

The Surprising and Surpassing Beauty of God's Work

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Bible Text: Ezra 6:6-22
Preached on: Sunday, September 29, 2019

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Ezra 6. Ezra 6. We continue our exposition of this wonderful Old Testament book, actually we're working through Ezra-Nehemiah, those two books together which in the original Hebrew canon, the Hebrew Old Testament, they were one book. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah most scholars believe probably written by Ezra, put together by Ezra, but we'll see there's autobiographical accounts in both so that Nehemiah's journal is part of the book and Ezra's journal is part of the book, but that the one who penned it into Scripture was likely Ezra.

Anyway, we're coming to the end of the sixth chapter, this first section of the book, and we're looking today, the title of the message is "The Surprising and Surpassing Beauty of God's Work." The surprising and surpassing beauty of God's work. What we're gonna look at, what we're seeing is, we talked about, we've been talking about the effect of the prophetic word, you know, that the prophets came and helped them to accomplish. So the prophetic word is the word given by God specifically to his prophet to a specific people, in a specific circumstance, with specific needs, and that word specifically speaks to that and addresses that, those needs. We talked about last time that our needs are very different, God's perspective on our needs are very different, is very different than our perspective on our needs. We want to make life work in this world. That's our natural disposition. God is much more interested in us finding him and loving him because that's what we need more than anything else. We just don't realize that, even as believers we forget that what we truly need is more of Christ; to know him more intimately. This is what the soul was created to experience and it longs for, but we're distracted by so many things and the cares of the world.

So the prophetic word we said last time, the purpose of the prophetic word is to create worship. It's to focus our hearts on who God is and our relationship with him, and today what we want to see is, we're looking at kind of the effects, the after-effects of the prophetic word and we're unpacking a little more carefully the worship that went on among the people in Ezra, well not in Ezra's day, in Zerubbabel and Joshua's day, and what I want to suggest to you is that when God truly works in our lives, when he works mightily in our lives, the effect is real and evident but it's different than what we tend to expect or even want.

So that's why the title of the message is "The Surprising and Surpassing Beauty of God's Work." Do you want God to work in your life? As believers that ought to be the longing of our hearts. "God, do Your work in my life. Do Your work through my life." And what we're gonna see and I think one of the reasons this passage is in the canon is to show us that when God works mightily in your life, the result will be often quite surprising, but when you see it rightly, it will be surpassing what you ever hoped for but it takes eyes of faith to see that.

We see this in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. I think it's one of the things that God is doing in this book is he's kind of breaking down, this is what the word does, the word breaks down our wrong desires, our wrong values, it breaks down the things that we're living for and often God's word comes in and it does just demolition in your life. Then when things are broken down and stripped away, we see that all that really matters is Jesus. This is what we see in this passage just laid out for us. Ezra 6:16-22, let's read the passage together. Well, we'll start with verse 15, a little bit of context.

15 This temple was completed [the temple is completed now] on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.
16 And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. 19 The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. 20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves. 21 The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate the Passover. 22 And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might now open the eyes of our hearts and that Your word might do its mighty work in us. Lord, when You speak, things happen. The world came into being the sound of Your voice. As the Psalmist says, "When You speak, the forests are stripped bare. When You speak, the oceans quake." Lord, the earth quakes and the oceans roar. So speak into our hearts. Do Your work. Make us treasure Christ above everything else. We pray in His name. Amen.

The title, "The Surprising and Surpassing Beauty of God's Work," and what we see, we're gonna see as we look at these two accounts of worship experiences in the people of the sixth century BC under the ministry of Zerubbabel and Joshua here as they complete the temple, Haggai, Zechariah prophesying. They complete the temple. They dedicate the temple and they celebrate the Passover, and what we want to see is that this is a beautiful and glorious thing but it's different, and to really see that I think we need to put it in context again historically. So I'm gonna try like I did last week and I'm gonna show the slides again. So we're going to try it again. We'll see if it works today as well, but hopefully and maybe you should have received an email. If you didn't, you can ask to be put on the email list and you'll get this and you can look at it more yourself, but I want to just quickly review something and we're gonna focus in on one point at the end of this.

