



O JERUSALEM!

SERIES: *THRONE AND CITY*

Catalog No. 1024

2 Samuel 5:6-12

Tenth Message

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March 31st, 1996

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, in remembrance of that day two thousand years ago when Jesus, the Son of David, entered Jerusalem. The multitudes gathered to greet him as their Messiah. The voices of the children rang out in celebration of his triumphal entry:

“Hosanna (salvation, please!) to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt 21:9)

“Voices and melodies swell together into one pure crescendo of sound, overwhelming the listener and drawing him inexorably in the mounting wave of excitement.”¹

For a few brief moments it seemed the ancient dream had come true at last. The King of Heaven, arriving for his coronation on earth; Jerusalem, the city of peace, embracing the King of Peace before all Israel. Pilgrims visiting the city for the Passover festivities were captured with awe and wonder as they were drawn into the center of God’s rule. They were present at the very hinge of history, as heaven became united with earth. The hills resonated with salvation at the dawning of the Messianic Age.

But what happened to the dream of the disciples of Jesus? How could they possibly be prepared for the events that followed? One final meal with their King in a simple room. Then the betrayal; the trial before a kangaroo court; Peter’s denial; the scourging; the ridicule; the impaling on a tree; three hours of eerie silence; the darkened sky. Then a Sabbath day. The disciples, gathered together, numb from consummate grief and shattered dreams.

Forty years later Jerusalem would be overrun by Roman legions. 1.2 million Jews were slaughtered. Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed. What happened to the dream? What of Jerusalem, God’s city of peace, and its Messiah? I have visited the city three times, and on each occasion I looked forward to walking on holy pavement that has been trodden on by pilgrims for thousands of years. But each time I visited I have been keenly aware of the violence that seems always to be present in that place. On my last visit I even got a taste of it myself. A young Arab boy tried to hit me with a metal bar because I refused his offer to watch my car for money. And what is that compared to the recent suicide bombings that have brought sudden, bloody death to scores of Jews?

What happened to the dream? To answer that ques-

tion, I would like to go back to the story of Israel’s first king and his conquest of Jerusalem.

I want to begin by reminding us once more that the Bible is one coherent story. Its myriad of stories build on each other, setting out the rhythms of salvation history from both the Old and New Testaments. Thus we find that the David story shapes the Christ story; and Christ’s story shapes our story.

Returning to our studies in the life of David now, we pick up the account once more, from the book of Second Samuel. In our text today we find David, having been duly recognized as God’s anointed in both Judah and Israel, now chooses Jerusalem as his capital.

I. Conquering Jerusalem (5:6-8)

Now the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, and they said to David, “You shall not come in here, but the blind and lame shall turn you away”; thinking, “David cannot come in here.” Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David. And David said on that day, “Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him reach the lame and the blind, who are hated by David’s soul, through the water tunnel.” Therefore they say, “The blind or the lame shall not come into the house.” (NASB)

Jerusalem would become the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great King, crowned as Zion with Solomon’s temple forty years later. What moved David to choose Jerusalem for his capital? The description here is surprisingly brief, cryptic, and difficult to interpret. Fokkelman rightly observes: “We are told nothing about the course of the events, nothing about the armies, almost nothing about the siege. We get no insight to political motives of the hero who set his sights on this enclave, or how this choice was viewed in Israel.”²

What happened? The text doesn’t help much. We are merely told that the king advanced and subsequently captured the city. But placed alongside the account of the battle are these unique speeches regarding the blind and the lame. Once more we discover, as we did in the story of the confrontation between David and Goliath, that the speeches delivered before the battle are more significant to the outcome than the account of the battle itself. Words are a window to one’s trust; and trust determines destiny.

(a) Jebusite Speech: Derision

David arrived in Jerusalem with a relatively small army ("his men"). These were the men who "had supported him in his fugitive days; loyal and resourceful, they could be depended upon to vie with each other in achieving the impossible."³ With this small but loyal army, David confronts the longtime Jebusite stronghold. The narrator's strong alliteration of the city name (*Yerushalayim*), city dweller (*yosheb*), and tribal name (*Yebusi*) "makes the city adhere more strongly to the non-Israelite tribe in residence there."⁴ It evokes the question whether this newcomer, David, can pry these two apart.

The Jebusites think they are impervious to attack in their densely compacted fortress of some ten acres. The walls of the city fit firmly onto the slopes of a mountain, forming a formidable chain on all three sides. From their inaccessible height the Jebusites gaze down on David and mock him:

"You shall not come in here but the blind and the lame shall turn you away...David cannot enter here!"

Their speech sends a powerful message to David. The echo, "you shall not come in here!" resounds on all sides, reopening old wounds for the king. This is a painful reminder of his wilderness years, when he was forced to find a home in the caves and crevices of the Judean desert. Now he hears the Jebusites mocking: "Keep moving, you and your ragtag band. Don't settle down here!" The derisive echo is amplified by the sight of invalids⁵ on the city wall, turning David away. What mockery!

