

From Destruction to Deliverance: God's Faithfulness Never Fails

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Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] All right, good morning all. There we go. Welcome to Spring 2025. Praise the Lord. Yeah, yeah. No? Okay. My name is BK and I have the pleasure of serving here as one of the pastors here.

Please turn with me to the book of 2 Chronicles, the passage that Carl had read. And there's not a lot I'm going to say on the merger right now.

I'm just pretty excited that God, just through his will, has just worked his way in our hearts, both leadership and members, just to be here. You know, someone gets asked, sometimes the question gets asked is, you know, are we doing it just for the sake of growing numbers?

I look at it the sake of growing opportunities. Combining different people with complementary gifts in order not only to serve one another better, but to reach this community better.

There's some wonderful gifts that both churches have, and I think as we combine them, I really believe that we can become, how do I say it, a powerhouse.

[1 : 18] Where we're just generating, we've got some biblical elders in place, we've got leaders that are dying to serve, opportunity to use their gifts. In case you don't know, the elder's job is actually to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

So any type of work that needs to get done in the church, guess who does it? Members. Members, right, it's the members. Our role is to equip you as the saints to present yourself mature in the faith, and our goal, as the Apostle Paul stated, is our desire is to present each and every one of you mature in Christ.

That means to provide for you every opportunity to learn, to grow in the knowledge of him. And we do this through several ways. We do this by leading by example.

We do this by teaching and preaching sound doctrine, through caring for the flock, and modeling Christ-like character. And when we do that, we really grow in affection for you, and I pray in an affection for us.

So for the next few weeks, next few months, just as the leadership teams grow, I'm going to ask you to commit to prayer. Just commit to praying with us, for us, just as we combine and we see how those gifts all come together.

[2 : 47] I ask for patience, understanding. But I'll be honest with you, there is no hesitation on my heart, or I'm excited.

I'm excited for this great opportunity to come, and for you who've come over from 99 to get to know you, as I've been able to get to know those in my own flock here. So now we are one flock together, being shepherded by several men.

So thank you for that. Now, because you've kind of been away, I'm going to give you a brief synopsis on where we are in the story of the Bible.

So we're going to cover this for the next two Sundays. Then we're going to go to the Book of Romans together. But one of the issues that I've kind of confronted or dealt with myself is, have you ever had a person or a pastor simply say, read your Bible more?

Right? Yeah, okay, I'm going to read my Bible more. But you kind of get into some of these books, and you start to ask yourself, especially in the Old Testament, these are hard books to understand. So what we've been doing is, for the last 13 weeks, kind of going through the Old Testament books and where they fit into the life of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 01] One of the most important things that we have been driving at is that not only are these stories relevant back then, but the stories that we read are relevant to today.

And one of the absolute points I wanted to pull out is, it's to teach us that the Old Testament, that to understand that the Old Testament just didn't happen.

These weren't just events that occurred that the writers decide to write down. But this was actually, in fact, a story written by God for us.

This was a story, how do I say, this is a real story created by God about real people who lived in real time, who faced real life circumstances.

It's a part of real history. And they had concerns that were real, just like us. They struggled with loneliness. They struggled with starvation.

[5 : 05] They struggled with a foreign nation coming against them. All these aspects are not accidents. That we've seen that God is the primary mover throughout the whole of Scripture.

Amen? That means God is sovereign. God is making these things happen. But here else is the things. Not only did he make the stories, but he made the promises.

God made the covenants. That God planned the redemption of his people from the very beginning. And this story is how God's rescue plan unfolds on the pages of history. I've divided the Bible into three acts.

And I got that division from Matthew 1.17, if you're familiar. The Old Testament is divided in those three acts. The first act is from Genesis 12, when God calls Abraham, and it ends when David is king.

[6 : 10] That's almost the first act is about how God grew the Jewish nation to almost to a point of perfection, where they were known throughout the world.

When we read in 1 Kings 10, Queen Eshiba comes, visits the land, and says, this is greater than we've ever heard. Your God has been kind.

Acts 2, which we looked at yesterday, is probably one of the most depressing passages in all of Scripture, where it was the decline from being on high listening to God, and how Israel rejected God over and over.

And we looked at specific moments in the history of Israel that eventually led them to exile. That God, tired of their sin, brings in judgment.

So this is where we now begin. We begin in 2 Chronicles 36. We begin with God's people now in exile.

