

## *E is for Expectations (part 2)*

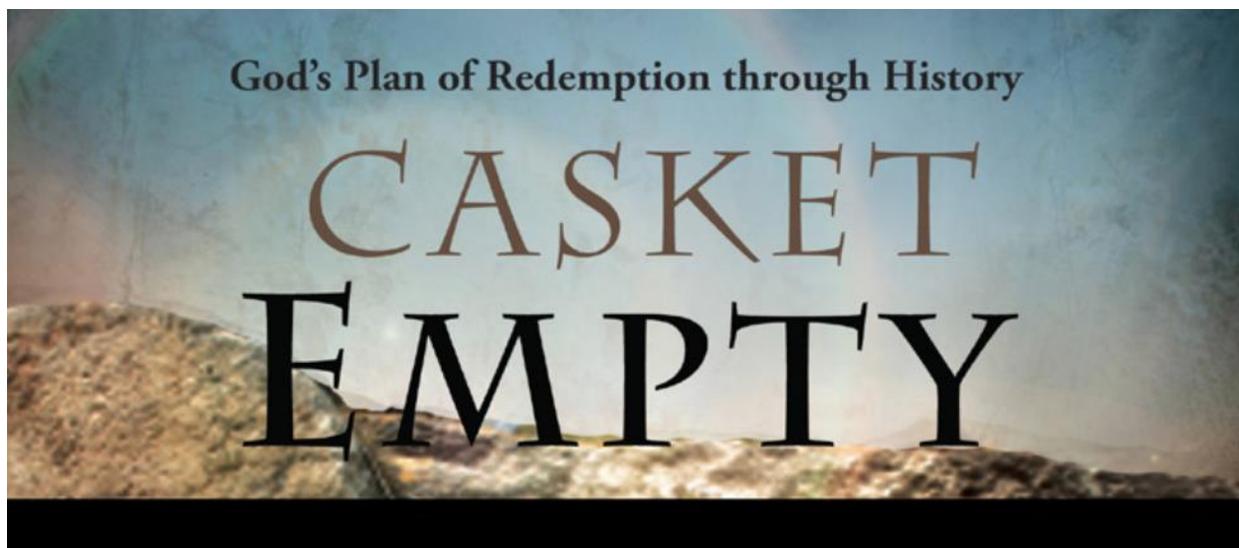
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

February 25, 2018

**TEXT: Micah 4:1-4**



We continue this morning in our spring series on CASKET EMPTY. As you see around the sanctuary, the banners are starting to reemerge. CASKET EMPTY is a way that helps us see the great narrative of Scripture. For many of us, the Bible, with its 66 books, seems a disparate collection of materials. Yet, the Bible was written by one great Author, the Lord God Almighty. There is a unity and coherence to the Scripture, and that unity and coherence is in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. CASKET EMPTY helps us see that. CASKET is an acronym for the Old Testament: Creation, Abraham, Sinai, Kings, Exiled, Temple—the journey that we took in the fall, and this spring, as we journey into the New Testament, we pick up the other side, the second half, if you will, of God's great redemptive story in Christ. EMPTY stands for Expectations, first of all, the Messiah, Pentecost, Teaching, and Yet-to-Come. EXPECTATIONS is the hope that we have in Scripture of what God will do to save us. Hope is powerful; it gives us courage. It gives us courage when hope can be described clearly. One of the greatest pieces of advice we received as young parents was from John and Lois Bascom, some of our senior members at Kenwood. They told us: “When you're going on a terrific vacation with your children, tell them where you're going in advance, and then the vacation joy will extend through all those months as they look forward to it.” Hope that is specific, hope that can be described, is hope that fills our hearts with courage. In the Bible, the hope of Israel—the hope that God gives to His people—is very specific, and we need to grasp the specificity of this hope because this is the template, if you will, for how God will save us in Jesus Christ. This hope will take place in what the Bible calls the *latter days* or the *end times*.

