

**A Firmly Rooted Faith – Part VI**  
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**Nehemiah, Esther, Zechariah**  
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Turn with me in your Bibles to the first chapter of Ezra. We come this morning to the sixth, actually the seventh message, but we had one message broken into two parts. So the sixth section of the Old Testament. We have for the last seven messages been doing a survey of the Old Testament. We had laid aside for a time our study of the book of John and began to look at the Old Testament. The title of the messages has been ‘A Firmly Rooted Faith’, and the idea is to see how our faith is rooted not just in the New Testament, all the way back to the very beginning. That the doctrines of Scripture, God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. So that the things that He is teaching about salvation are being progressively revealed, but there is a consistency, and a unity to the Bible that helps give a stability and strength in our faith, especially as we live in a world that is filled with deception, and the Church is plagued with false ideas about God, false ideas about salvation. How encouraging it is to see that the things that we believe go all the way back, Genesis to Revelation. We’ve seen that as we’ve looked at the various epics of Scripture.

We started out looking at the first five books of the Bible, and we asked a question that related to a prevalent doctrine today, and that is the doctrine, the idea of ‘*easy believism*’. That just to profess faith in Christ one time, it doesn’t matter how you live, if you ever change you are saved forever. This is easy-believism, there is no real change, there doesn’t have to be. We noted how really, when you look at Exodus, and you look at Joshua and how those books talk about salvation, you see that salvation is not a small, little thing like just checking a box. Salvation is when God reaches into the kingdom of darkness and pulls you out. That is the Exodus, it is a picture of salvation. He plants you in His land through the outpouring of His wrath. Salvation is not a small thing, it is a big thing. We’ve seen that in other sections as we’ve gone through, too.

I want to talk about one particular area of false doctrine that particularly plagues the Church today, and that is the idea of kind of a focus on this world, a worldliness about the Church. And particularly the idea of health, wealth, prosperity that God intends you if you are a Christian to have everything that you want, it’s just a matter of believing and trusting. He wants you to be healthy, He wants you to be wealthy, and you just need to believe it enough. They take verses from various places and say, “Look what Jesus said, ‘Wherever two or three are

gathered in My name, there I am in your midst, and whatever you ask, you'll have from Me, so believe it and you have it.” ‘The Word of Faith’ movement. Millions of people in America are affected by this kind of bad theology. Not just in the extremes of the Charismatic movement, and The Word of Faith, but all the way down to people like Joel Osteen, promising “Your Best Life Now”. That you can know how as a Christian to have your best life now. I heard John MacArthur speaking about that recently. He said, “You know, the only way that you have your best life now is if you are on your way to hell.” The Christian is not having his best life now, and the reason we are doing this study is to show that the hope, it is not just, and there is enough Scripture all over the Old Testament and the New Testament to show that that is a wrong theology, but to me, what we’re going to see today is that the whole tenor of how God deals with His people from the beginning to the end shows the error of that kind of thinking. That the health/wealth gospel is inconsistent with the *whole* of the Bible, and what God is teaching as He deals with His people. As we’ve approached this study, we’ve looked at, it is kind of a study of redemptive history. We’ve looked at how God has dealt with His people throughout the stages of redemptive history, and as we’ve done that, we’ve assumed, based on Hebrews 11 and other passages in the New Testament that the Lord is using some typology to teach us some things. In Hebrews 11, we noted how Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are commended as great heroes of faith because they received a promise, “You’ll have the land of Canaan,” but they never actually received what was promised. They never got Canaan. They lived their whole lives and didn’t get it. We noted 685 years after Abraham was promised Canaan did the people finally possess Canaan. Six hundred and eighty-five years, what was God doing? The author of Hebrews says, “He was teaching Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob that the true Canaan is not a place in this physical world.” The true Canaan is Heaven and because they realized this they began to look for a better country, not Canaan anymore, but a heavenly one. That is what God was doing, He was teaching from the beginning. You see that in itself says that health and wealth doesn’t make sense, that *‘health/wealth’* gospel. If you are looking for everything now, you are running 180 degrees in the wrong direction. The Christian is the person whose affections are set on the things above.