[7 : 21] They live in a foreign land ruled by a foreign king. Before we go any further, I want to pray.

But what I want you to know is my goal for this sermon is I want to give you, kind of like last sermon, I gave you the five main aspects of history that led to God's demise.

Guys, this morning I want to teach you about how God's promises hold true six times in the exile, which eventually leads to the promises being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

You with me? So that's the goal. I want to give you six of those. So let me pray. Dear Lord, Holy Father, I just pray that you'd give me clarity with this head cold, that my voice would be strong and that the people would be eager to hear your word, oh Father.

Father, I pray that it'd be an effectual word, that your word working with the Holy Spirit, because the issues that we are going to be dealing with in this sermon are the issues that we deal with ourselves here today.

[8 : 40] So Father, I ask for your hand of blessing. I ask for your hand of blessing on this unity. I pray that our love for one another grows. Our love for the knowledge of one another grows.

I pray that the love for one another's holiness, as we seek to be more like you, may you create a true bond, not just in our worldly interests, but in our spiritual interests.

So God, I ask you these things. I want these things, oh Father. And I pray that you'll answer these things. In your most holy and precious name, amen.

I don't know about you, but perhaps this is a question that you can ask yourself.

And the question is, is there at any time or place that you have felt that you were in exile? Is there any time of your life that you felt at some point disconnected from God, that you felt left behind?

[9 : 46] That perhaps that you had a plan that you had engaged with since university, and it did not work the way you had wanted it, and you ask the question, God, are you going to restore this plan?

Perhaps you've made decisions now in retrospect, weren't the wisest of decisions. And you begin to ask the question, God, are you going to restore me?

Has anyone here ever felt the hand or voice of betrayal? And that betrayal is so steep, you wonder if you will ever be able to get out of it, and that life could be normal once again.

And you ask, God, are you going to restore me? Or perhaps your story is, you just simply ignored God.

You chose to sin, chose to suffer, and you chose disobedience over obedience. And now you cry out to God, God, are you going to restore me?

[11:02] The fact of the matter is, I believe we all want restoration. Amen? We can all point to a time where one of these kind of aspects happened in our life, and we would like, you know what, I know there was a time where I was in a better place with you, Lord.

I long for that place. Would you please restore me? Some of us, we look at our lives, and our lives seem more like a ruin than they would be as a great monument for people to respect.

We wanted to live that life that could be the example, but yet everything around me is destroyed and broken, and I don't want anybody to look at my life.

We ask the question, God, are you there? Do you still hear me?

So this morning, if you are one of the people who has ever felt forgotten, if you're one of the people who's actually had to live in the wreckage of your own decisions or the decisions of someone else and you felt this is unjust, if you've ever asked, what now, God?

[12:25] If you've ever wondered, where is God in all this? This message is for you. This message is for you. This message is for the exile, the downtrodden, the one who believes.

They stand outside of God's favor. It is for the one that simply asks, God, where are you? Because I don't know you right now. See, this morning, we're going to go walking through Acts 3 of this Old Testament, and I want to look at six moments in Israel's history where it seemed that God was not there.

And his people cried out, Lord, where are you? It looked as if almost the promises that God had previously made were dead.

Where it looked like that judgment was the final word, and his people simply asked, is this the end? Are we not still your people?

Well, let me begin by telling you one of the most important truths that you need to understand.

[13:36] And I'm going to drill this truth into your heads, your heart, and your soul every part of this sermon. And this truth is, God is always faithful.

I repeat that. God is always faithful. There are no exceptions. There are no delays. There are no failures on the part of God.

Can you say that with me? God is always faithful. God is always faithful. The fact is, he did it for his people then, and we're going to look at it, and guess what?

The same work he did thousands of years ago, God still does today. Amen? And that is why we can say, God is always faithful.

So the first moment I want to look into is the exile itself. That is the passage that Carl read for us. I'm going to reread it, 2 Chronicles, starting in chapter 36, verse 15.

[14:40] It says, The Lord, that is Yahweh, the personal God, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them his messengers.

So God hadn't just given them one or two warnings. He had persisted in giving them warnings by sending them messengers, prophets, teachers.

Why? Because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place, which is the temple.

But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets.

Until the wrath of the Lord Yahweh rose against his people, until there was no remedy. Therefore, he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, that is the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of the sanctuary and had no compassion on young men or virgin, old men or aged.