Last Sunday, we looked at the vision of King Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. In Daniel 2:17-28, when the king has this dream of the future time and asks for the dream to be interpreted, the prophet Daniel says to the king:

*“No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.”*

I want you to look at that phrase, that little phrase, *the latter days*, because that phrase signals for the Bible the day of God's saving action. How many of us use that phrase *latter days*? We think of it as meaning the end of the world. It actually doesn't mean that in the Bible, and I hope to persuade you that this morning. *The latter days* describes God's saving action, what will happen when God comes to save this world.

We heard the passage read from Micah 4, and we want to start by looking at this very briefly and then pull back and look at the hope of Israel more broadly. Notice the prophet Micah. In Micah 4, he begins: *“It will come to pass in the latter days. . .”* There's that phrase again, do you see it? In the latter days, what will happen? What will happen in the future from the prophet's perspective? What will happen is a breathtaking vision of total transformation. What will take place, what will happen when God acts in the world is first of all that the mountain of God's house will be established as the highest. It will be raised up. The house of the Lord is the sanctuary, the temple, the dwelling place of God. It will be raised up. I don't think we are to take this necessarily literally, that the area around Jerusalem will somehow rise above Mount Everest, but it's an image that the house of God will be lifted up, and notice what happens. We read in Micah 4:1:

*“. . .that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it.”*

The peoples of the world will flow to it. They will stream towards God's dwelling place. Wouldn't it be amazing to see the nations of this world just rushing to the place of God's presence, streaming to where He is? As they stream and move towards the place of God's presence, we are brought, in Micah 4:2, into their conversation. They are saying to one another:

*“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.”*

The nations of the world stream to the place where the true and living God dwells, and they are exhorting one another. It's like reverse-missions. We say, “Let's go out to them,” and here they are also saying, “Come, let's go to where God is that He may teach us His ways and we may walk in His paths.” It's a stunning, breathtaking vision of the peoples of this world streaming to

where God is, asking to be taught His ways so they can walk in them.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine the peoples of this world streaming into God's dwelling place? Micah tells us how this will be. God's Word will go forth from Jerusalem. God will act in such a way that He will bring judgment between many peoples and decide disputes, and this transformation of the world is described in a beautiful, moving scene. What happens to people when they come to know the living God? What happens to people, what happens the nations when they learn God's ways? What happens in Micah's vision is that they take their swords out and they start hammering them. They start pounding and beating their swords. If you've never seen someone make a sword, a blacksmith heats up the metal and he pounds it in a very violent action. He secures the blade and then sharpens it until it can be used for destruction. In Micah's vision, when they learn of God, they start heating up those swords and pounding them, and they turn them into plowshares. They take their swords, their spears, and pound them into pruning hooks, and they no longer learn war. It is a vision of total transformation. It's a breathtaking vision of this world remade. This will happen in the latter days. The prophet says in Micah 4:4 that instead of making war:

*“ . . .they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid.”*

Can you imagine a day when you don't have to be afraid of anyone around you? You don't have to lock your doors; you don't have to have a security system on your house; you don't have to wonder about that guy you just cut off, if he is going to turn around be enraged? It's a world remade, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Micah 4 is one mosaic tile, if you will, of this portrait of redemption that God envisions for the world. It's what the prophets call, and the apostle Paul calls, *the hope of Israel*. The hope of Israel is this vision of God's saving activity. What will happen when God acts again?

I want us to consider this morning this hope of Israel as something specific. It's like a constellation that you look at in the night sky. Though there are different stars in that constellation, those stars form a coherent, single hope. I want us to consider from Scripture ten facets of this hope. It is a hope that is unique to Israel in the ancient world. It is the hope that is the substructure of Christian theology. It is a hope that helps us understand the person, identity, and work of Jesus Christ, and it is a hope that gives shape and direction to our own discipleship. So, understanding this hope is critical. It is the most important part of the period of EXPECTATIONS. We talked about the sequence of kingdoms last week leading to the kingdom of God, and this morning we look at how God brought His people to search out His Word to know what He is going to do. Let's look at it together. We are going to do an overview pass, like a 30,000 foot view, as we look at this constellation of hope. What are these facets?