This is basically the history of Israel. You notice over here, the history of Israel because it starts [laughter]. Let's don't play any games with me now. Okay. The history of Israel starts with the call of Abraham, right? When Abraham is called, around 2150 BC, and so the period of the patriarchs is about a 300-year period almost, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The death of Jacob happening sometime after they get into Egypt. This marks when they go into Egypt, they're in Egypt for over 400 years, a large part of that time slaves. Then the exile, I mean the exodus happens there in 1446, and they come out under Moses, they enter the Promised Land 40 years later and then they conquer the land under Joshua. Then you have the period of the judges: Deborah, Gideon, Samson. Ruth and Boaz are also in that period of time. Then you have the unified monarchy. Samuel anoints Saul and then David, and they, Saul, David and Solomon reign over Israel for about 40 years each. So it's 120 years that it's a unified monarchy and this is God showing his glory through his people. Solomon builds the temple. It's a period of, it's the glory days of Israel, David and Solomon, their reign.

Well, then you have next slide, we continue the line on. Yeah, okay. You have the, boy, this is not the right, these aren't the right slides because you don't have the southern... Anyway, we're gonna go with it anyway. Okay, so we worked on several different versions of them, but the northern kingdom and southern kingdom were supposed to be here, Assyria is above, Babylon is below. So the northern kingdom goes. Forget this, this is the northern kingdom. They end in 722. Israel divides into two kingdoms after Joshua, God's judgment on Joshua, and so the northern king, you have a series of kings up there, Amri, Ahab, Jehu, and then you have the southern kings starting with Rehoboam, and then you have people like Hezekiah, Josiah, Manasseh, Uziah, they're on the southern kings, and the northern kingdom ends 722, the southern kingdom continues on to 606, the first exile begins and exile comes in three installments ending in 586 when the temple is destroyed. But we're reading about the events, we're reading about Ezra 1 started with the first return of the people from exile. They're carried off to Babylon. The Babylonians carry off the southern kingdom about 900 miles away, and then the first return happens under Zerubbabel and Jeshua after they're allowed to return by the Persian Emperor, Cyrus, who conquers Babylon.

Well, let's put up the next slide. Okay, oh, here we go. This is the right one. Now you see. That's such a relief. Okay, northern kingdom, southern kingdom. Okay, so and you see

the books of Ezra-Nehemiah are recounting beginning with this first return and they're gonna recount all the way down past 445.

So let's go to the next slide. Now this is that gold box now, you know, expanded, and you see the Persian rulers, Cyrus, Cambyses who doesn't appear in the book, Darius, Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes and we see these are the Jewish leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah.

So the next slide, or the next overlay. So here you see that this is Ezra chapters 1 to 6 are covering this period of time. Then you have this big gap where we're not told anything by Ezra, and chapter 7 to 10 then cover that period of time. Now if you remember, the book of Esther, I didn't put this in here but it would come in here somewhere, okay? So next week, Lord willing, we'll be in chapter 7 of Ezra. We're gonna jump from here, 515 all the way to 458, almost 60 years.

Next overlay. Okay, the first return under Zerubbabel and Joshua to rebuild the temple is in 538. The second return in chapter 7 is what we're gonna go to next week which is under Ezra and he's commissioned to restore the law. And the third return under Nehemiah to rebuild the walls.

We have one more, we have two more overlays. The ministry of Haggai, Zechariah we showed last week. Now I want to show one more. The next one. No, there's one more overlay after that. Yeah. The writing of Ezra and Nehemiah. Do you see on the far right? It's on the far right either side, okay, alright. Writing of Ezra-Nehemiah, 430-420. Now I want you to think about this, the book, you have the events or the events that are described are from here to here, okay, and from there to there, from 458 to basically 430, but the writing of it happened after that. So when we're interpreting the Scriptures, we always want to think about the original audience of the written word. It's not just the events and what's happening on the page of Scripture, it's those who are receiving that, the inspired word written. When the word was written, it was written with a specific purpose and a specific goal. So when you think about what were the people in Ezra that received the book in 430-420, what were their circumstances of life? That's going to be helpful.