He, that's he, God, gave them all into his hand. Let me begin with this truth. God's judgment is not a sign of God's absence.

[15:56] God's judgment is not God's absence. What we're seeing in Judah's fall is not random history. It's not political misfortune.

It's not that Babylon became so strong they finally decided one day, hey, we can roll over Israel. It was God keeping his word.

And truthfully, that truth should shake you a little. The fact that God is keeping his word. Because here's what Scripture says in this passage.

It said, Notice, the Lord, the God of the Father, sent persistently. And at the end it says, He kept doing that until there was no remedy. What that means is there comes a point when rebellion demands judgment.

When rebellion demands judgment. God had sent prophet after prophet. He gave them opportunity after opportunity. Yet they kept hardening their hearts.

[17 : 06] They kept pushing God's patience like it had no end. And here's the truth about God's patience. God's patience is not weakness.

God's silence is not indifference. God's mercy has a limit. And guess what? Judah found it. What happened? The temple was burned. The temple riches were plundered. The walls were torn down.

The city was flattened. The people were murdered. The people were taken captive. Why? Simply because God meant what he said.

God meant what he said. God was not bluffing. God had warned them through Moses and the prophets over and over and over.

[18 : 05] Break the covenant and judgment comes. You may be sitting here this morning and you say, that's harsh. No, it's not. That's holiness.

holiness. You see, God's holiness demands judgment. And if you view, your view of God doesn't include the wrath of God, you do not know God.

All too often, our idea of God is this sleepy old grandfather who's kind of rocking in his chair and you're his young child and you're doing something disobedient and he kind of gives you a wink and I'll let that go.

That is never how the God of the Bible presents himself. Through all over these 600,000 words that are included in this Bible, there is not one word, not one verse that presents God the Father as being such a being.

But this is what I don't want you to miss. Even in judgment, God stayed faithful.

[19 : 21] Even in judgment, God stayed faithful. Behind me is a verse. It's written by the prophet Jeremiah. Lamentations 3, 22.

Jeremiah writes, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. Now here's the million dollar question. Where did Jeremiah write this from?

He didn't write it from on top of a balcony on a king's palace looking over the land. He wrote this in a pile of rubble.

The city had been destroyed. He would have been standing in ashes. The smell of smoke still in the air. The smell of bodies that were rotten.

[20 : 20] The cries of suffering still echoing in the night as people were crying out for their lost or exiled ones. Yet here, the prophet declares from a place of ruin, God is faithful.

Now here's the thing. Why is God faithful? Because God did exactly what he said he would do. God did exactly what he said he would do.

If you continue in your disobedience, I will bring judgment. If he didn't do that, would we call God faithful?

No. He would no longer be a faithful judge. But, God also tells us through Jeremiah when the suffering would end.

Jeremiah 29.10 says, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill my promise and bring you back.

[21 : 34] That's what we call covenant faithfulness. covenant faithfulness. God had made a covenant with his people and that he would never leave them.

See, that covenant faithfulness, that is a holy God who judges sin but doesn't abandon his people. That's a God who disciplines but does not destroy.

And here's the truth we need to learn, we need to accept, is that God's judgment is always righteous. God's judgment is always righteous.

His mercy is always available and his promises are always kept. So this morning, if you are a believer here, you have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, this is a place where you need to lean into lean into because some of you are in a season of discipline.

You feel like God is against you. You feel like you're under the weight of consequences. You've made a mess of things and you're wondering if God is done with you.

[22 : 53] Perhaps you're here this morning just hoping for a lifeline. Well, let me tell you right now that God is not done with you.

If you belong to him, he will discipline you but he will never ever forsake you. The writer of Hebrews 12 tells us the Lord disciplines the one he loves.

God isn't punishing you to destroy you, he's pruning you to restore you. You with me on that? He's not doing it to punish, he's doing it to restore you.

He's burning away that sin that's killing your soul so he can bring you back to life. So stop thinking that your failure is final.

If you are still breathing, it's not. Even if you're in the ashes of your own decisions, you can still sing with us, great is your faithfulness.

[24 : 05] Now if you are here, you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps you're just here because a friend has asked you or a family member, you need to hear this loud and clear, sin has consequences.

Disobedience to the law of God brings consequences. You can tell me you don't believe in God, you're unsure of God, you subscribe to another God, it doesn't matter.