The first star that God's people hope for is **the kingdom of God**. We saw that last week. Remember that the sequence of four kingdoms leads to the coming of the kingdom of God. The prophet Zechariah, in Zechariah 14:9, expresses it like this:

*“The LORD will be King over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and His name one.”*

Israel's prophets envision a day when God will reign over all the earth and He will be the only Lord acknowledged; His name the only one. Do you long for that? Do you long for the idols of the nations to be cast aside? I long for that even in my own neighborhood. I can look out the windows of my house and see my neighbors bowing down to images made by the hands of man, and I long for the day when those will be put aside and God will reign and His name the only one. Zechariah 14:9 holds an important place in the worshiping life of Israel at the time of our Lord. Zechariah 14:9 is the closing line of the synagogue service three times a day and of the temple liturgy. It is a prayer that one day God will be king over all the earth. His name will be one, His name the only one, and then the service ends. The kingdom of God will come—the first star in this constellation of hope.

The second star is that **a Son of Man will rule**, and we touched on this last week. The second star is that the Son of Man will come, a royal, divine figure. The prophet Daniel saw our Lord Jesus approach the throne of His Father. He saw Him, and he said in Daniel 7:13:

*“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”*

As God's people hope for His kingdom, the rule and reign of His kingdom will be carried out through a royal, divine human being, the Son of Man.

The third star in this constellation of hope is that this **King of the kingdom will be of the line of David**. The prophet Jeremiah says it like this: *“Behold, the days are coming.”* You see that recurring expression: *in the latter days; the days are coming*. God has a plan. God has a future. He is carrying it out, and it's a plan that is going to change this world. God's people are to long for this and desire it, and He prepared the hearts of His people. They had to wait 400 years for this to be realized, and we are surveying that this morning. We read in Jeremiah 23:5-6:

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.*

*And this is the name by which He will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"*

God will raise up this Davidic King.

The fourth star in this constellation of hope is **atonement for sin**. Remember that our ancestors were driven out of the Garden of Eden for our disobedience to God. Our ancestors of faith, the people of Israel, were driven out of the land because of their disobedience and sinfulness, and so God said that He would solve this problem. It is only in Christian theology that there is a solution for the real problem of humanity in our sinfulness. You know what's wrong in the world is our disobedience to God, and yet God makes provision and plan for this. We call this atonement for sin, *at-one-ment*, reconciliation. How will this happen? The prophet Isaiah describes it like this: "There will come a certain figure, a Servant of the Lord." He says in Isaiah 53:6:

*"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him [the Servant] the iniquity of us all."*

He goes on in Isaiah 53:10:

*"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous one, My servant [the Servant of the Lord], make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities."*

The solution for humanity will come through a substitute. He will carry your sins and mine. The prophet Isaiah saw this and promised it. The big archaeology news of the week, about which I could hardly contain my joy, was that the archaeologists found the seal of Isaiah the prophet. It says, "Isaiah, the prophet." The bottom edge of the seal is pressed with his finger. You can still see the fingerprints, probably the fingerprints of Isaiah, found just a few feet over from the seal of Hezekiah. This man saw this, that God would act to make atonement for sin. Atonement for sin would then make possible the cutting of a new covenant.

And Jeremiah saw this, the fifth star, that there would be **a new covenant between God and His people**. He would write His law upon our hearts. We read in Jeremiah 31:33:

*"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

Within this new covenant relationship with God, we are reconciled to Him and our sins are forgiven. After atonement, a new covenant is the fifth star in the constellation of redemption.

The sixth star is that **God would pour out His Holy Spirit** upon all—life-giving Holy Spirit, poured out on this world. The prophet Joel saw this, and he said in Joel 2:28-29:

*“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit.”*

There’s that key phrase: *“It will come to pass afterward.”* Aren’t you glad that the Holy Spirit is poured out on old people and young people, on men and women of all social classes? God’s Spirit is poured out, and we walk in newness of life.

When God’s Spirit is poured out on all humanity, star number seven in this constellation is that **the blessing of Abraham flows to the nations**. That is what Micah describes: “The house of the Lord is lifted up, the God of Jacob, and the nations stream to learn of His ways.” They will stream towards Zion, and His Word will go forth.