There is no emotional response recorded of David, nor is a single detail of the battle given. There is but one verb of action, indicating that David captured the stronghold of Zion. The silence, and the glaring absence of detail, speak of the ease with which the city fell. The only thing we are privy to is the inscription of the county recorder, who inscribes the city's new name in the books: "the stronghold of Zion, the city of David." With one stroke of the pen, the long-time settlers are dispossessed and the new king moves in. The once impenetrable stronghold is now David's city.

(b) David's Speech to Counter the Derision

It is only after the battle is over that the narrator hints as to how the city fell. The Jebusite derision is countered by a clever but cryptic speech by David. David's enticement to battle was that anyone who wanted to defeat the Jebusites had to hit (or reach; the Hebrew verb can mean either) them on (or through) the pipe. The pipe is a reference to a large vertical shaft which the Jebusites had constructed through the Ophel (the SE hill of Jerusalem). During a war or siege this carefully constructed shaft enabled the Jebusites to withdraw within their secure walls but still retain the ability to draw water from the Gihon spring, located outside the city

walls.

The tunnel was named Warren's shaft "after the Briton who discovered it 120 years ago—at the foot of the hill. He who manages to conquer or cut off the source of [the water] supply, severs the main artery of those besieged and quickly brings them to their knees."⁶ On a metaphorical level, the shaft is the throat or wind-pipe of Jerusalem (a play on words with "those hated by David's soul"; the Hebrew word for soul, *nephesh*, means literally "throat, or gullet"), the sensitive spot where David hit the Jebusite, and ironically, from whence came the derision.

Chronicles 11:6 reveals that Joab was the first to make his way up the water shaft, and was duly rewarded by David. Once the city is conquered, David turns the Jebusite reference to invalids on its head, and a new saying is inscribed for Israel: "The blind or the lame shall not come into the house" (probably a reference to David's palace). So the saying from Psalm 5 is true:

**The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes...
Their throat is an open grave...
By their own devices let them fall!
But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I
will enter Your house** (Psalm 5:5,9,10,7).

The strength of the Jebusites became their weakness. The throat of the city became the very channel for its defeat.

Having conquered Jerusalem, David proceeds to fortify his newly acquired capital.

II. Rebuilding Jerusalem (5:9-12)

So David lived in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. And David became greater and greater, for the Lord God of hosts was with him. (5:9-10)

The Millo was probably some bulwark which formed an existing part of the fortress walls. "The Jebusite city walls were built on the slopes of the hill, which was particularly steep on the west side, hence the need to have secure buttresses resting on terraces, which would not slide...downwards toward the valley."⁷ David started from the outside, making sure the walls were secure, and then worked inward until he had a place to build his palace.

As David is becoming rooted in his capital, the narrator reveals the reason behind the king's unrivaled success. Make no mistake about it: "the Lord of Hosts was with him"! This military term refers to Yahweh as Commander-in-Chief of all armies, including the natural forces of creation (wind, hail, rain, etc.), and both human and angelic armies. David, being borne along by the presence of God and all his authority, thus could not help but grow in importance, as does the city of Jerusalem.

God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved...

The Lord of hosts is with us... (Psalm 46:5,7).

To demonstrate the widespread impact of David's fame, we get the report of a gentile king, Hiram of Tyre. On hearing of David's success, Hiram sends skilled craftsman and precious materials to help build David's palace. Verse 11:

Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David with cedar trees and carpenters and stonemasons; and they built a house for David. And David realized that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel.

Joyce Baldwin notes: "Tyre [was] an important port which already at the time of David had for centuries been trading in the eastern Mediterranean. The hinterland of Tyre was noted for its cedars, and the port boasted skilled workers in wood and stone... This foreign recognition was indeed a new development."⁸

The sight of a Gentile king being spontaneously drawn in to help build the kingdom of God helps David realize he is part of something far bigger than himself. A deep knowledge enters his soul that God is acting for the sake of his people Israel. This revelation leaves David with a keen sense of humility, and prevents him from exaggerating his own self-importance (Deut 17:20). Two gentile responses to David's rule are thus: "One party hurls abusive but impotent jeers at David, the other furnishes constructive deeds. The Jebusite sends the paper tiger of 'the lame and blind,'...Hiram sends David skilled craftsman and supplies him with stately accommodation."⁹

As we reflect on the text we can discern a definite pattern of rhythm and repetition. In the conquest of the city there is a pattern of action/speech; action/speech. In the rebuilding of Jerusalem there is repeated pattern of building/recognition; building/recognition. This is important, because these patterns and repetitions prepare us for the Jesus story and give shape to the spiritual rhythms in our own lives.