We’ve noted how, as God deals with His people, each stage planting them in the land, then under the united monarchy, the United Kingdom, Saul, David, Solomon, He is teaching us more about what we need to be His people. Then in the divided kingdom, which we looked at for a couple of weeks, we saw what He was teaching us—we need to be worshippers of God if we’re going to live in His land. We need the word of God to make us worshippers of God.

Then last time we looked at the exile, when the Lord causes the land to basically spit out His people, casts them away. And we saw that in that the Lord was teaching us what He then spoke to them through the prophets was, “You need a new heart. You can’t dwell in my land until you have a new heart.”

So today we come to this next epic of history, the post-exile. After they had been in bondage for 70 years in Babylon, God brings them back to the land, and they have great expectations of what the Lord is going to do, which are rooted in biblical prophecy. You know the prophets that told them they were going to be exiled—Isaiah, Jeremiah. He also told them that, “After the exile, God is going to do some amazing things. When He brings you back in the land, there is going to be blessing that you cannot imagine. We’re going onward and upward. It is going to be better than it has ever been,” was essentially the message. But when they get home, things are very different than they expect. What is God teaching us through that? That is what we want to consider this morning. What was the Lord doing? What was He revealing about Himself, about us, our need, and about His kingdom in the way that He dealt with the people after the exile? I want us to read Ezra 1, and we see here the end of the exile where Cyrus, the king of Persia, right after the medo-Persian empire, the way God delivers from Babylon is He raises up another empire, the Medes and the Persians, an alliance of two kingdoms, who attack Babylon, and Cyrus, the king of Persia, then issues a decree to let the people go home. This is where Ezra 1 begins.

***Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying:***

***<sup>2</sup> “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”***

***<sup>5</sup> Then the heads of fathers’ households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and***

*rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> All those about them <sup>7</sup> encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering. <sup>8</sup> Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods; <sup>9</sup> and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. <sup>10</sup> Now this was their number: 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes; 29 duplicats; <sup>11</sup> 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second kind and 1,000 other articles. All the articles of gold and silver numbered 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem*

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we ask that as we come to Your word that we might be blessed by Your Spirit, to understand, to apply it to our hearts, Your truth. That in Your light we might see light. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Now we are basically dealing with the history in the Bible that is covered in the last three historical books—Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. We are also talking about the time where two of the post-Exilic prophets, well several of them actually, four of them, but particularly Haggai and Zechariah's ministry. Also Joel and Malachi, we're talking about the period after the come back from Babylon, in 538-536, the journey, they get back in the land. They start the temple construction in 536. They were originally exiled in 606, so it's been 70 years since the exile began. They have great expectations now. The Lord has stirred up the spirits of people. They come back to the land. They are being led by Zerubbabel, a son of David, and by Joshua, a man who has been chosen as high priest, and they come back to the land amid great celebration, great anticipation. But what happens is their hopes are quickly met with a reality. Now think about this, remember that the exile was a time where the Babylonians made three different attacks on Jerusalem. In 606, 597, and 586, three separate sieges of the city, destroying parts of it each time, taking captives each time, but the last time they burned the temple to the ground, they destroyed the palace, they broke down the walls of Jerusalem. They left it in utter disarray. Each time they've carried off more people, and so Jerusalem is a shambles, it is in ashes. Now the people in exile though the Lord stirs up their spirits to come back. Cyrus, the king, issues this amazing edict. I mean think about that, the Persian king says, "I want to build a house for the God of Israel," the hand of God as it were. So they go back, they come back, and as I said, they start the

temple construction in 536. They've come back with gold and silver that they were given by the people around them, including Cyrus, the king of Persian, giving them back the articles of the temple which had been plundered. They go back with great expectations, but then it meets reality. When they get back they see Jerusalem is in ruins. Imagine that you were years and years away from your house. You came back after 70 years. Well that is kind of hard to imagine, isn't it? We don't live that long, but say your grandchild comes back to your house. He heard about what a great house it was, but he gets there and nobody has been tending it for 70 years, what is it now? It is overgrown, it is rotting. There is something about good house, that if you don't open it up and use it, it rots. That is just one little example of what is happening all over Israel. There are some people on the land but it is such a small number of people in the land that things are left untended. Farmland is overgrown. You don't farm on your farmland for 70 years and you've got some nice pine trees there.

