

Hope in Exile Through the Word of God

Let us look to the Lord:

Our heavenly Father, we lift up our eyes to You this morning with thanksgiving. We thank You, Lord, that all things that are good come from You, and we look up to You that You might send down good things to us this morning. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the history of Your people through which we can see who You are, how You love, and how You act. Lord, we pray that You would open our eyes to see just who You are and what You are doing, not just in our midst but in the things we talked about today. Lord, we are grateful for Your Word. We are grateful for the Holy Spirit who is able to make it alive to us. And Lord, we are praying this is not just the words, nor the examples; it is the life that is in the Word that we want to be able to lay hold of. We want to lay hold of You in Your Word. Lord, open the Book to us, we pray this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The last time I was up here, I told you that I had been, for some reason, stuck on the exile. I do not know why, but you know, there is not a lot about the exile itself. But it made me think, "Lord, what were You doing during this time? Why did it happen?" I opened the last time by saying, "I had been considering the exile of the Jews from Judah to Babylon, and I had three questions: Why the exile? What happened to them during their time of exile? And what was the outcome, what was the fruit that came out of the exile?" So, the last time we covered why they were exiled, so I do not have to talk about that again.

Introduction – The Time the Israelites Spent in Exile

Today, I want to look at the time they spent in exile, but there is not a lot in the Bible about it. We have two prophets, Daniel and Ezekiel, who were there during that time from whom we can gather what was happening. And then we have a lot about their coming out of exile in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the prophecies of Zechariah and Haggai and Malachi, but during those seventy years we do not have a lot of information. So, in looking at this time of exile, there were two things that I had looked at. Number one was that you have to look at the children of the exile. There were those, like Daniel and Ezekiel, who were there during the exile. So, you have to gather something from them. And also, Ezra who was born in Persia or Babylon during the exile, and he came back later. He was one of the children that came back, but he was a child of exile; he was born in exile. So, we want to look at those.

The other thing is to look at history. The Word does not have a lot of history, but I started looking up the history of the Jews, and I read a couple of books, but not entirely. The books were on the history of the Jews; one was by Paul Johnson who was an American secular historian. Another was by a Jewish man, and I do not know if he was a Christian or not, but it was the history of the Jewish people. So, gathering from those things, I kind of looked at what was happening during this time.

The exile came in three shifts. There was one in 606-605 BC, and that was when Daniel and the largest group of exiles went during that time. Then ten years later, 597-596 BC, was when Jehoiakim was taken into captivity, and with him went Ezekiel. Then there was the final in 586 BC

which coincided with the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The thing about this time was that it was all leveled. You would think that Israel would have been ready to repent, and during that time they felt it was the time of repentance.

People Were Obstinate

It is interesting that this exile was not like the slavery in Egypt, where they were in forced labor, breaking rocks with sledgehammers. Many of these men were of a higher class during the first couple of departures from Jerusalem. Even Jeremiah advised them, "When you go there, build houses, plant your fields, and do these things." It was not as though they were engaged in hard labor in a penal colony. Some were brought into cities who were craftsmen to help build things. Remember, they took Daniel and several other intellectual people and raised them to positions in the court, government, and bureaucracy of the Babylonians. Because of this, when you look at the prophecy of Ezekiel, especially in the first twenty-five chapters, you find that the attitude of these people in exile was still obstinate: "Ah, we are getting out of here. God cannot do this to us. We are His people." It is akin to, "I am an American, you cannot do this to me. You do not know who I am." This obstinacy was due to false prophets going back up to Babylon. That is why Jeremiah wrote the letter in Jeremiah 29: "Look, I am going to tell you, this is not going to be easy for you. There are deep issues that you need to deal with, and you will be there for a long time. So, you might as well build houses and marry because you will be here for a while." That realization did not sink in until the temple was destroyed, and the city was razed. Then it was like the door closed, and suddenly it was, "What do we do now? Are we ever coming back?"

Israel's Second Birth

This whole period of time was one of darkness. Elizabeth Elliot once wrote a book called "That Slow and Certain Light." It was about guidance, and I loved the title, although I never read the book. But I loved the title, and the picture on it was great. When I saw it, that slow and certain light touched me. In a way, I wonder if that is what children in the womb are looking for, that slow and certain light. "Ah, there is the opening, and you can get out."

