front of him in the past, the path that he chose, the consequences of that choice, and how that is relevant to us, in a far more significant way even. You see, we don't know if Zedekiah, blind and in prison, ever had dealings with God regarding his sin. There is no indication given in the text, one way or the other. We just know, that from the standpoint of this life, at the very least, he was condemned to an end, full of torment and regret. Indeed, the past freedoms he enjoyed, the privileges that were ever before him, the time he had enjoyed with his sons (from birth), to the time of their terrible, gruesome death, on his account, definitely haunted him. He could never, in this life, forget what images passed through the gates of his eyes and into his mind, before his eyes were forever shut. And he might continually ask himself, "Was the short time of rebellion against God, that I enjoyed, really worth it?"

And so, he stands here, as it were, with heavy chains, full of weights of regret, speaking these relevant words:

1) "I was a man given much privilege and great opportunity by God, being able to enjoy freedom, in the context of a city that was already under God's judgment. The reality of the curse and fall of mankind was ever before me...indeed, so present, even in my own family." "And you too are given such a wonderful privilege from God!"

"You have been given the blessed gift of life; a real, living you, clearly evidencing the wonderful design of your Creator. And as you look around you, you see very clearly that you are living in a fallen world, which is presently under the judgment of God. God has not hidden the truth of His reality and the desperately lost condition of a world that is presently under His judgment. You witness this, even in the hardships, griefs, sorrows and deaths that have infiltrated your own family's history. What a privilege you have gained, to live freely, to breathe air and enjoy this wondrous creation, without being ignorant of the judgment that currently rests upon it."

"And with this great privilege, you can yet, at this very moment, seek the Lord, and find His grace. All things can be made new for you, if you but submit not to Nebuchadnezzar, but God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, who is appointed King over all things in heaven and on earth, and who will bring the final judgment upon this world, and upon all who refuse to subject themselves to His authority and reign."

2) "I was graciously given God's Word. As if the visible evidence around me weren't good enough, God had given me the constant warnings and prophecies of Jeremiah (and others) so that His will would be made clearly known to me." "What a wonderful privilege to be given such light, and yet, with such great privilege (a privilege which many in this world do not enjoy or deserve), comes great responsibility."

"And friends, you too, even this morning, and every time you hear God's Word preached; indeed, in the very Book, that Bible in your possession, which even I did not have, you are given such glorious light and full insight into the mind and heart of God, concerning His will!" "What a glorious privilege, for you to be sovereignly placed under the light of God's truth, even this morning, giving you a clear understanding of the condition and need of this world, all found in the Christ revealed herein!"

3) "And, O friend! With all of that in my possession; with blessings that many had never known before or after me, I yet chose my way, and stubbornly remained in my way, as if I could live forever in rebellion against God, serving the lusts of my flesh. And because of this; because of my foolish desire to turn my back to God, eventually it caught up to me, and in my increasingly hardened state, I made poor decisions in this life, which came back to haunt me greatly and without any hope of relief."

"And you too, if you continue to reject God; if you continue to sin against such merciful light, you too, will find yourself progressively being hardened, until you plummet yourself further and further into a life of poor choices, ultimately leading to eternal regret."

4) "While I did get to reign (and enjoy my sin) for eleven years, the consequences of my rebellion were absolutely catastrophic! Look at these heavy chains and the weights that are forever bound to them. What is written about me in God's Word, can never, ever be changed."

"And you too, if you remain in such a hardened and unrepentant state, will cross the line of no return, where you will live forever, with eternal regret. Let the agony of my past memories of my family, which plagued me for all my days, remind you of the memories of your life (of all the times that you have enjoyed with family and friends), which will plague you forever in hell, where you will be reminded forever not only of the eternal consequences you have brought upon yourself, but of how you have contributed to the eternal damnation of others (indeed, some of your own family members), for failing to believe the gospel, and to share it with others, who desperately needed it as well. What will be louder, the voice of your own cries of utter agony, or the cries of other familiar voices, which will shout in agony along with you...when you are there... I do not know?"

And let my physical blindness, the very plucking out of my eyes, which have enjoyed so much sin, and witnessed so much of my own evil, remind you of the eternal darkness that you will endure, in God's fiery judgment, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever! All you will see, are the vivid reminders in your conscience, of every poor decision you have made in this life, and the lot that you have now gained because of them, and most of all, because of your refusal to come to Christ, that precious, blessed medicine, which could have redeemed you from all of your sins and spared you from all such eternal agony, torment and regret!"



5) "My judgment caught up to me, and yours will catch up to you, unless you repent now and embrace God's only way of salvation, found in His Son, Jesus Christ!" "O friend, don't cross that line! Don't enter the portal of never ending regret! You still have a chance, right now, in the present. But, who knows when your heart will stop beating, and by what means. And at that moment, your eternal destiny will be forever sealed. Hell, like my prison in Babylon, has an entry gate, but no means of escape!"

### **Conclusion**

Friends, this is not another Dickens novel. This is reality! Zedekiah was real! And so was King Saul and Cain and Absalom and Amnon and Joab and Goliath and Sodom and Gomorrah, and every other condemned sinner in all of history, inside and outside of what is revealed in the Scriptures. And the gate, travelled through by the damned, leading to destruction, is very wide and broad, because most travel through that way. And the gate, leading to eternal life in Christ is narrow, because there are few (in comparison to the whole) who truly find and enter it.

What path are you on, this morning, friends? How will you respond to Zedekiah's ghost, as it were? More importantly, how will you respond to the very clear and thorough teachings of all of Scripture, which teach that we are all born in sin, at enmity with God, and heading for eternal destruction and regret? And that the only way of reconciliation and peace with God; the only way to eternal life, is through His Son, Jesus Christ, who laid down His own life on behalf of sinners? Don't die in your sins, friends! There is no coping in hell. Hell is a place of eternal suffering, regret and torment. It is a place where the pain is forever felt, and where there is no possibility of ever coping with it or getting used to it. There are no positive adjustments to be made there, ever. Every moment is filled with the same level of torment and regret. It is an unending inability to cope, with what must always be experienced in the body and the soul! Such is the serious nature of sin, it's offense against God, and its due consequence.

If you're not saved this morning, God help you! God help you, as your never dying soul dangles, by a very thin thread, over the volcanic fires of hell!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Isaiah 55:1-7