So the economy is in a shambles and yet they were told by the prophets that when they came back there were promises like this: The land of Canaan will be like the Garden of Eden. The mountain of God, the mountain of Jerusalem will be exalted above all the mountains. That means Jerusalem, the capital city, will be exalted above every other capital of every other nation. It will be more glorious. These are their expectations as they read the prophets, and as they come back, but the reality is they come back to a city in desolation. They come back still not truly free. They are not an independent nation again, they've just changed masters. They've gone from being under Babylon to being under the Medes and the Persians. They still have to pay taxes to the wicked Persian and Median kings. There is no king, no freedom, no blessing, and so there are questions very soon. I want us to consider two questions I think that what God does during this time helps us consider two questions about the kingdom, and these two questions are:

*Where is the kingdom? and How does the kingdom come? So Where? and How? Where is the kingdom? How does the kingdom come? They start asking, "Where are the blessings?"*

### 1) Where is the Kingdom?

So the first point, *Where is the kingdom?* "Where are the blessings, Lord, that You promised us?" "Where is the outpouring of Your grace?" "Where is the blessing upon the land so it will be like the Garden of Eden?" This incongruity between the expectations they had that seemed to be drawn rightly from the Scripture. Now it is not exactly, they weren't drawn rightly, but you have in the prophets, the prophets will be talking about '*The Day of the Lord*', a big theme in the 16 books of

prophecy that we have, Isaiah through Malachi. *'The Day of the Lord'*. The Day of the Lord is the day when God comes, and the Day of the Lord has two separate emphases that are complimentary. The first is that the Day of the Lord is the day when God comes in judgment. Amos, one of the first prophets to preach in the Northern Kingdom, he talked about the Day of the Lord and he said this: "Prepare to meet your God," to the Northern Kingdom. That is when God comes, He comes in judgment. If you are in rebellion, He will judge you. If you are an unbeliever, you will be judged for eternity. If you are a Christian who is wavering, or you are a true believer who is wavering, He is going to deal with your sin. So a key part of the Day of the Lord is God coming, and it talks about when He comes the earthquakes, fire goes before Him, devastation happens, and so that was fulfilled in the Babylonian exile, wasn't it? That was the Day of the Lord. It was part of the Day of the Lord.

The other part of the Day of the Lord is He not only comes in judgment, but He comes in blessing, that as He pours out His wrath, He also makes available His blessing. He makes His love known and the same time He makes His wrath known. This is on His day, the Day of the Lord. So that they would see, the prophets would talk about the terrible things that were going to happen in these images that they would see. As I said, the earth will quake, the mountains will fall into the heart of the sea, but then it would be, but then the Lord is going to gather you from the nations, and He's going to make the land of Canaan like the Garden of Eden. He's going to bring rivers in the desert. So they saw this blessing is coming to come, so they assumed that when they came back from captivity, that it was going to be like that. A reasonable assumption, we could have probably been thinking exactly the same thing. In studying these things, I've begun to wonder when we were working through this, "Lord, why weren't You more clear? You could have been more clear. You could have said, 'You are going to come back and there is going to be a measure of blessing, but you are going to have to wait a long time after that for the real blessing to come. Because the real blessing he is talking about came in Jesus in His first coming, which was the ultimate Day of the Lord. Think about how I said the Day of the Lord means wrath, and anger, but it also means blessing and love. The Day of the Lord is the day Jesus hung at Calvary. God poured out His wrath in an unprecedented way, He poured out his wrath upon sin, He poured out His wrath upon His Son in a way that the sky went dark. We are not even able to look at it, as the Son becomes sin. He who knew no sin becomes sin for us, and at the same time that moment is the day when God's love is poured out, and as Jesus breathes His last, the Lord of Life dies. When He breathes His last, the curtain is torn from top to bottom. The way into paradise is made open. That is the Day of the Lord.