We just sang a Christmas carol by Wesley. You know, the gospel is in so many Christmas carols, not Christmas songs, but Christmas carols. There is so much gospel in them. "God rest ye merry gentlemen. He sent Him to save us from sin." In the one we just sang, there were the words, "Born to free the sons of earth, born to give them second birth."

In a way, this was Israel's second birth. This was them being in the womb. This was something new that was happening. There is a verse in Isaiah, one of my favorite verses in Isaiah, chapter 43, the first few verses: "Jacob, I know you, I created you, I have redeemed you." Toward the end of the chapter, and I think this goes with this period of time in verses 16-20, it says: "Thus says the LORD, Who makes a way through the sea And a path through the mighty waters, Who brings forth the chariot and the horse, The army and the mighty man (They will lie down together and not rise again; They have been quenched and extinguished like a wick): "Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past. "Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert. "The beasts of the field will glorify Me; The jackals and the ostriches; Because I have given

waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people.” This is a very good word, and when Isaiah gave this, he had predicted what was going to happen. He told Hezekiah, “These people you showed your treasures to, they are going to come in and raze this place.”

Chapters 40-48 of Isaiah are about bringing them back. “What I am doing, I am doing the work.” In chapter 45, it even mentions Cyrus: “I called Cyrus; he is my servant.” He was going to be the one who brought light. There is a slow and certain light, and understanding begins to come to them. That is the story of our Christian life. We have a burst of sunlight; we are saved, and we live in that light for a while. But things become dim, and then there is something that will not let us go. *There is something that will not let us go.* We have discussed, “Once caught, no escape.” There is something that has caught us, and then there is that light always ahead of us that says, “I am drawing you forward; I am drawing you forward, I am drawing you forward.”

This is what happened during the exile. Previously, I said they were brought from the familiar to the unfamiliar. When Jerusalem fell, Psalm 137 speaks about it. It struck the people deeply, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps.” Then it says, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem ...” There was such a memory. They said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” “How can we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land?”

It impacted them profoundly, and there was repentance. I do not want to emphasize repentance excessively. They repented; that is wonderful. You repent; but you do not grovel. God does not like grovelers. He is not out to make you grovel. You repent, and He restores. You repent, and you are revived. You repent, and He makes new.

So, they repented, but again they went from the familiar to the unfamiliar. In other words, they lost everything that was familiar to them as God's people, everything. Most of the important symbols of Judaism that signified their favored status with God were gone. The temple was destroyed, the ark was gone, the altar was destroyed. These were symbols of His presence, and they were gone, the symbols were gone. Therefore, the sacrifices ceased, so there was no sacrifices. They no longer went into Jerusalem for their three feasts; those were gone. Their king was no more, and without a king, where is the kingdom? The kingdom was gone. Everything familiar to them was gone. I do not want to say everything because there are a couple of things that I want to discuss. Now they were aliens in a strange land, a land without a familiar culture or language. There were unfamiliar gods. Babylon was ready and willing to incorporate them. That is where the Lord sent them. He said, “I am going to send you to a place that is so foreign to who you are, and they want so much to envelop you, but that is why I am sending you.”

God and His Word Went with Them

It is not that they lost everything because two things went into exile with them, and they are very important. Again, I do not want to merely provide a history lesson because we can also see how these things apply to us today. We live in the same situation as Christians, in a place ready to usurp us, to draw us in and hold us captive forever. That is what they want—forever. That is what the enemy wants; that is what the world wants. They want us.

Two things went into exile with those who were captives. I should not even say “things” because one was God, and the other was the Torah and some other writings that would later be recognized as Scripture. These things went in, but they could not carry the ark and other objects. It is amazing that they carried the Torah, and that is important because it is one of the main points I want to discuss.

God Went with Them

First of all, God went with them, and that is probably one of the most important things. I should say it is the most important thing. Just the idea that they had God with them. Now you need to understand when those doors closed, when the temple was razed, it was like, “We sat and wept for Zion. Where is our hope? Zion is gone; the place where God dwells is gone. It is not like, ‘where is God, and what are we to do?’”