So let's go ahead and we're gonna turn off the slides now. I want you to think about that because it's the importance of context in interpreting the Scriptures and part of context is not just where it falls in Scripture, that is important and we're gonna see that's part of what we're gonna see here but also the context of the original author or the author and the original audience. There was a particular, remember I said the prophetic word, remember, is a specific message given by God through his prophet or apostle to a specific group of people, with specific issues or problems. God's word comes directly to address what he intends to address and so we do well as we interpret the Scriptures to think about who were the first recipients of the message so it helps us understand what the general thrust in the mind of God was when he put this passage on paper. Now it still applies to all God's people afterwards but we start with the original authorial intent.

So when we think about this particular passage, I think it helps us. When we're looking at Ezra 6:16-22, to think about those who were reading this now, not just what's happening on the page but the circumstances of those who were reading this for the first time, say 425 BC, almost 100 years after the events described on the pages of verses 16 to 22. The Jews that are reading this, they've seen all the events of chapters 1 to 6 and chapter 7 to 10 happen, and they're on the other side of it. To them the temple's been rebuilt, the law has been restored under Ezra, second return happened, the third return happened under Nehemiah, the city walls are rebuilt. Everything's happened and here they are and what are the particular things that they're struggling with?

Well, one of the things that they're asking is: is this all there is? Especially because one of the interesting things in the providence of God is the book of Chronicles, 1 & 2 Chronicles, is a book written at the same time as we just talked about, 430-420, somewhere in there, maybe 430-400 BC. One of the last books written in the Old Testament, possibly the last. You have, if you want to think about contemporary messages to the people that are receiving the book of Chronicles. I'm not talking about the people on the page of the book of Ezra, I mean, the book of Ezra, sorry. That's why we need charts, isn't it? It's tough to keep all of it straight. The people who were the recipients of the books of Ezra-Nehemiah, they also about that time received the book of Malachi and they received the book of Chronicles, 1 & 2 Chronicles. These were contemporaneous prophetic words to this group of people. The same time. And one of the things that when you read Chronicles and Ezra in light of Chronicles, one of the things that jumps out at you is how radically different the way God is working in the book of Ezra is from how he worked in the past.

So I want us to try to unpack this under three points this morning. The theme is essentially God is at work, when God is at work, when God is truly at work, his work will be very different than we expected. Often it will appear to be so much less than we hoped but in reality it will be so much more wonderful and so much more glorious. So when God's at work, it'll be very different than we expect, often much less than we hoped but in reality much more glorious and wonderful than we could have even imagined.

So the first point this morning: you can know, I think this is what the recipients of the book would've thought, you can know that God will work mightily through his word. You can know that if you put yourself under the prophetic word, if you submit to God's word, he will work mightily through his word in your life. You can know that. His word is doing a great work. His word built the temple. His word has called those people back out of exile back to the place of worship. His word builds the temple and dedicates the temple and calls the people to worship through this Passover. So his word works mightily and you can know that God's word will always work mightily in your life. Isaiah 55 says that, "The rain does not fall from heaven without first watering the earth, it doesn't return after falling from heaven without first watering the earth and giving bread to the eater and seed to the sower. So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth. It will not return to Me empty or void. It will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it." God's word always accomplishes its purpose. So when we are in need, where do we go? We go to the word of God. When we have areas of our lives that are in disarray and disorder and

chaos, we go to the word of God. We desperately need the word of God more than anything, but what this passage is telling us, what God's word is going to do, he will work mightily for sure if you do that.

You see this, this first point, you see it in the two wonderful events that are recounted: the dedication of the temple in verses 16 to 18 where we read, "the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses." This dedication of the temple, the fact that they dedicated the temple, the word "dedicate" means "to inaugurate; to start." It pictures the beginning of a process that's going to be ongoing.

So the temple that had been laying in ruins for 70 years is now rebuilt and temple worship is restored. God can be sought, God can be fellowshiped with again for the first time in 70 years in truth. I mean, he was, God still exists but in that point, of course, and he was still watching over his people at all of that time, of course, but the way that he had ordained that you fellowship with him was through the temple. At that point in history, you had to go to the temple and you had to offer sacrifices at the temple to truly meet with God. The temple was his footstool, the place that people met God, and for 70 years there was no temple. For 70 years you could not truly meet with God and yet the word of God through the prophets has now caused the rebuilding of the temple and now the people are meeting with God.