But back to my issue with the prophets. “Lord, why weren’t you more clear through the prophets that there was going to be this lag time? I think one of the things that the Lord does is He has a way of saying hard things to us. He has a way, His word is perfect, exactly the way He wanted it. There is nothing wrong with it. I wish He would have done it differently maybe at times. “Why didn’t You do this?” but I’m wrong. I think the reason He did this is He wanted the people asking that question, *Where is the kingdom?* He knew that if they asked it with enough perplexity, and enough earnestness, they would begin to understand the same way Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could have been saying, “When will we get our land?” And the Lord used that time of them living in the land, not possessing the land, to help them loosen their grip upon the land of Canaan. That is, this life, and He let them begin to yearn for the next world. The same thing is happening here. The Lord is teaching them that there is no ultimate blessing until Jesus comes back and we enter into eternity. I mean, think about how different it was for the Israelites. They wanted to go back to the days of David. They thought they were going to, David and Solomon. When they were defeating their enemies, when God was pouring out His blessing upon them, the borders of Israel were expanding. They expect the Lord was going to do that again, but the Lord is basically saying after the exile, “No, I’m never going to do it again.” Israel has never been, and it was never under a king again. They had a brief period of independence, the Maccabean Revolt, but they didn’t have a Davidic ruler even then. It was a brief period and the Lord let them get stomped out quickly by the Romans. In fact, what the Lord tells them in exile, the book of Daniel, though it was written during the exile, was really about the post-exile.

We went through the book of Daniel a few years ago on Sunday mornings. What we saw there is that basically Daniel’s message is—the Most High is reigning, and He is ruling, His kingdom is coming in His way, but it is never going to be good for you again in this world. Remember the four beasts that Daniel sees in Chapter 7? It represents four great kingdoms. And the fact that they are beasts tells you, “Look, it’s going to be hard to live under the dominion of these kingdoms.” Who would want to live under the dominion of a lion with wings? That is Babylon. Well you are going to be delivered from him, but what is going to happen after that is a great bear, with ribs in his mouth, who is wanting to devour flesh. That is the Medo-Persian empire that is going to rule over you. So Babylon ruled to 538, and then the Medes and the Persians ruled from 538 to about 330 B.C., 200 years. Then the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, took over and they ruled from 330 to 165. From 165 to about 70 A.D. they were independent. Then the Romans took

over. A brief little period of independence, but never any of the glory they had before. Why did God do it that way? I mean, was it just that the nations were tougher than they used to be? He just wasn't able to deal with them like He dealt with the Egyptians. He wasn't able to subdue them like He had the surrounding nations in Canaan. "They were just tougher," was that it? Of course not! God was teaching us. What He was doing was showing them, "It is not about this world. The kingdom that I set up in Jerusalem, the kingdom with David there, was to show you a picture of how you come into My land." It was never about that land itself, it was always about My Son, the Son of David, who will come, who will make a kingdom that is not of this world. That is the message. It was to intensify the Messianic expectation.

Now you could have also been, "Well, Lord, You could have just let them have a milder time," but when you read the book of Daniel, and you read what they are going to go through, it was anything but mild. I mean, the times were going to be very difficult, not always, but at times they have great difficulty under wicked, evil kings that would make them suffer. Antiochus Epiphany is described in Daniel 8 and 11. The antichrist, or possibly also Roman emperors like Nero, Augustus described in Daniel 7. What He is teaching them is, "My Kingdom is not of this world," and that is what the authors of the New Testament, the apostles, came to understand. I mean, think about why they said things like Peter says, in 1 Peter 2, "As strangers and aliens abstain from fleshly lust." What he's saying is if you're a Christian, you are a stranger and an alien in this world. This world is not your home. Paul said in Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly await a Savior."