God Was There Right Where They Were

But God had called two prophets of note in Babylon. And I want to make a point here. They were not those that came from Jerusalem and traveled up to Babylon and said, “Okay, we have the Word of the Lord.” There were two that were in Babylon, Daniel, and Ezekiel, and they received their calls as prophets while they were in Babylon. This was important to know because, who called them? It was God, and if God called them in Babylon, where is God? He is there with them. I know He was outside of the thing. But we need to understand that sometimes, when we go into deep darkness, into our captivities to understand and to see that God is with us in our captivity can be a very liberating thing. It can be a very uplifting thing because when we go into places of our darkness, we close out all hope of being saved: “Who is going to help me? God is so far away from me; how can I ever get back to Him?”

I was right there when I read and had that experience after reading, “The Normal Christian Life” of saying, “Oh God, look at me where I am. I have never done anything for You.” And when He spoke into my heart and said, “You cannot get any closer to Me than you are now.” And for me, that was because I was in Christ. But the whole idea is this, that wherever we are, God is there. Yes, He is everywhere, but personally speaking, He is right there. And I think for a lot of us He is there waiting for us just to say, “I am at my end; I cannot do anymore, I am lost.” And when we come to that place, we come to the place of seeing like in Ezekiel 37:11 when he is talking about the valley of the dry bones, and he says, “Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’”

And some of us are in there. Some of us have been there in our own lives, and out of our own peril we say, “I cannot see; I cannot get ahead of it. I will never get ahead of it. Lord, just go on without me.” And that is what the Lord waits for, to get us to that point to look to no other to be our Savior. “If I just had some good times happen to me, I could get out of this.”

Only God Saves

I am reading Robinson Crusoe, which is an old book. What is so funny about it, not funny, but you know what I mean. He said, “I want to be a sailor.” And his father said, “You do not want to

go, boy because if you go, first of all, there is not going to be an inheritance for you, but danger waits for you. I know it, danger waits for you.” He said, “I still want to go.” So he goes, and on the first voyage that he embarks on, there is a storm, and he is frightened to death. And he cries out: “Oh, if I had listened to my father, I would not be here.” When they get out of the storm, he is ready to go home. But after a couple of days of peace sailing, what happened? “I want to be a sailor. I just want to be a sailor.” Then he gets captured by pirates: “Oh, what do I do with this?” And when he gets out of that, “I want to be a sailor.” We are the same way, are we not? If I could only get above it; that is what is going to save me. You do not want to get to this place; none of those things save you. Only God saves. *Only God saves*. That is Jesus, right? Jehovah saves. *Only God saves*.

He Has You in His Hand

When Daniel first interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he said, “You know, God is greater than all nations. There is greatness in all of them; they may do this and that and the other thing, but in the end, God has them in His hand. He lifts some up, He brings some down, but they are all in His hand.” And there is the whole idea of us being gone from the land. Well, you might be gone from the land, but God still exists. God never changes who He is. We might think He is just our God. No, He is not just our God; He is God. He is God over all. He is God forever; nothing changes that. And all of a sudden, there is this reawakening to who God is. Remember, after a couple of times, God reveals Himself to Abraham in Genesis chapter 17 and says, “I am El Shaddai, I am the Almighty.” In chapters 40-48 of Isaiah, how often He is saying, “I do not see anything; I am God; I bring things up; I put them down. I can tell you what is going to happen before it happens because I am behind it. That is why I brought up Cyrus. I know these things; I do these things; this is who I am. I am powerful, I am a Mighty King.” And all of a sudden there is a reminder of who He is. In Daniel, it says that He is in control, He has you in His hand.

In Ezekiel there is the valley of dry bones, and he comes to the place like he said, “There is nothing; I am dead.” You know, that is so wonderful about the Lord; He waits until we are dead.