We all need shape and continuity in our lives. As we approach the end of this century, however, life seems to be characterized by lack of coherence and significance. I am presently coaching a girls softball team in a local high school. I was surprised to find that some of the girls who came out for the team had never played softball before, and none who had were currently playing in positions they had experience in. I thought to myself, "why would these girls want to come out now in high school and face the possibility of humiliation from other teams?"

One afternoon I asked them to share their stories with me. I discovered that the parents of most of them are divorced. That was when I learned why they wanted to play for this team. These girls are hungering to be part of something that is much larger than themselves. They want to be part of a community that gives some coher-

ence and significance to their fragmented lives, and they think that playing for the team will give them that.

The deepest hunger of our souls is the ache we feel for the city of God. We all have that dream, that hunger to be drawn into something that is much bigger than ourselves.

III. Jesus' Arrival In Jerusalem

Having immersed ourselves in David's conquest of Jerusalem, we are now prepared to feel the force and power of the greater Son of David and his reception when he entered the city. When Jesus set out for Jerusalem, he took the same route by which David had left the city, recorded in 2 Sam 15:30. Jesus did not come with a conquering army, however. He rode into the city on the foal of donkey.

Following Jesus' entry, the first word we hear is the resounding praise of the inhabitants, grown-ups and children alike:

"Hosanna (salvation, please!) to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt 21:9)

For the disciples, this was a dream come true: God's heavenly king, welcomed in Jerusalem. The city of peace and the Prince of Peace embrace.

But the initial reception of warmth and awe is drowned out by the discordant notes of derision by the ruling class in Jerusalem. The New David and his rag-tag group of misfit disciples are not welcome in the city. At this juncture, I imagine the disciples expected the story to continue in classic Davidic fashion. The new King would force out the rulers of Jerusalem and take up residence in his capital; the city would be rebuilt in cosmic new dimensions and all nations would be drawn to its glory; the Messianic age would burst forth in all its fullness.

As was the case in the David story, Jesus counters the derision of the Scribes and Pharisees with lengthy speeches and parables, saying that the kingdom would be taken away from them and given to others. And as in the David story, the blind and the lame are mentioned specifically, but this time with a new twist: instead of being shut out, they are drawn to Jesus and healed (Matt 21:14). What a reversal!

A second ironic twist, one which the disciples failed to hear, was the way in which Jesus would conquer and rebuild Jerusalem. Rather than the King conquering Jerusalem, the city would first kill the king, and then it too would be destroyed. Knowing that this was the fate of Jerusalem was what led Jesus to lament:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you

shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt 23:37-39).

What a graphic image! During a firestorm, a hen gathers her chicks under the protection of her wings. When the fire is over, the hen lies dead, but the chicks survive. Jesus was grief-stricken, not only because of his own impending death, but for the judgment predicted upon the city. How he longed for Jerusalem! How he longed to gather the people and shelter them under his cross from the coming judgment. But they would not come. That was why, even as he was carrying his cross on the way to Golgotha, he told the grieving women: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke 23:28, KJV).

IV. Jesus Builds the New Jerusalem

If the Messiah was supposed to rebuild the city, we have to ask, "Where is Jerusalem today?" Again in these speeches in Matthew, Jesus proclaims that the stone that the builders rejected would actually become the cornerstone of the new city, with its new temple, made without hands, eternal in the heavens (Matt 21:42). Seeing the exaltation of the new King would so move the Gentiles that they would be drawn in to help the building process (Matt 21:43; Mic 4:1-8). That city is being built in cosmic new dimensions (Zech 2:4-12) that transcends time and space! So today, "whenever two or three are gathered" in his name, that city is being built.

May God grant to us eyes to see and ears to hear all the voices and melodies of the New Jerusalem, swelling together, drawing us inexorably into God's city, until that day, foretold by John, when the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, "having the glory of God...and all nations shall walk by its light" (Rev 21:11,24).

That is the dream worth living for, and the only one worth dying for.

My friends, may you see your dream,
To see what you thought had died,
But lives in glory greater than any dream,
Next year in Jerusalem!

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1. Description taken from Elie Wiesel's portrayal of what it was like in Moscow during Simchat Torah in *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 150.

2. I have been greatly helped for many of my observations by J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. III, Throne and City* (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum 1986) 157-169, coupled with Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: IVP, 1988), 195-203.

3. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 196.

4. Fokkelman, *Throne and City*, 158.

5. Maimonides, the great Jewish thinker of the twelfth century, suggested that the derision might be a mocking reference to Isaac and Jacob, who at the end of their lives were blind and lame respectively.

6. Fokkelman, *Throne and City*, 161.

7. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 198.

8. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 199.

9. Fokkelman, *Throne and City*, 167.