There's only one God who rules this world. All other gods are charlatans. sin has consequences. Judah didn't believe that, they presumed on God's kindness. They thought they could sin without consequences, mock the truth without fallout. My plea to you is don't make that mistake.

God's judgment on Judah is a warning for you as well. Judgment is coming, sin will be dealt with.

[25 : 16] But the message doesn't end in fire and exile, it ends in mercy and restoration. You see, just as God preserved a remnant, he's offering you a way out this morning.

even if your life feels like you've burned it down with all your sin, I'm here to tell you, if you're still alive, he hasn't given up on you. If you are here hearing this message, you do not have to stay in the ruins of your life.

You do not have to stay in the bondage of your sin. The fact is, God is calling you right now to turn from your sin and trust in his promise.

And that promise has a name, and that name is Jesus Christ. So the first moment in the story of exile that we experience is that God is faithful even in judgment.

God is faithful even in judgment. The second moment that I want to bring, I've titled, There is Hope in Exile. There is hope in exile.

[26 : 25] God's redeeming presence even exists in a foreign land. God's redeeming presence is still in a foreign land. Let me ask you something.

What do you do when you find yourself from where you thought you'd be or you're far from the person that you had hoped to be?

What do you do when life feels strange, when it feels like things are just out of sync, out of place, you're out of hope, you have no direction, have no strength?

Do you know that we have people here that because of their children, they moved to this country to have a better life for them? Because they did not want their children to subsist in poverty or be in a place where they could not freely worship God.

Do you know that we have people here who attend this church who are actually forced out of their homeland and do exist as exiles here in Canada?

[27 : 39] Judah knew that feeling. Babylon just wasn't a location, it was a symbol of everything broken. Babylon was the ultimate enemy and now I'm a part of Babylon.

It was the symbol of judgment. Their land gone, their temple destroyed, their identity shattered. They were exiles, captives, strangers in a strange land.

But if this truth can be an encouragement to you, if you have immigrated here or you have been displaced is God's redeeming presence isn't limited by geography. God's redeeming presence isn't limited by geography.

you can be 700 miles from Jerusalem and still be one inch from his grace. God didn't abandon them.

He didn't say to them, you got yourself into the mess, good luck getting out. No. God stayed with them in the exile.

[28 : 49] In the middle of the exile, God showed up. Let's look at Jeremiah 29, 11.

And here's the thing, this passage is probably recognized the world over as being one of the most self-help motivated statements in all the world, but they do not understand that the context is this is written to people who are in exile, they are in deep pain, and they are a people under discipline. What does God say? I know the plans I have for you. What? Plans for welfare, not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

This isn't something I remind myself when I'm graduating from my grade 12 class that God must have great things for me. This was written to a group of people who were absolutely lost in every way.

What he's doing by saying that is he says, I'm still writing your story. I haven't left you. This chapter is not the end. And then God goes further.

[30 : 14] He says, when you call on me, when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found. One author on this passage says, exile isn't the end of intimacy.

It's the beginning of pursuit. Exile isn't the end of intimacy. It's the beginning of pursuit. You see, the reality is the lesson we learn from the early exiles is that God shows up in a furnace.

If you remember Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the king says to them, bow or burn. They say, no way, Jose.

Daniel 3 says, our God is able to deliver us. But even if he doesn't, we will not bow.

You see, that's real faith. That's tested faith. That's not, I trust God if everything works out for me.

It's the kind of faith that says, I trust God even when it doesn't work for me.

[31 : 32] And what happened in their story? God literally met them in the fire. In Daniel 3 verse 25, they said, I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire, and the fourth is like a son of the gods.

You see, my friends, that was the presence of Jesus Christ, the pre-incarnate Jesus walking in the furnace with his faithful friends. God didn't remove the fire, God joined them in the fire.

You with me on this? Sometimes God wants you in the fire and he wants to join you in that fire. This is the God we serve.

Same thing with Daniel and the lions. The pit was supposed to be his end, but it was used as a platform for the glory of God. Daniel 6 22 says, my God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouth.

The truth here is God just doesn't redeem people from exile, he redeems them through exile. You with me on that? I'm going to repeat that.

[32 : 47] God doesn't just redeem people from exile, he redeems people, them through exile. Because in Babylon, God just wasn't preserving his people, he was purifying his people.

He was burning off their idolatry, he was refocusing their faith, he was proving once and for all that he alone is worthy. See, this is why it happened.