I think of Lazarus; the Lord did not just go as soon as Lazarus died: “Okay, he is dead, I will go over there.” And it is four days! It lets you know you are good and dead. Remember, He said to Martha, “If you believe, you will see the glory of God.” And that is the thing; with God, it is not just that all of a sudden faith in Him arises. This is who God is, and all of a sudden, faith arises in us because it is responding to God’s Word to us. And all of a sudden, because faith arises, there is hope. That is the whole thing about Ezekiel chapters 36-37; it is speaking of hope. “Can these bones live?” “I do not know, Lord, You know. Speak to them. Speak to the bones.” And here we have the Word speaking to the bones. How often that has been the case in church history, of the Lord speaking to the bones of dead Christianity, and the Lord speaks to the bones and raises them up again to new life. It is not reviving them; He is raising them up again and clothing them with a new man. It is like we are clothed with the new man. That old man has to be good and dead because we want to live by that new man. But God is able to resurrect, and He does it for His own name’s sake. He does not do it because He feels sorry for you. He does pity you, but that is not why He moves. He does it for Himself. Why did He send the Lord Jesus for us? For Himself, because what He made for Himself was taken from Him, and He wants it back. He did it for no other reason

but for Himself because He made us for Himself. If we can just get hold of that! He made us for Himself.

The Word of God Went with Them

This leads us to the second point I want to make. The Torah accompanied them, the Word of God. Paul Johnson, a secular historian, who is quite skilled, provides a good account of U.S. history. Regarding the history of the Jews and the period of exile, he noted, "It is during this time that the exiles learned how to be Jews." Is that not interesting? They were Jews, but they learned how to be Jews. It is not all Israel that is Israel, is it?

What did they do after losing all the outward symbols? When the symbols were gone, they turned to their writings, laws, and records from the past. They sought help and hope from the Torah. They also had other writings from Daniel, who conveyed their beliefs and shared Isaiah's Scriptures with Cyrus, so they had Isaiah. Jeremiah documented his own records, and you recall Daniel said, "I realized the seventy years were up, and he began to pray." Thus, they had the Torah, the five books. They probably had Psalms, Proverbs, writings like Job, all those things. And it was out of this time, because they had those things, there was a turning and saying, "We want to know who we are." From this arose a school of scribes, with entire families becoming scribes.

School of Scribes

I recall reading about the Benasher family of scribes, and they had the Benapsoly school of scribes, but they were all scribes. And the scribe is not just one who copies; they are not merely copyists. Scribes were not just individuals who copied; they also wrote, learned, and interpreted. They engaged in writing and learning, and as they learned, they began to interpret while God opened the Word to them. This is where we encounter Ezra.

There is something significant about this. Through the writings being copied and discussed, people began to gather together. This is thought to be the beginning of the synagogue because Jews started meeting, not merely because they were from Israel, but because they wanted to know who they were. They banded together, not due to shared trade or origin from Israel, but because they had God in common and wanted to know His name. They began gathering to read and discuss the Scriptures. A synagogue is not like I am here and just talking to you. You are not telling me anything; no, I am telling you everything. But if you go to a synagogue, someone begins to expound on the Word. A person might ask, "Well, what about this?" and either the speaker or someone else in the congregation will respond. Does not this sound like a gathering described in I Corinthians 12, with a prophet here, a prophet there, the same kind of thing? But the whole thing is because of the interest in, "Who are we? Who am I? What does it mean to be a Christian?"

They began to renew or even reawaken their special identity. No other nation is like them; no other people are like them. They have a special identity, created by God. The nation of Israel was created by God, called into being when He called Abraham, saying, "You are going to have a multitude." This was His calling; He was bringing them forth with a special purpose. They sought to understand why they had come into existence and what God's intentions were for them. This was all documented by a secular historian, but he realized why they were doing this. This is what is happening. They were looking to understand, "What are Your intentions for me? Why have You

called me into being? Why have You redeemed me from Egypt? What is it? What are You like?" This book is not merely a history book, but a testament to God living and relating to man, every bit of it. Why should you read the Bible? Because you want to see what God is like. You want to see Him alive. You want to see Him talking. You want to hear His thoughts. You want to see what He does. It is all in there.

God Manifests Himself through a Company of His People

So why have I been brought into existence? Or for us, why have I been born again? Why has God given me a second birth? It is that God can manifest Himself through me. That is originally what man was supposed to do. God created man so he would manifest Himself to the rest of creation in a way that no other creature could. He made him in His image for communion, for service, for relationship. This is why I have been created: to be this type of vessel whom God chooses to reveal Himself to.