The readers of the original audience as they read this, would be struck by a number of things. One thing in verse 17 would be that they note that we're told that the sin offering for all Israel, 12 male goats corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. This was an act of faith on the part of the people because in reality, remember I said that the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom divided. The northern kingdom had 10 tribes. The southern kingdom had two, Judah and Benjamin were the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom was the rest and Levi basically is spread between both because there was actually, there were 12 sons but Levi doesn't get a possession of the land. Remember when Joseph has two sons and his son, his sons Ephraim and Manasseh get his share. Basically they both get a tribal inheritance so the 12 tribes are Ephraim and Manasseh, Levi is like 13th tribe that is the one that belongs to God.

So what you have returning since Judah was Benjamin and Judah, the southern kingdom was the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin and Levites, that's what you have returning, those three tribes, as it were, or those tribes return. But here they are offering a sin offering for the other 10 tribes that aren't there. What does this mean? That they're understanding the God who made all the promises to Israel will save all of Israel and they're connecting their experience, what God is doing in my life is connected and our lives is connected with what he's been doing in the past. There is a sense in which the

God who made David a great king and made Solomon a great king, is at work now among us, making us his people.

So the dedication was significant. The Passover in God's providence, the first feast that would happen just a month after they celebrate the dedication, it would be time for the Passover and it's important to note that he recounts for us this, he could have very easily said, "Hey, they dedicated the temple and they started keeping the feasts." That would've been an economical way to make the point. They started keeping all the feasts. But he doesn't tell us that, he wants to remind us that they kept the Passover and he tells us about the Passover. Verses 19 to 22, "The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves. The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate the Passover." One of the things that the original audience would have heard in this was the significance of Passover. In fact, it would have connected with a couple of passages in Chronicles because, as I said, they received Chronicles and one of the things about Chronicles is it's a retelling of the books of Samuel and Kings. You may as maybe you've read through the Bible, the first time you ever read through the Bible, you're reading through the Old Testament and you read 1 & 2 Samuel and you read about Saul and David, and then you read 1 & 2 Kings and you read about Solomon and all of the other kings of the north and the south, and then you turn to 1 Chronicles and you start reading about David, Saul and David again. In 2 Chronicles, you're reading about all those kings. What's up with that? Why do we have two tellings of the same history? We already got that. I mean, history is bad enough the first time through, why do we have to go through it a second time? Actually, I like history and some of you probably do, I know some folks go that way.

What is that? Chronicles, I was reading a commentary that says it's like an inspired commentary on Samuel and Kings. I think it's better than that, it's not an inspired, it's an inspired commentary that was actually now given to specific people, at a specific point in time, who need some encouragement. What do they need? The people in 420-430 BC who are receiving this, the wall's been rebuilt, Ezra's come, Nehemiah's come, the temple is there, and they're still under Persian domination. There is no nation. Israel's a postage stamp. It's a drop in the bucket compared to what it was before. Chronicles comes and tells them, "Yet the God who's at work in you is the same God who was at work gloriously in David and Solomon. He's still building His kingdom and His kingdom is marching on. It's not diminishing though it appears to be diminishing outwardly. In reality it is expanding gloriously." It's just very different than it was before. You see, it's now spiritual and inward. It's not physical and outward.

So the chronicler is calling the people to this kind of a vision but the same time as he tells them this, "You're a part of what God was doing in the old covenant," they can't help but also marvel at the great distance between where the glory of David and Solomon and where they are now. This brings us to the second point: you should anticipate that God's work might look very different than you expect or even want. The first point was you can

know that God will work mightily through his word. Secondly, you should anticipate that his mighty work will look very different than you expect or even want.

One of the things that, again would jump out to the original audience in a way that it doesn't to us, is the number, the numbers in verse 17. This dedication that happened, "They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats." We mentioned the significance of the 12 goats but let's look at the bulls and the lambs and the rams. I mean, it sounds pretty impressive to me: 100, 200, 400, that's a lot of animals. 100 bulls. But the original audience that also is in possession of Chronicles knows what Solomon offered for the dedication of the temple. In 2 Chronicles 7, remember how we saw that when they laid the foundation they saw it was going to be so much smaller than Solomon's temple was? Look at the number difference. In verse 5, "King Solomon," he's dedicating the temple when he first built the original temple, he "offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep." 22,000 oxen versus 100 oxen. That is 200 times more, 220 times more. For every one ox they're offering here, Solomon offered 220. 120,000 sheep versus when you add the rams and the sheep together basically they're the same animal, 600, 600 versus 120,000, that's 200 times more. For every one ram or sheep, Solomon offered 200.