You know, you much more eagerly await a Savior from Heaven when things aren't good, and so that what we've learned is that that basic promise of God for life in this world for His people is, the basic plan of God, is a pathway of suffering, the complete opposite of what so many teach, because in this sin-sick world, the only way that we can let go of this world and let go of sin is to suffer.

1 Peter 4:1-2 says, "If Jesus suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same mind." If it was necessary for Jesus to suffer in the flesh, then we're to arm ourselves with the same mind: *...because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,...* Jesus was perfected through suffering. He didn't have any flaws. He was always spotless, but He became more and more worthy as a Savior by going through what He went through, every temptation He went through and conquered. And He suffered. His whole life was suffering. He was a man of



sorrows acquainted with grief, and so we should understand that the Christians are normally going to be the disenfranchised outsiders, and when we find ourselves that way, we shouldn't be surprised. I mean after all, Satan is the god of this age. He's the prince of the power of the air. He's the one who is in the world.

So that tells us about the way we should live our lives. We shouldn't put so much into things like politics. I'm not saying it's completely unimportant. It is important and I think an appropriate amount of time should be spent working on political issues, but the reality is politics is never going to solve the problem. I read an excellent article the other day by a guy—I don't know that he's a true believer—Mark Steyn, who basically was saying that it doesn't matter what happens in the 2016 election, that if a Republican is elected or not it's not going to change anything ultimately, because the Republicans have lost the culture war, and so it doesn't matter who's in charge, because you're fighting the issues that are there. Things have changed so much culturally that people's mindsets are moving at such a rapid rate away from Conservative values that there's no way you can change it unless you change the culture.

I thought I'd like to add to your article, Mark, and say the only way that you can change the culture is to change hearts with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have the most powerful weapon to change the culture, the Good News of Jesus Christ, but it helps to put it in perspective again. What do we expect in this world? *My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were, My people would fight for Me.* So the question is where the kingdom was, was being revealed in the way the Lord dealt with His people in the post-Exilic period. That's why John says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The world is not our home.

So the question is: Where? Where is the kingdom? The kingdom is coming. The kingdom's not yet, and the more that we learn that, the more we can set our hearts and our affections on the coming kingdom. But we also learn something in the period after the Exile, and the other question is: How? Not just where the kingdom is, but how the kingdom comes.

## 2) How Does the Kingdom Come?

We're stepping back and looking at what God is doing. Sometimes when you're looking at it real closely and you step back from something, it gives you perspective and suddenly you see, "Oh, I've been totally missing this, and now I see what's wrong." Well, stepping back from what the Lord is doing in history even in bringing them back to the land, there are some interesting things. I was reading a book *A House for My Name* by Peter Leithart and he makes a point that

the prophets make clear that the return from the Exile was actually a second Exodus in the way God dealt with His people.

Remember the Exodus. They're delivered from the domain of darkness and brought into His land. Well, the same thing happens. They're delivered from another domain of darkness and brought into His land. They're delivered from bondage, a measure of bondage that they're released from when they come back to the land. The prophets make these parallels. In fact, turn with me to Isaiah 11 and we'll look at a couple of passages in Isaiah. In Isaiah 11:15-16, this is one of the passages that pictures the glory of what God will do. In fact, if you look back at Verse 6 for a moment, when the servant of the Lord comes, this is what's going to happen:

### *Isaiah 11*

**6**    *And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little boy will lead them.*

**7**    *Also the cow and the bear will graze,  
Their young will lie down together,  
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

**8**    *The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,  
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.*

Basically that's what's going to happen when the kingdom comes, but of course that's really a picture of heaven. There are some glimpses of it in this life on the other side of the cross, but ultimately it's heaven. But what I wanted you to look at is Verses 15 and 16 to see how as the prophet is talking about the return from Exile, that he really makes some striking comparisons to the Exodus. Look at Verse 15. He's talking about when they come back from Babylon. He says:

*Isaiah 11:15 ~ And the Lord will utterly destroy...*

In the Hebrew, the word means dry up.

