

Salvation through a crucified Redeemer was so opposed to the popular theology and general line of thought of the Jew of that period, that while—as we observed in our previous sermon—many gladly accepted Him as the long promised, and ardently desired Messiah, the great majority of the people were scandalized by it. It became to them a stumbling-block and a rock of offence. It ran counter to all their preconceived ideas, disappointed all their ambitious hopes of greatness and glory. In a word, the cross was altogether too humbling for them.

I. It was fatal to all their hopes of national greatness.

That the Jews were anxiously looking for the advent of the Messiah at the time when He actually appeared, we know from the readiness with which they lent themselves to the designs of the various impostors who came forward about that time. But the Messiah which they had pictured to their minds was very different to the one foretold by the prophets and which, in fulfilment of their predictions came at the time appointed. He was, it is true, according to their idea, to be a Saviour. But it was to save them from the power of their civil rulers, rather than from the power of the devil, and their own corrupt hearts. He was to be a king. But it was to take immediate possession of the throne of David in Jerusalem, and reign over a temporal Israel, rather than to become enthroned in their hearts and govern a spiritual kingdom. He was to establish peace. But it was to be peace of a national and international kind, rather than a peace with God of which they did not feel the need. And consequently when they saw Jesus of Nazareth ascend the cross instead of the throne; being put to death by the Roman power instead of conquering it: instead of reigning in triumph, being put to an ignominious death—the death of a slave: and when instead of the Roman eagles being driven out of the land, and the kingdom of Israel assuming more than its Solomonic glory; they still heard the measured tread of the hated sentinel upon the pavement of the Sanctuary enclosure: and were over-looked, even at their devotions by the watchful eye of the centurion—in short, as their country still remained but an insignificant province of the mighty Roman Empire, they were offended.

II. It was in direct antagonism to all their religious prejudices.

Had they not a divinely appointed priesthood, and a divinely constituted service? Were not they exclusively God's chosen people? And yet if the doctrine of the cross, as preached by the apostles, prevailed, all this would slip away from them.