It looks like a day of small things. Wow. It doesn't look that impressive to them looking at it. Where's the glory? And in fact, that is even more striking. When you read in 2 Chronicles 7, we looked at verse 5, he offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen, 120,000 sheep, thus the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. In verse 1 of that same chapter, 2 Chronicles 7, "Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house." When Solomon offered his sacrifice, when they dedicated the temple, the cloud of glory filled the house. You know, when Moses built the tabernacle back in Exodus 40, you know what happened when he finished all the work? It says when Moses finished the work and the ark was placed in behind the Holy of Holies, the cloud of glory filled the house, and it said the priests could not go in because of the cloud of glory. Same thing when Solomon builds the temple, the cloud of glory fills the house and the priests could not go in because of the glory of God in the house. In Ezra's day, they build the temple, I mean in Zerubbabel and Joshua, when they complete the temple, there is no ark and there is no glory cloud. It's a very small thing in comparison.

You know, that's the way that they would have seen this. "What in the world is God up to? Are we somehow going backward? Is the kingdom of God retreating? What is God doing in my life? What is God doing among His people?" And then the original audience looking at this, sitting there saying, "Look how small the offering was on the dedication. There is no glory cloud. Then we built the walls under Nehemiah and still there is no glory cloud, there is no nation. All there is is just Jerusalem and the temple. That's all there is. We're still under a foreign rule. The Persians now rule over us instead of the Babylonians." After that it would be the Greeks and then later the Romans. Israel would never again come to the glory that it had had before and yet Zechariah and Haggai, what they had said when they were ministering, remember, wasn't just build the temple, it wasn't just that the word build the temple, they were giving the people that they were

ministering to faith. They said, Zechariah says in chapter 4, verse 10, "Who among you has despised the day of small things? You look at this and you see small things, you see a smaller temple, you see smaller offering. Don't despise the day of small things."

Haggai in chapter 2, turn over to Haggai near the end of the Old Testament. "On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word," this is chapter 2, verse 1, Haggai 2:1, "On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, 'Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying,'" here's the question, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?" Who among you out there saw the temple before in all of its glory? This is the temple of Solomon. And look what the prophet says, "And do you see it now?" Think about, put in your mind the image of what it was before and now look at it now. Do you see it now? "Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua.'" Don't fear he basically says. Be encouraged. Don't fear. Don't be afraid. I am with you. And he promises in verse 9, "'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts." What he's saying is, "Look," it's like the Lord says, "I want you to take a moment and reflect on what your life was before and what it is now. Look at the difference. Look at the difference and don't despair." Yeah, you look at the difference and you naturally, you want to despair. Where is the glory? What has happened in my life? He says, "Don't despair because what God's going to do with this smaller temple and this lesser picture is going to be far more glorious than what you could ever imagine and far more glorious than what you had before."

What this means is that when you begin, when you and I need the word of God to come into our lives, God promises he's going to, his word will do its work. But we tend to think in such human man-centered ways that when God's word comes in my life, I'm going to feel better, I'm going to be more successful, my relationships are going to be healed and restored. This is the whole name-it, claim-it thing. We tend to buy into it more than we even realize though many of us recognize that in other people and say, "That's all wrong. Name-it, claim-it, that's not biblical." But when God does his work in us, he has a way of bringing his word in such a way that it actually diminishes you. He breaks us down. He makes us less and this is actually the most loving thing he could do because this was the one thing that could be done that makes us see that all that really matters is Jesus. He humbles us and his word comes and so you put yourself under the word, you can know his word's gonna work but it's gonna work in ways that you would not have expected.