We, the Jews, have been brought into existence, redeemed. We as Christians have been brought into existence, born again, so that God can manifest Himself through us as a company, as a nation, as a race. Is not that what Peter said? "You are a nation, you are a race, a priesthood." You know, brothers and sisters, this is the eternal purpose of God for us: to manifest Him. That is His eternal purpose. This is what God had in mind when He made man. This is what God had in mind when man fell and said, "I am going my own way," when He raised up Israel. And when Israel fell, this is what He meant when He sent Christ to earth. He did not send Christ to earth because Israel failed. He knew Israel would fail; He sent Christ to earth because it was in His plan from the beginning. But the whole thing was to create that new race in Christ who would manifest Him. And that is what we see in the Lord Jesus. We see that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That is why He has called us.

The law to the Jews was given to them by the Lord to manifest who He was. He is holy, He is righteous. This is who He is, and you can see it in the laws that He gave. It was not just about not having idols. It is about how to live, so we can manifest who He is. Do not kill one another, do not steal from one another, but manifest who I am.

He is different, and when we come to Ezra in chapter 7, we find that he is working as a scribe. And while he was doing the work of a scribe, he was copying and learning. Incidentally, if you are studying the Bible, a good way to do it is to copy what you are studying. Copy the Word as you are studying, because it makes you think about what you are writing. It moved him to what Ezra 7:10 says, "It moved him to set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, to do it, and to teach Israel the statutes and ordinances."

All that study in him was not just head knowledge because it had an effect on his heart, and so he said, "I want to know this law; I want to know it. I want to know what is behind it, I want to know the spirit of it, and I want to do it." Psalm 119 is the cry of that Psalmist's heart. He was reading the Word, and he said, "Oh Lord, open it up more to me. I want to know it, I want to do it, because to me it is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. It is food to me. It is right because I see by ordering my life, what is in it. I find peace and joy, and that I am a blessing to others, and I did not say, 'And I am blessed by it.'"

Notice the order: to seek, to do, and to teach. I am not going to touch the teaching because we receive a lot of teaching, and for Protestant Christians, the teaching of the Word is a significant thing. And we know a lot about that.

Seek and Do

Let us look at the other two: to seek and to do. When you seek, it is not just to read but to study. Study simply means to observe. I studied a bug the other day. Does that mean I pulled out a bunch of books and started reading about a bug? No, I just looked at the bug and watched it for a while. I started noticing things like how its legs moved, its coloration, where its eyes are—all these kinds of things. That is what it is: you are observing it, you are beholding it, you are looking at it. You think, what is really there? What is this bug about? Then you look to it for its commands: “Lord, are You speaking to me? Are You speaking to me to act?” He is not speaking to me, so I will have something to say; He is speaking to me because He has something for me to do.

Now, I do not want you to think I am imposing a legalistic burden on you, that you have to obey commands and all this kind of stuff. It was C. T. Studd who paced in a room all night while he was at F. B. Meyer’s house. F. B. Meyer went up the next day and asked, “What were you doing?” And he replied, “I was looking for what command the Lord wanted me to obey.” He was up all night reading the Scriptures, asking, “Lord, is there something You want me to do?”

I do not want to put you on a trip saying, “You have got to do this, okay?” Let me explain it this way. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” I am going to refer to Paul’s epistles for this. I think for us, when we look at Paul’s most revelatory epistles, Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, they take us up into the heavenlies, and we see the kingdom of God. We are just thrilled with it, but we tend to stop in the kingdom because we like living in the kingdom. We like thinking about the kingdom.

One night, while I was living with seven other Christian men, we stayed up until the early hours of the morning. We were just contemplating the kingdom of God and discussing what the kingdom of God must be like. We were thrilled with it. But Paul starts those epistles in the heavenlies; however, he does not leave you in the heavenlies, because if you go to chapter 12 of Romans, all of a sudden, you start seeing practical applications. Now that you have seen this, this is how it should affect your life.

Ephesians chapters 4 to 6 show us that now we have seen this, this is how it affects our life. Colossians chapter 3 tells us that now that we have seen this, this is how it should affect our life. We cannot have just one of these perspectives. If we have only the practical applications, we end up with legalism. If we have only the knowledge, we have a sort of Gnosticism: “I have this wonderful knowledge. I have the secrets of all these things.” They were never meant to be separate; they were meant to be together. One might come first, but the other must follow, *it must follow*.