Remember when Moses goes up into the mountain, you got the Ten Commandments and he comes down, they make an idol. When they moved into the Canaan, they still kept the small little islands of the people that lived there, the idols, not islands.

They kept these little idols there. They intermarried, they brought in other gods into their home for hundreds and hundreds of years. And that's why in 1 Kings chapter 11 it says Solomon loved these foreign women.

And if you remember the names of those women we went over, the nations, those were all God's enemies. And he brought them and it said they turned his heart from God. So you know what God said?

[34 : 02] Okay, you're playing with these little gods, I'm actually going to give you what you want. You want these false gods? I am now going to put you in a land where it's everything false god.

You with me on this? Where that false god is worshipped everywhere. You wanted to play with that sin at home? I'm taking you to the center of that false worship.

That was huge. It's almost he said, you know what Babylon was about.

You want those gods to rule over you? Now they do. And those gods who are ruling over you, if you do not bow before them, they throw you in the fire.

Those were the gods that you set up in your mantles in your home. You see, not only was God redeeming his people through exile, God was also protecting the line of Messiah.

[35 : 14] Even when no one else saw it, God was guarding the seed of promise. For Jesus Christ is from the seed of Judah, the remnant tribe of all of Israel.

And he was doing something else. He was showing his power to the nations. Eventually Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked king, in Daniel 4, and I preached a sermon on that, eventually becomes a worshiper of our God.

He says, now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of heaven. See, that's the God we serve, the one who turns even enemy kings into evangelists.

Now, as I'm going to end off every section, I'm going to ask certain questions for the believer. The fact is, I don't know what kind of exile you're in right now.

Maybe it is relational, maybe it's financial, spiritual, or emotional. and when you're in those type of exiles, you feel like you're miles and miles and miles away from peace and from God.

[36 : 31] And you're miles away from the life that you thought you would have. But here is my promise to you. God is not absent. God did not go away.

God just isn't stuck at home on the other side of the border. God is right here in the middle of your exile.

In fact, Isaiah 43 2 says, when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, for I am with you. If you're in a trial, write that verse down.

Put it on your fridge. Put it on your bedroom mirror. Want some advice? I'm a pastor, so I'm going to give it to you.

Stop looking to escape the trial. Stop looking to escape the trial. Start by trusting in God's presence in the trial.

[37 : 32] All too often we put our energy trying to get away from the trial when that whole time God wants you focusing in on Him. Stop waiting for a change of location.

Start walking in obedience right where you are right here right now. How often we cry out, God, if you do this, I'll do that.

God's there. He hears you right now. God isn't interested in that kind of contract with you. God has already made promises to you.

God uses exile to deepen your dependence and display His glory. Notice, if you notice the well-known verse, Romans 8, 28 doesn't say everything is good.

It says God works all things for good. And sometimes the good is what He does in you before He ever changes what's around you.

[38 : 40] You with me on that? That He's interested in changing the you, not around you. So stay faithful, stay in the fire, stay in the fight, because He's right there with you.

Now, for the unsaved, let me talk to you directly. the fact is you're not just in exile, you're actually in bondage. Sin has taken you far from the person that you are meant to be.

Sin has taken you away from the person of God and wants you to be. And maybe you think you're gone too far for God, you're too messed up, you're too far gone in your sin.

Is there hope? Let me tell you right here, right now, you aren't too far from God. If God could walk in a Babylonian furnace, He can walk into your life right now.

If God can redeem captives in a foreign land, He can redeem you in whatever wreckage you're now standing in. See, here's the thing.

[39 : 52] God's not asking for you to climb your way out of that pit of despair. You got yourself out. He's simply asking you to turn to Him. Isaiah has this wonderful promise in Isaiah 5-9.

It says, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. There is nobody who is beyond the reach of Jesus Christ. Amen? Nobody.

Don't stay in chains another day. God is offering you freedom. That is freedom from guilt, freedom from shame, freedom from sin. And the only thing you need to do is to call out on the name of Jesus.

So the first moment we've seen is God's people in at the beginning of exile, that God is faithful in that judgment. The second moment we looked at, there is hope in the exile, that God has a redeeming presence while God's people were in exile.

The moment three I want to look at in our Bibles, looking in Ezra, is God's mercy is seen in bringing his people home. God's mercy is seen in bringing his people home.