You know, think of an example, you're having issues with your spouse and you guys are struggling and you realize we need help and you finally humble yourself and come, and you ought to have come a long time ago but you finally do and you're thinking in your mind, "Yeah, I've got some problems I need to work on," and maybe you're generous and you think maybe 30% of the problems are on my side. Okay, maybe 40. Your mental, if you think in percentages like I do, you might do that. Some people don't do that. But anyway whatever, however you do it, you know you're laying blame somewhere and you're accounting some way and our natural disposition is to think most of it's on the

other side. So you can see with incredible clarity the issues that your spouse has, that if they could just get this one thing right, it would just, everything would change. Crystal clear and so, so often in counseling this is what happens is you can see each spouse can clearly define the other person's problems. It's amazing. I mean, they're not perfect but it's a lot more clarity than they see themselves and if the Lord's really gonna work in your life, what he's going to do is he, maybe even you may be right even. Amazingly it might only be 30% but that 30% he is going to humble you and break you and cause you to mourn over and he's going to show you that that 30% is wicked and ugly and needs to be repented of and you should be ashamed of yourself. He's going to, that's what his word does, and that 30% is the only problem that matters between you and Jesus. That's all. It's as if the 70% does not even matter because the issue is will you follow Christ. Will you surrender fully to Jesus.

So to get our attention, he lets us be broken down, even the circumstances that lead to us finally asking for help or a part of that demolition process. The prophet Jeremiah said he was called to uproot and tear down. The word of God was given to him, it was a burning in his bones, and this was what he was supposed to do, to uproot and tear down and to plant and to build. The word of God does that. It uproots and it tears down but when you know that God works mightily through his word and you see that it begins to, it does it very differently than you ever expected, maybe you're never going to get the answer to the things that you really thought you longed for, maybe your marriage is not going to be rebuilt because your spouse is not going to repent, maybe your child is not going to follow Christ and you're going to experience the broken-heartedness of dealing with these things, and his word as it works in you may do things in you that even as you become more holy, they reject you even more emphatically.

We should be aware that and anticipate that his mighty work will be different than we expect but, thirdly, we should trust that his work will be more wonderful than we could ever have wanted. His work will truly be more wonderful than we could ever have wanted. It was a smaller temple, it was a lesser offering, it was, Israel was now just Jerusalem, it had been reduced to just Jerusalem, just the temple, that's the place where God's kingdom now is, just this small area. But in doing that the Lord was clarifying, bringing great clarity, "Keep your eyes on Jerusalem. Keep your eye on the temple. That's where I'm gonna make peace," as Haggai said. The glory of this temple will be greater than the glory of the former temple. It's a much smaller temple, it's a much smaller, the nation is no longer there, it's just essentially the faithful people who are making Jerusalem the center of their life, worship the center of their life, the temple the center of their lives, as they keep looking to that temple, God's going to bring his glory and finally 400, more than 400 years later the Lord Jesus Christ was brought into that temple and the people who were looking to Jerusalem and looking to the temple, they saw his glory.

And think about the difference between the cloud of glory, I mean, that's pretty amazing. When you read those passages and you think about a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, isn't that attractive? I mean, especially when you're trying to make decisions in your life, tough decisions, should we move and take this job? Should we do this? Should we go to this school? Should you marry this person? Don't you wish sometimes that you could just

like God would just show you with a cloud or something, "Here's the right answer"? You'd love to see his glory like that, to feel his glory, to see it visibly manifested. How awesome that must have been and yet in reality we just tend to want the wrong things. We think it's cooler because that's like just so amazing visuals of that.

When Mary and Joseph walked into the temple, six weeks, 40 days after she had given birth in Bethlehem, here is a young woman, a young man, basically peasants, ordinary looking, carrying an ordinary looking baby among the many other babies that are being brought to the temple that day to be dedicated, all firstborn males have to be dedicated so there are other firstborn babies that are born on the same day as Jesus was born and they're being brought to the temple, and yet Anna and Simeon, two old, a prophet and a prophetess who happened to be continually at the temple and Simeon had been told he would not die until he saw the salvation of the Lord, he sees this ordinary couple walk in and the Spirit shows him, "That baby. That baby is the Savior of the world. That is the baby that we've been longing for since Adam sinned. That is the one." And he walked over and he got to hold that baby in his arms and he knew he was seeing the salvation of God and he was seeing the glory of God made much more gloriously visible than ever before. A pillar of cloud, a pillar of fire, as brilliant and beautiful as those things were, now in Jesus Christ you can see what God is like. John said this, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." And then he goes on to say, "No man has seen God at any time. No man has seen God at any time but the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." He's saying nobody's ever seen God until you could see Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. How much more wonderful and glorious is it to have Jesus than to have a temple that you go to with a glory cloud over it? We now see God as he truly is. When we look in the pages of Scripture, we see what Jesus is like. We see what God is like.