### *Isaiah 11*

**15** *And the Lord will utterly destroy  
The tongue of the Sea of Egypt;  
And He will wave His hand over the River  
With His scorching wind;  
And He will strike it into seven streams  
And make men walk over dry-shod.*

They're going to walk over the river on dry land.

**16** *And there will be a highway from Assyria  
For the remnant of His people who will be left,  
Just as there was for Israel  
In the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.*

You see, just like in the days they came out of the land of Egypt, so will it be after the Exile. Turn over to Isaiah 43:14-19.

### *Isaiah 43*

**14** *Thus says the Lord your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,  
“For your sake I have sent to Babylon,  
And will bring them all down as fugitives,  
Even the Chaldeans, into the ships in which they rejoice.*

**15** *“I am the Lord, your Holy One,  
The Creator of Israel, your King.”*

**16** *Thus says the Lord,  
Who makes a way through the sea  
And a path through the mighty waters,*

**17** *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):*

You see the imagery, the allusion to the Exodus. It was clear in Chapter 11 He made the direct reference, “It’s like when I took them out of the land of Egypt.” But here again He’s saying that at the post-Exile, He’s comparing it. “Look at the Exodus and look at what I’m doing. I’m delivering you from darkness. I’m

bringing you into My land.” The problem is that is it also, as you step even farther back from it, you see that there are a lot of similarities, but there are also a lot of differences. As for similarities, did you remember earlier when we read in Ezra when they left Babylon, they left by plundering the Babylonians? They were given gold and silver by their neighbors. That’s exactly like what happened in Exodus when they left Egypt. They were given gold and silver to take back to build God’s house. So there are similarities like that.

Another one is in Ezra 2, where there’s a careful numbering of the returnees by the family names, which is exactly like the book of Numbers after the Exodus when the people are numbered. But when you step farther back, there are some stunning contrasts that basically we would expect that things would be like they were in the Exodus, but there are some contrasts. The number of people in the Exodus, probably 2 to 3 million people left Egypt and went to Canaan, 600,000 men of fighting age, we’re told. In Ezra 2, we’re told that only 42,300 total people went back to the land, 7%. But more than that, think about this: Probably the most dramatic difference is that when you compare the Exodus with the return from the Exile, the thing that stands out the most if you really look at it is in the post-Exile, there are almost no miracles. There’s virtually a complete absence of miracles.

I mean, think about what happened in the Exodus. I mean, you’ve got the plagues on Egypt, you’ve got the parting of the Red Sea, you’ve got water coming out of the rock, manna coming from heaven, but after the Exile when they come back, there are no plagues. There is no parting. The Lord said it was going to be something like that, but there’s nothing physical like that. There’s no pillar of cloud by day, no pillar of fire by night. Why is that? I mean, why did God not show up the way He did earlier?

This here is again showing us why there the basic tenor of Scripture is against so much of the way people teach it ought to be. I mean, there are miracles, but they’re much more understated. Basically the miracles you have after the Exile are the return under Ezra. They make it in four months without a bodyguard, without an army to protect 50,000 people making that journey. And that is miraculous, but do you see the difference between that and the Red Sea opening up? They rebuild the wall in 52 days under Nehemiah. That’s amazing too, but again, it’s not the same character of miracle. It’s a more understated miracle. The book of Esther, this shows you again this contrast. In the book of Esther, the name of God is not mentioned one time. God or Lord is not mentioned one time, and yet what you see is God governing everything with split second timing to deliver His people. So the miracles are understated.