Star eight in this constellation of hope is that Israel hopes for **resurrection from the dead**. We take this for granted, but you know, Israel is the only people on planet earth in antiquity that hope for this. No one hoped for this. Israel believed that their God would act again. Isaiah says it like this in Isaiah 25:8:

*“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’”*

There it is again: *“on that day.”* God will act in such a way that He will raise us from the dead.

Star nine is that is that God will bring a **final judgment on the world**. He will rightly condemn evil, and this will be an occasion of great rejoicing. Imagine how you feel when you see gross injustice. Imagine how you feel when you see violence in the land and those in authority just turn their eyes away. We long for righteousness. The Scriptures are filled with the expectation that God will come and He will judge rightly, condemn evil, and the earth will rejoice. We tend to think that God’s coming judgment is something just terrible, to be feared, but in the Bible it’s an occasion for rejoicing. Psalm 96:11-13 says:

*“Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for He comes, for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world*

in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness.”

God will come and He will banish evil. Can you imagine a day when evil is just banished—no more, ruled out, permanently eliminated?

The tenth and last star in the constellation of redemption is that with evil condemned there will be **a new creation, a new heavens and new earth**. Again the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 65:17-18:

*“Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.”*

The Lord will act again. This is the hope of the Scriptures. The hope of the Scriptures is that the kingdom of God will come, the Son of Man will rule, the son of David will be enthroned. There will be atonement for sin made, a new covenant cut with God and His people. The Holy Spirit will be poured out. The blessing of Abraham will flow to the nations. There will be resurrection from the dead, a final judgment of evil, and a new heavens and new earth. That’s a lot to take in, isn’t it? That’s much better than any Christmas list we could come up with. Isn’t it? It’s a complete remake and solution of what’s wrong with this world.

I know some of you are thinking, “I thought we were to start the New Testament.” But, you know, you can’t understand the New without the Old. You can’t understand Jesus without the hope of Israel. You can’t understand New Testament mission or preaching. You can’t really read the New Testament well without the Old because one out of every ten verses in the New is a quote of the Old. But this is the New Testament portion, so let’s see what we did last week. How does this play out? How does the hope of Israel come to pass?

The very first words we hear of Jesus’ preaching connect to this hope. The first breath of our Lord’s public proclamation is in Mark 1:14-15. Jesus came into Galilee and He was proclaiming the gospel of God, the good news of God, God’s great announcement for the world, and what did Jesus proclaim? What is God’s good news for the world? Jesus says the good news for the world is this: *“The time is fulfilled, . . .”* For those who know the Bible well, for those who have been hoping, longing, praying, for this hope for centuries, the first words of our Lord Jesus are that *“the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.”* Daniel’s vision, the fifth kingdom, the reign of God is here in the world. Jesus’ preaching introduces not the idea of the kingdom, but Jesus’ preaching introduces the idea that the kingdom has arrived. The point of Jesus’ parables is that the kingdom of God is at hand. The demonstration of His public ministry is that the kingdom of God has arrived. The first star in the constellation of redemption is the hope of the kingdom, and this is what Jesus talks about more than anything else in His ministry.

Jesus' favorite way of designating Himself is as the Son of Man. He identifies Himself as this in Matthew 9:6:

*"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . ."*

This is something only God can do. In Matthew 12:8, Jesus says:

*"For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*

Who is that? Jesus says in Matthew 13:41:

*"The Son of Man will send His angels, . . ."*

Who is that reigning Son of Man who can forgive sins, is Lord of the Sabbath, can command the angels, and is powerful and mighty? Is Jesus the Son of David? The first verse of the New Testament tells us that He is. Blind men followed Jesus and said: *"Have mercy on us, Son of David."* Demon-possessed people who were oppressed and sought healing from this mighty Son of David spoke and the people were amazed and said, *"Could this be the Son of David?"* The crowds that went before Jesus as He came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday were shouting out: *"Hosanna to the Son of David!"* The third star. Does Jesus provide atonement for sin? He does. As He headed for Jerusalem, He told His disciples in Matthew 20:28:

*". . .the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."*

Does Jesus carry out the new covenant? He does when He gathered with His disciples in the upper room. He took bread and broke it and said: *"This is My body given for you."* He took the cup in the Passover meal, and he said: *"This cup is poured out for you. It is the New Covenant in My blood."* No one had said that for 600 years, since Jeremiah said it would come. The latter days, the hope of Israel has come to pass in Jesus Christ. This changes everything. What about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, star six of the hope that God gave to His people? What does Jesus do after His resurrection from the dead? He is exalted at the right hand of the Father, and the first thing that Jesus does, enthroned in glory, is to pour out the Holy Spirit. In the first Christian sermon ever, Peter proclaims what is happening at the day of Pentecost and he says in Acts 2:33:

*"Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, [Jesus] has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."*

What about the blessing of Abraham to the nations? The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:26:

*"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."*

You are all one in Christ Jesus. We tend to say that if you're in Christ, your sins are forgiven. If you are Christ's, then you will go to heaven when you die. Paul says in Galatians 3:29:

*“And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”*

What about the resurrection from the dead? Jesus is the firstborn, bodily raised. We experience a portion of His resurrection power. The New Testament says that we experience this in part, but not fully. Paul says in Romans 6:4:

*“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*

Paul says in Romans 8:11:

*“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

This is mind-blowing. This will wake you up early! We share in part this resurrection life.

What about final judgment? The remarkable thing about the New Testament is that the New Testament says that the judgment of God, the final judgment of God, has been poured out in advance in one place. It has been poured out in Christ on the cross. As He is getting ready to go to the cross, and I love this so much, Jesus says in John 12:31:

*“Now is the time of judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”*

The ruler of this world, the enemy, the adversary of our souls, Jesus said, “Now is the moment for him to be cast out,” because in the cross of Christ, Jesus takes the sin of the world upon His shoulders, and the one who would accuse you and me day and night of not being worthy to stand in God's presence, the one who will deface and degrade the image of God, Jesus says: *“Now is the time for him to be driven out, for his power to be crushed.”* It will be crushed by the cross, when Jesus will take your sins and mine. He will carry them. He will fully satisfy the wrath of God against sin, and everyone who believes in Him will never face the fear of future judgment, But, if you are outside of Christ, God's righteous judgment will come on all the earth, and that will be a dreadful day for those outside of Christ. There is a second coming. The apostle Paul says to the Athenians in Acts 17:31 that God:

*“. . . has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.”*

Judgment has come and yet will fully come.

What about the new creation of the heavens and the earth? I know some of you are thinking that surely that is all for the future, right? Maybe not, because maybe that was the scroll that Isaiah wrote, maybe the document that went with the seal that was just found, because that

clay bulla seals a document. Maybe it was Isaiah 65 and 66 that was rolled up, and when Isaiah put his seal and accidentally put his thumb print on the edge of the seal, maybe it was that portion where He said: "I am going to make a new heavens and new earth. I am going to make a new creation." No one used that language after Isaiah for almost 700 years, until the New Testament. Galatians 6:15 says:

*"For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."*

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*

"If anyone is in Christ," then what? Full disclosure, this was for me exegetical euphoria flaming out from the pastoral office. This is unbelievable! Do you believe this? "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is passed away!" Forget about your old self; forget about the pattern of living that you grew up with; forget about what you suffered; forget about the way life was modeled to you; forget about it! Forget about the indwelling sin that grips your heart and be open to the infilling of God's Spirit so you can learn to walk in God's ways, in the resurrection power. He who raised Christ from the dead is in you. You are dangerous; you are unsafe. The presence of the living God dwells in you through faith in Christ, and He has made our dead lives to be alive. The old has passed away; the new has come! Is this fully realized? Not yet, but it has begun. The hope that God taught His people to expect, that is why we have to have this portion: EXPECTATIONS. We won't understand who Jesus is, what He is saying, what He is doing. We won't understand who we are and the impact and outcome of His death and resurrection. The new creation has begun.