It is like the difference between reading Tozer’s “Knowledge of the Holy,” which is about God and His attributes. After you read that, you read J. C. Ryle’s “Practical Religion.” Put into practice what you know about God, and suddenly, it has an effect on your life. You see who He is; and how that will affect you.

For example, there is the parable about the man who had the great debt. He said, "Oh, you know, just give me some more time," and the Lord forgave him. It did not affect his life. He went and throttled his debtor. But when you actually see and are touched by what the Lord has done for you, and it is not just something you read, but it is actually God touching your life, and you are changed; you have been touched. And you have a spot where you have really been hit. You have a spot that every time you touch it, you still feel it. It is the same with the Lord when He touches us; He has that thing. I know because I have been touched. And sometimes you like to go back and touch it just to feel it again. This might make me appear strange.

At present, we are not obeying the letter, and this is extremely important. Instead, it is the Spirit that transforms the Word into life experience. Let me explain it this way: The new covenant says that the Lord writes His law in our hearts. What does that mean? Is it inscribed with a little pen so you can memorize it? No, it means this: When you read the Word and take it into your heart, it does not necessarily occur every single time. However, as you read the Word, you may suddenly perceive something, and then, when you encounter a circumstance in your life, the Lord might say, "Remember when you read that? Let us apply it here." That is what our brother Lenny referred to when he spoke about abiding, which is the experience. All of a sudden, the Lord might say, "Let us apply this right now in this circumstance." You must exercise some faith in it. This is how the Lord writes it as you are doing His will. He is writing it while you are doing the act that He is asking you to do. This is what makes the stylus cut into the clay; you are doing it. Otherwise, it remains erasable because when the Lord writes something in your heart, it is forever. It is indelible, and that is what He wants. He wants that indelible character seen through you. Thus, He has given us His Word and He says, "Look at it. Eat it. At times, it might be sweet to the taste but upsetting to the stomach." This represents the inner conflict when the flesh resists, questioning, "Should I do this, or should I deny and say, 'No, Lord, I am not ready for this?'" That is when it becomes upsetting in our stomach. However, when we step out and do the will of God, as He reveals it, we discover strength and joy in the doing of it. "I have food that you do not know of; my food is to do the will of God." This is how Christ lived, exemplifying the perfect Man in whom the character of God was manifested.

We become more aware of who we are because we have His Word showing us who we are. You know, the whole history says, "This is why you were chosen; this is how you were chosen. This is what I want for you. This is My desire for you. This is My purpose for you." Then He says, "And learning how to walk in these truths, look at Me as you see Me in the Law, not the letter because the letter leaves out the heart. Understand this: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' That is what the Pharisees misunderstood."

As we become increasingly aware of who we are, then we experience what Daniel did in Chapter 1, when he declined the king's table laden with food and wine, saying, "I do not want to defile myself." Now when you think about "defiling oneself or avoiding sin, saying, 'I do not want to do this; I do not want to do that,'" that is the fruit that shows you are defiled. What leads to defilement? Disregarding what you are called to do leads to defilement. I disregard who I am in Christ. I disregard who I am supposed to be, who He has made me to be, who He has called me to be, leads to defilement. If I say, "I will do it my way; I disregard. He has blessed me in this way, surely, I can have this." It is not sure. That is where we go back to the Lord and ask, "Lord, can I

do this? Is this okay for me?" So, think of what you are called to be. Consider your calling: You are called to be a son of God. Remember Israel: "Out of Egypt, I called My son. Out of the world, I called my son." When we are born again, He declares, "I called you out of the world; you are Mine."

Sure Hope In God

Finally, we gain a third insight, which again came from a secular historian. He noted, "When the Jews were in Babylon, because of prophecies like those of Isaiah and Jeremiah, which mentioned 'seventy years,' they knew they would not be there forever. They knew that this was temporary and transitory. Their outlook was not an outlook of saying, 'I am here forever.' It was an outlook of saying, 'I am a sojourner; I am just passing through, and there is an end to this, and when that end comes, I will be back in that glorious place where I am supposed to be.'" The whole idea of my outlook, is that my outlook becomes who I am, and what I am made to be, and suddenly, I see that the things around me are temporary."