[41 : 14] Let me say this at the start. God just doesn't leave people in exile, he brings them home. You see, this is what sets our God apart. He judges, but he restores.

He wounds, yet he heals. He disciplines, but he's always moving towards redemption. And if there's something that you need to understand is that God's mercy always moves towards redemption.

God's mercy doesn't take you to shame. You with me? If you're on the shame train, God wants you off that shame train and going on the rapid, Japanese fastest rail to restoration.

I didn't write that in my notes, it just came up to mine. You see, when the 70 years of Babylon were up, God just didn't sigh and hope for the best.

God acted. And Ezra 1.1, and this is the exact same portion at the end of 2 Chronicles 36 that Carl read, it says, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.

[42 : 25] No, it didn't say Cyrus looked down on these people and had pity on them that he wanted the best for them. Man, if I strengthen them up, I can have a great military outline or these guys are so good with economics and trade, it'll make me wealthy.

No, that's not what it says. It says that the Lord stirred in up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia.

God writing the story. And let me make this point. The fact of the matter is God can stir up any heart he wants.

Even a pagan king, even an unbelieving husband or wife, even kids who feel so far away from you in the faith, God still can stir in their hearts.

Even someone who hates him, who doesn't know him, who doesn't want anything to do with him, God still has more control than they do. Amen? Even someone who thinks they're in charge.

[43 : 39] You see, Cyrus wasn't a compassionate diplomat. The reality is he was a conqueror, but God owns every heart, even those who sit on foreign thrones. And when it was time to fulfill the word that he gave to Jeremiah, and you read this story in Daniel chapter 9, which I think is quite emotional.

It says, he moved Cyrus like a chess piece to fulfill prophecy spoken a hundred years earlier by Isaiah. In Isaiah 44-48 it says, who says of Cyrus, this is God saying, he is my shepherd and he shall fulfill all my purpose.

So a hundred years before Cyrus made that decision, before he stepped foot, born on this earth, Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus would fulfill God's purpose.

this Bible is no accident, is it, friends? See, that's not luck, that's not coincidence.

That's called covenant faithfulness in motion. But here's the truth that we really need to understand. Restoration in our own lives starts when God stirs our hearts.

[45 : 03] Restoration starts when God stirs our hearts. He just didn't stir Cyrus, he actually stirred the people too. Ezra 1-5 says, God stirred the hearts of the heads of the families.

You see, that's what God does, he stirs, he awakens, he moves in power. And the people responded. And what's interesting when we read this text, the restoration wasn't comfortable. The restoration was moving back to a city that didn't exist, a temple that was destroyed. This wasn't an instant miracle.

They weren't airlifted back to Jerusalem with red carpets and open gates, but they returned to ruins, they returned to ashes, weeds,! They returned to ashes, rubble, and resistance.

But God's people came back anyway. Why? Because God stirred their hearts.

[46 : 08] And when God stirs your heart, you don't stay. You move. You return. You rebuild.

And that's what God's people did. The first thing they built was an altar. because the first thing they wanted to do was worship before they built the walls and the temple.

They didn't start with infrastructure. They started with repentance, with sacrifice, with a return to God's presence.

Ezra 3.2 says, they built the altar to offer burnt offerings as it is written in the law of Moses. My friends, that's revival right there.

Getting back to what God said. Getting back to first things. See, the truth that we need to embrace is restoration begins with returning to the word and rebuilding worship.

[47 : 16] You've been far from God. Don't worry about it. He's not far from you. In fact, in this place, they later, they laid the temple foundation. Some shouted and some wept.

The new people, the new generation, were so excited to have a temple before the Lord, but Ezra 3.12 says that the older generation wept because they remembered how beautiful Solomon's temple was.

God's glory is. What's interesting is that it never says that God's glory returned to this temple. That's going to be a part of next week's sermon.

The fact is, warning may not look like what it used to, but that doesn't mean God's not in it. The life that we destroyed or came from, when we go back to it, doesn't look like it's going to be the same.

God was restoring his people, not just their buildings. God was rebuilding identity, purpose, community, and calling. Psalm 126.1 reminds us, when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

[48 : 30] That's what restoration feels like. It's unreal, like a dream you never thought would come true. Verse 3, the Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.

The writer did not write that as a sentimental slogan. That was the cry of a people who walked out of exile and saw God move.