Why is that? Why is God doing that now? I think what He's doing is He's teaching us that the kingdom comes—how does the kingdom come? The kingdom comes differently than we expect. We don't know where the kingdom is. That's our problem. It's not where we want it to be. It's somewhere better, and we don't know how it comes. We want it to come with fanfare and glitz and glamour, and God says—He's teaching them like weaned children that the way the kingdom of God comes is with less glitz and fanfare, and it comes quietly and meekly. It's really been that way all along. The kingdom came to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with little fanfare. There weren't any miracles. God wasn't wowing them into submission to Him. That's not God's nature. We think it should be that way, and this is the whole signs and wonders hunger that's out there today, craving for miraculous expressions. Jesus said, "A wicked and perverse generation seeks a sign," and there's something that is wrong when people are enamored with those things.

In fact, a passage of scripture that speaks to this, Romans 10:6-8, says, "Don't say that you should ascend into heaven. That is to bring Christ down. Or don't try to descend into the abyss. That is to bring Christ up. Don't look for something supernatural. No, realize that it's the preaching of the word. He's near to you in the preaching of the word which you believe." He's telling us that the kingdom comes quietly. I mean, God could do it however He wants to, but He knows that for faith to be born, a faith that is pleasing to Him, a person needs to trust His word and believe His word. Think about the coming of Jesus Himself. He didn't come the way we would expect. There was no announcement from heaven, a bugle the first time, was there? There will be in the end, but when He came to save people, He came quietly, almost imperceptibly, almost entirely unnoticed. He lived for 30 years in silence in Nazareth.

Isn't that so contrary to the way that we would expect? His ministry was only 2.5 to 3.5 years, depending on how you understand how many Passovers He was present for, and though He did miracles, that wasn't His main thing. Remember if you heard the story of Joni Eareckson Tada, she was a woman who was as a 14 or 15-year-old girl, was diving into a pool, broke her neck, and became a quadriplegic, and she talked about how for so many years she wanted to be healed, and she was angry with God, and she went to the places where she could be healed, where the Christian miracle workers were having their services, and she talked about how when she went in, she was so excited. Her sister took her to see Kathryn Kuhlman, and she was there when they wheeled her into the wheelchair section. There were like 35 different people who were either in wheelchairs or on walkers, and they were off to one section.

Then Kathryn Kuhlman came out and she watched her with her flowing gown and she began to teach, and then she noticed as things were going on that she was on the other side of the auditorium over there healing people, and Joni thought, “Why don’t you come over here to where the hard cases are?” And before the service was over, those same ushers came and wheeled all those wheelchairs out through the back entrance to the elevator so that they wouldn’t be in the way, and maybe so people wouldn’t notice. She said she struggled with that. She was embittered that why would God not heal her? And then she came in reading Mark 1, and she noticed something extraordinary.

She saw where Jesus was healing people, and people were coming from everywhere in Galilee to be healed by Him, and He was healing them. One night after everyone’s gone home, the disciples go to sleep and they wake up the next morning and they can’t find Jesus. The people are already at the door ready to be healed, people gathering to be healed. They go out and find Him, and they basically say, “People are looking for You,” and He says, “Let us go to another city.” He doesn’t go back and heal them. He says, “Let’s go to another city. I need to preach there, for that is the reason I came.” He came to preach, and Joni came to understand the title of the message that we listened to on Wednesday this past week, *A Deeper Healing*, that Jesus didn’t come to save people from the effects of sin. He came to save people from sin itself and all its effects too eventually. But He came to save us from the reign and rule of sin. She came to a place in her life where she talked about going to the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, and suddenly finding herself. Whenever people had come to her before when she wanted to be healed before she realized that that’s not Jesus’ way, to heal everybody.

She went to Jerusalem, she and her husband who was pushing her down the Via Dolorosa, and they suddenly found themselves at the pool of Bethesda, and she noticed the sign there, *The Pool of Bethesda*. Early in the aftermath of her accident she would always ask people and they said, “Would you like us to read you some Scripture?” and she would say, “Yes, read John 5.” That’s the story of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda where a man laid lame for 38 and Jesus healed him. And Joni was telling this story recently in the message we heard, and she’s now been lame for 46 years. She said at the pool of Bethesda, her husband was looking to see if there was any water down there anywhere. She was sitting there and she started praying to the Lord and thanking Him that He didn’t heal her the way she wanted to be healed, because through that she was healed in ways that were much deeper and much more wonderful.