So God has a way of doing things in such a way he breaks down our expectations. The things we naturally would want, the things we naturally would request, he doesn't work that way, he works in an opposite way and he breaks down the things that we want so that he can give us what we really need. So he has a way, his word has a way of coming into your life and breaking things down and making things more minimalistic. Your focus becomes clearer and narrower.

There was a lady in our church that when I first came to be pastor here 26 years ago who was a dear saint, Mildred McAdams was her name, and she was just a faithful woman who loved the Lord, loved her husband, loved her children and grandchildren, loved the people of the church, prayer warrior, was always praying and caring for people. I remember when she got cancer and she was nearing death and one of the things that a real blessing of my early ministry here was, this was about five or six years in, was walking a little bit alongside her as she neared glory. At first we were praying for healing, "Lord, heal Miss Mildred." You know, her husband, he outlived her by 12 or 13 years and he needed her. You know, it's not good for a man to be alone and George would agree with that. He's now gone to be with the Lord since then, but he needed Mildred more than she needed him. And so we were praying for Mildred to be healed and she

very quickly realized that the Lord wasn't going to heal her and she developed a real contentment and just trusting in God's timing and what God was doing, and one of the things that I remember going the last couple of times I saw her, visiting with her, it was like she was living out what 2 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul talks about when he says, he's talking about suffering he's gone through and different ways, sometimes persecution but listen to what he says, 2 Corinthians 4:7, "we have this treasure," the treasure he's talking about is the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ, the fact that we know the living God through Jesus Christ, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." We have this treasure of this knowledge of God in earthen vessels, clay pots, and then he says, "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." He's using an image here, the clay pot with treasure in it, and I think he's alluding to what Gideon did when Gideon won great victory that he won. He had the people, 300 men with him who put a torch in a clay pot and what they were supposed to do at the right moment was to break the clay pot, they would hide the fire until they break the clay pot and then the brilliance of the light in the middle of the night would come out and the Midianites would see it and would be terrified, and the Lord would give them victory. And he did, they defeated this huge army, they killed themselves basically, it was an awesome thing, a display of God, but the light was hidden inside the clay pot. Well, the clay pots broke and you see the light and what I saw in her life was as her body became weaker, you saw more of the reality of God within her, and her clarity to see, as he goes on later to say, "This momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." The affliction we have is momentary and light so we're not losing heart, though our outer man is decaying, our inner man is being renewed. While we look not at the things which are seen but the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal.

She had a sense in which she was seeing more clearly into eternity and she called in all of her grandchildren, I can't remember, she had 15 or 16 grandchildren, all of them had to come to see her before she died and she basically said, "Listen, I want to tell you more than ever before I want you to know that all that matters in this life is Jesus Christ. That is all that matters." And here a lady standing at the precipice of death, looking beyond the veil, seeing with more clarity than ever before that all that matters is Jesus. What powerful words and that is God's agenda in our lives, to show us that all that matters is Jesus and his word's agenda in our lives is to show us that all that matters is Jesus.

So in the way that he worked in Ezra-Nehemiah, he's showing them, "Look, it's not about the nation, it's not about all the numbers of people, it's not about our military success or our political success, our economic success. No, all that matters is worshiping God, the temple. All that matters is meeting God. All that matters is Jesus. Jesus is the temple." And so we need to understand that when God is at work and we ask God to be at work mightily in our lives, what he's going to do is he's going to show us that all that matters is Jesus, Jesus who came and was the temple. Remember he said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it," because he was talking of the temple of his body. At that

moment he was saying, "This building over here is obsolete. It just anticipated this temple. This is the one place. This is the one place that sinners meet God is in the body of Jesus Christ sacrificed at Calvary for sinners. His blood and His blood alone, the only way to God."

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the wonder of what You've done for us in Christ. We confess our need of Your continued grace to show us, Lord, how prone we are to be preoccupied with the things of this world, the cares of this world, and truly all that matters is eternity and all that matters is Jesus. Help us, Lord, to cling to Him, His sacrificial death, His glorious resurrection, and to come to. to long to come to know Him more and more every day. May that be the heartbeat of every believer. And we pray this in His glorious name. Amen.