We fear a third world war. We fear the collapse of the United States into chaos or perhaps into four or five separate nations. We fear the loss of our pensions. Let us be real about it. Brothers and sisters, this is not the final reality. I know it is hard to fathom because we live in time, but you see, the Lord is trying to bring us to the eternal so that we can live in the temporal. Do you understand? He wants us to see that He is in control of all things. He has us all. Live in the light of that so you do not fear these other things. I am not going to lie to you; I fear an economic collapse. I fear persecution, but if that comes, I found this with my own body.

I remember years ago before I joined the group of people with no gallbladders. When you have gallstones, the pain during an attack lasts for hours, and my thoughts would be, "Oh my goodness, I am dying," leading me to think that way. Through that, the Lord brought me to a place of saying, "You know something, Lord, I am in Your hands; I am just in Your hands, and I am going to leave myself there." So, whatever happens, you say, "Okay, you have this." You have inoperable cancer, and you think, "You know something, Lord, I am still in Your hands, and if You are going to take me, then I know You still love me, and I do not have to fear those things. I do not have to fear, Lord, that You are doing this to punish me. Perfect love casts out all fear, right? But I know I am in Your hands."

During this time of exile, these exiles found that they were in God's hands, and because of that, they had hope. They had the hope of their being returned to where they belonged, in His presence. This world is not my home. "This world is not my home; I am just passing through. My treasure is laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I cannot feel at home in this world anymore." That is what God was doing within these people, providing them with hope. He assured them, "I have you in My hands, and I will bring you to My intended end."

Conclusion

Is that not wonderful to know? It is a wonderful thing! He is able to save you to the uttermost. "I can bring you through to My end." And what do we have to help us see that? We have His

presence always, even if we do not feel it, and we have His Word. Out of that Word comes faith and life, and this is what happened during the exile.

There was a new reacquainting, not just with God, but with His purpose for them and who they were. So, when they went back, they were a changed people. They were not the same. That is what He means for us; it is the same thing He means for us. Can we see it as glorious? *Can we just see it as glorious?* The door is shut on the old life; the old life cannot be saved. That is okay because He has given us a new life.

That is the bones; that is the new covenant. The new covenant is life indeed because what it does as we look at the Word, and we see His commands, He takes that and puts it into us and pushes us and prods us into His will. It is not that we are going against it, but He prods us because we need that prodding. Then with the doing of it, we come to life. It is not just life for me; life touches someone else. That is just manifesting Him to others through you. What a glorious calling we have, is it not? How glorious it is!

This is the time of Advent; our hope is in an Advent, is it not? It is also the Advent of His life in us coming through to others. That is what we desire as Christians. That is what we want to see. That is what we want to be reminded of, not to look down and say, "Oh, I have fallen far short." I have to look and say, "Oh God, thank You for Your mercy. Thank You that You love me. Thank You that You still have not taken away my calling. I can still manifest You, as You planned for me from the beginning. Oh Lord, I give myself to You afresh. Let me walk with You, and when You walk with me, live through me."

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, what is man that You do what You do? Oh, Lord, thank You for making us manifest Yourself. Oh Lord, what a privilege You have given us! And how we want to just give You our all and just fall down and say, "Lord, I may have blown it, I may not be walking, but Lord, I thank You that You are saying, 'You are still Mine; I have not let go of you, and I still desire to manifest Myself through you.'" We pray that You would open Your Word to us, and we pray that we would see Your law and the life that is in it, and Lord, that it would be light to us and a lamp to our feet and how to walk. Thank You for giving instructions on how to live. Oh Lord, we want to see those instructions afresh. Our eyes are open, we want to respond in our spirits to You. We want to have everything You meant for us to have because You have given it to us. They are Your gifts; they are Your desires, and You want us to share not only in Your desires but in Your glory. Oh Lord, how can we refuse You for giving us such a great calling? Thank You for opening the door to us. Lord, we ask You to help us open the door to You that You might flow into us and flow out of us as You will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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