What is the call to action from this hope? This is our last week on EXPECTATIONS. I have three things I want us to do.

Number one is: I want us to **search the Scriptures so that we hope for what God actually promised**. We have to be a people that know His Word. He told us what He was going to do. Some of us can tell you who won the last 52 Super Bowls but can't tell us anything about the hope of God's remaking and saving the world. That can't be, right? It's not a fault of our memory, it's just what our memory is being used for. So, we need to be a people who search the Scriptures and really learn to hope for what God has actually said He would do. That has a big effect on us. I'm so grateful for the artists among us and the artists who are making the banners. I've been given the chance to see a picture of the banners in advance, and I remember when the banner that Cathaleen Wells painted was first shown to me. It was the EXPECTATIONS banner. I was so moved by it, and Cathaleen is right here. As Cathaleen was meditating on it, on the hope that flows out of the Bible, this is what she painted. When I first saw this, I said,

“Cathaleen, I am really moved by this because I see, as I look at the painting, what first almost looks like a time of chaos and uncertainty, and maybe it's a time of darkness, but hope is rising.” As you look at the painting, you can see the constellation. It almost looks like something in the heavens, doesn't it? It's that hope that will be, that single great hope, a constellation of redemption. As you look at it long, you see that it almost looks like a new creation is about to burst forth. That's the hope that we have in Scripture, and when you get really close to this banner, you'll see how the ages turn. Cathaleen is a gifted artist, but she learned something new to produce this piece of art. She learned how to weld. If you get up close to that banner, and I invite you to do that, you'll see that there is a crown. There is a blue crown attached to the banner. That's the crown of the reigning Son of Man, the legitimate King of the world. You will see woven into that crown, there is a crown of thorns. The real King of the world inaugurates His reign by suffering and then being raised. Galatians 4:4 says:



*“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son.”*

A second call to action is that we need to **keep our hope fixed on Christ**, because this hope of a brand-new world has its center, its agent, in the person of Jesus. Hebrews 1:1 says:

*“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but **in these last days** He has spoken to us by His Son,”*

There it is again, “*in these last days.*” Hebrews 9:26 says:

*“But as it is, [Jesus] has appeared **once for all at the end of the ages***

There is no other age coming than the one that we are in. In 1 Peter 1:20, we read:

*“[Jesus] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but **was made manifest in the last times** for the sake of you.”*

There it is again. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:11:

*“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, **on whom the end of the ages has come.**”*

We are those upon whom the end of the ages has come. Brothers and sisters, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, because the new world just started in Him. The hope that God promised for the world is fulfilled in Him. He is the center of our faith. We have got to search the Scriptures to know God's intentions. We have got to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, because the turning

of the ages has happened in Him. This is so practical for witnessing for Christ, because it means that Jesus really is the climax of God's intention for this world. There is no other. This is so vital when you are trying to share Christ with the Muslim, or someone with a Mormon background, or someone who is a secular humanist, or anyone, because people today think that was for then, and the really exciting news is this other news: It's Mohammed; it's Joseph Smith; it's the Internet; it's the iPhone; it's now. We can say through faith in Jesus Christ, that it's in Him this world has been changed.

Call to action number three, and we will close with this. If this is true, and some of you might still be doubting, saying: "I don't know about this. I think pastor David just went off the deep end this week. I don't know." If this is true, if this is really true, if this is what God told us to hope for and then He fulfilled in Christ, if that's true, then the only thing that makes sense is for us to **be ambassadors of the King in this world**, right? The apostle Paul said that he was an ambassador in chains. When he came to the city of Rome, the greatest city of his day, the largest city in the world at that time, very impressive, Paul, when he came to this city, said in Acts 28:20:

*"It is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain."*

He said in 1 Corinthians 5:17-18:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself . . ."*

Hallelujah! We are excited! And then Paul seamlessly goes from there to say: "Oh, and by the way, He gave us the ministry of reconciliation." He says in 1 Corinthians 5:19:

*". . . that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."*

God did the most remarkable thing: God saved the world through Jesus Christ, and then He gave the message about that to you and to me! He could have done it Himself, but He said, "I'm going to give that message to you." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:20:

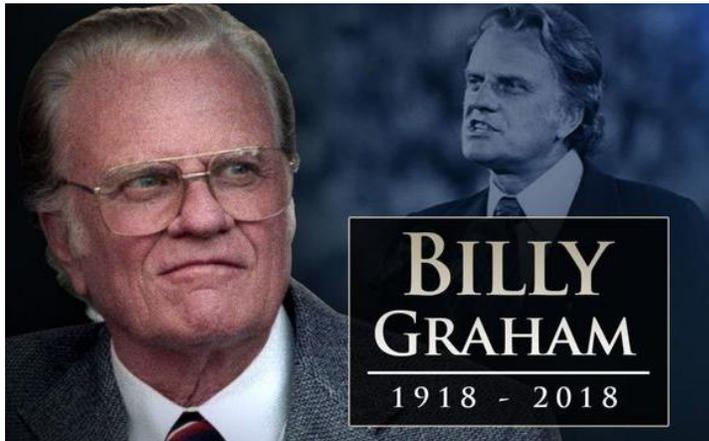
*"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us."*

If you listen closely, that is almost always in my benediction, because that is how I think of us. I think of it from this verse. We are ambassadors, we are representatives, of this King of Glory who has come to save the world and is remaking us. It is God making His appeal through us. Wow! There is nothing on TV that is as interesting as that. There just isn't! God is appealing to people around you through you.

We are ambassadors for Christ, so I challenge you to search the Scriptures, to keep your eyes fixed on Christ, and then to be an ambassador for Christ in this world. That can take all kinds of

different shapes. Sometimes people think that's the pastor's job, but it isn't really, because pastors have too high a percentage of Christians around them. You have better chances than the pastors do of rubbing shoulders with people who haven't heard any of this. God can use any of us.

This past week, a great servant of Christ was reunited with his Lord: Billy Graham. I had a



chance to meet Billy Graham. Christine and I, when we were married, lived in Graham Hall. Billy Graham was instrumental in starting Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and he spoke at our graduation. As he spoke, he gave a very biographical message. He talked about how God can use anyone. We are tempted to think while this was a great man, a powerful man who had all these

earthly reasons for being used. He talked about himself, and he said: "Look, I'm from a humble family, and I grew up on a dairy farm." There's nothing in him that you'd say, "Oh here's the guy that God says, "Perfect, I'll use him to preach to 215 million people." But He did. When Billy spoke at our graduation, he came to the end, and he said, "I want to tell you two things that as I reflect on my ministry I would have done differently and one piece of advice." There were 2000 people in the room and you could have heard a pin drop. What's he going to say? He said, "The first thing I would have done differently is I would have studied more." I thought that was really remarkable and very humble.

The second thing he said he would have done differently is this: "I would have spent more time with my family." That also was humbling. Then he looked out at all these seminarians about to graduate, and he said, "Now, I have one piece of advice for you." In his easy way of speaking with his North Carolina accent, he looked at us all he said: "Make sure you put the cookies on the bottom shelf." We felt the way half of you feel right now: What's that supposed to mean? I thought he could end right here, but he didn't. He explained, as Jesus explains some of the parables: "Put the cookies on the bottom shelf," he said. "The truths of Christianity are so lofty, so breathtaking, just make sure when you get out there that you put those great truths on the bottom shelf so that everyone can understand them, because what God has done in Jesus Christ is worth the attention and understanding of everyone."

Brothers and sisters, we have covered complex territory this morning, but it's really simple at the end, that the hope of Israel was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and we are ambassadors of this

King. God took Billy Graham and led him to preach to millions. This is one image when he preached in Seoul. It was a simple gospel message, and over one million people came to hear it. As he went to be with Christ this week, as a tribute to him, people have estimated that over six decades he preached live to an estimated 215 million people in 185 countries and hundreds of millions through radio and TV ministry. I wonder if you been touched directly or indirectly from the Billy Graham ministry, would you stand, just as a visual that God can use us all.



Amen!