Nehemiah 9.31 says, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

My friends, this is the same God we worship here this morning in Squamish. A God that is gracious, merciful, faithful, and restoring.

Let me conclude with these two points. For the believer, this is where the rubber meets the road because some of you are standing in ruins right now.

[49 : 34] you're not in exile anymore, but you're more like you are in recovery. You've come back to God, but things aren't quite like what they used to be.

I think anybody who's ever spoken or known the destruction of infidelity in a marriage knows that when they go back to that marriage, it's different.

Even when there's forgiveness, even when there's a building up of trust, it is different. Not only are you rebuilding a marriage, you're rebuilding a mind.

When you're coming back from church, you're actually rebuilding a ministry, rebuilding your spiritual life. And sometimes you're discouraged because it feels small, feels weak, feels unimpressive.

But if there's one thing that I can say to you is don't confuse humble beginnings with absent power. I was just talking to a friend that went through a very big split in their church and their worship leader chose to leave.

[50 : 47] And the worship leader after about a month realized that he had made a mistake and he wanted to come back and they welcomed him and he says, well, can I lead worship that Sunday?

And they said, well, we don't want to have you lead worship, we want to fellowship with you. We want to know you, like let's spend some time getting to know one another all over again. Sadly, he didn't come back because he was confused with his humble beginnings was absent of God's power.

Zechariah 4.10 says, who dares despise the day of small things? The reality is God delights in small beginnings. The altar wasn't the temple, but it was a start.

The foundation wasn't the finished structure, but it was progress. So my encouragement to you is take the next step. Offer the next prayer.

Obey in the next moment. That's how restoration begins. You don't run away from God and all of a sudden come back and everything is as it was.

[51 : 58] There's other issues to deal with. And finally, if you are an unbeliever here, let me give you the clear unvarnished truth.

You do not need improvement. You need restoration. You need a new you. The fact is sin hasn't messed you up.

Sin has exiled you from God. You're not just broken, you're lost. You're outside the covenant. But here's the good news. God brings people home.

God adopts those who are outside his family. We were all outside at one point and then God invites us in. And here's the truth. You don't need to stay where sin has left you.

If your life is feeling like a ruin and you're never going to get anywhere out of that, God is the one who removes you through that. See, God made a way through the person of Jesus Christ to destroy what was ruined, to rebuild what was lost.

[53 : 16] But here's the thing. You've got to return. You've got to come back like the exiles. You've got to respond to the stirring that God is doing in your heart that you are going to leave Babylon forever.

You may say, it's too late for me. I say, no, it's not. Probably one of the greatest stories that I would have you read if you think it's too late for you is I'd advise you take out the book of Luke, the gospel, and read the story of the prodigal son, the son who came home with nothing, torn clothes, empty hands, shame in his heart, but his father ran to him, hugged him, covered him, restored him.

You see, that's the gospel, and that's what God wants to do for you. So my plea for today is just don't wait another day in the far country.

Come home. Let the rebuilding begin. So the first moment was exile. The second moment we're looked at was there's hope in exile.

At moment three we looked at God's mercy is seen in bringing his people home. And next week I hope to preach on the final three moments that God's people learned through exile and eventually fulfilled in the person through the birth of Jesus Christ.

[54 : 42] Let me pray. Dear Lord Heavenly Father, these are deep words. I think they're words that every single one of us as Christians at one point or another have struggled with.

God where are you? Whether it's because of my sin or someone sinned against me even in a patch of life where it doesn't seem unfair.

But as we look to your people Israel this Judah this last tribe this remnant how you were there in the fire how you were there you promised them they'd stay in exile for 70 years but you remained with them you brought them hope you strengthened Daniel and Meshach Shedrach and Abednego in fact Jeremiah 29 the instruction is to be a blessings to the people that hold you captive so much so history tells us that some families remained it it was their home we'll even see the benefit of Esther and how her life played a part in keeping your people safe God you are bigger than anything that we can imagine and

I pray that these people who do not know you I pray that they put the biggest challenge they can think of before you whatever it is they need broken I pray that you would break it any jail that they need to be set free from I pray that you just simply destroy that jail for those that are enslaved by alcohol I pray that you would do away with that taste in their mouth that they would no longer desire that taste and it's the same with drugs the desire to not be in our right mind father I ask on this day that you would stir the souls to come after you so that you would indeed make them children of God we ask these things in your gracious and holy name amen