That's the way God works. He comes in the still small voice. He speaks through His word, and throughout history what we see is it's not the sensational and the flashy. It's people who are suffering but who have faith. What is faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. If you see it, it's not faith, so God only has punctuated His message with these seasons of miracles in the Exodus under Elijah and Elisha, and in the ministry of Christ and the apostles, but generally the greater miracle is the preaching of the Gospel causing people to be born again and transformed to be followers of Jesus Christ. Those are the greatest miracles and the miracles that we need to look for.

So as Christians, we need to understand and we need to heed the word of Haggai the prophet. When they were building the second temple, they came back from Babylon, they started the construction in 536, they ran into opposition shortly after they'd laid the foundation, they stopped building, and for 16 years the project lay dormant. Then God raised up Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets, to preach the word to them, and they began building again, and the people were discouraged. Some were discouraged because this temple was going to be so much less than the former temple had been. It was a much smaller temple.

Again, why did God do that? He could have built a bigger temple, a greater temple, if He wanted to. He was showing us it's not about this temple, and Haggai the prophet said this to the people: "Do not despise the day of small things, for this temple will be more glorious than the former temple. This temple will be the temple to which Jesus Christ, God in flesh will come. Don't despise the day of small things. I'm weaning you from the glitz and the glamour of that first temple and it's a smaller temple so that you will learn that when I come, it's going to be not with the glamour and glitz that you expect."

I mean, who would have expected when they first saw that Nazarene gentleman that that was God in the flesh? He had no stately form or majesty but He came in meekness and gentleness, but if you were willing to keep looking at Him, you would see that in Him dwells the glory of God. So the Lord wants us to be people who don't despise the day of small things. God doesn't do the things we want. He calls us to a life of suffering. He calls us to a life of challenges and difficulties, a few mountaintop experiences, but if we stay with Him in His word, what we find is that even as we are like Paul said, "We're crushed, but we're not overwhelmed. We're broken down but we're not despairing, always bearing in our bodies the death of Christ, that the life of Christ might be revealed." That's the way, and it's faith and trusting in Him and in the simplicity of His word where we meet Christ.

This is how we overcome and God is glorified, in that. The God of heaven who reigns over all, who could do whatever He wants to, is glorified in conquering all that's evil in the world in the most simple and surprising ways, and the cross is the ultimate testimony of that. The greatest victory that has ever been won was won when Jesus hung there in weakness and humiliation. At that moment, Satan was utterly defeated, and how is Satan going to be utterly defeated in our lives? In moments of weakness when we don't think we have anymore, when God allows the temptations to be so great that we find ourselves struggling under them, when God allows the burdens to be so great that we can't bear them, those are the moments when we reach out and we call out to Christ and we find in Him our strength and His glory is revealed, but the pathway is through crushing, through being broken down. As we do that, we will see more and more of His glory. It's not your best life now. Your best life is to come, but the wonder of it is when we know that, we really are the ones that are the happiest of any people on the face of the earth, because when you suffer with Christ, when you suffer, when you're broken down, you see His glory, and that is wonderful.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

*Father, we thank You for the wonder of the plan of salvation. We thank You that You have found a way to save sinners, remaining holy and righteous, such a mind-stretching way, Father, that You would have chosen to punish Your Son, to pour out all of Your wrath on Him, so that You could punish our sin in Him and treat us as He deserves to be treated, and then that You would continue to sanctify us along that same path, an unexpected one, one that we wouldn't even desire or choose, a pathway of suffering, and difficulty, and trial, and yet, Father, it is the most wonderful way. It is the most beautiful way.*

*We say with the Psalmist, "The Lord has done it and it is marvelous in our eyes." We pray, Father, that You would open blind eyes today, open deaf ears to see the glory of Christ, to hear the wonder of His call to salvation, and we pray that You would help us all to be more content followers of such a wonderful and worthy Savior. We pray in His Name, Amen.*

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