

Prophecy

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[0 : 00] Father God, as we have gone through this series on your self-revelation throughout history, we pray that we would heed the warning of Israel who listened to you, even delighted to listen to you, and yet ignored what you said.

So as we come to your word now, we ask, Father, that you would, by your spirit, help us to see it as light and truth and hope, and that we would be motivated to obey it.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen. On the eve of Operation Desert Storm in January 1991, President Bush Sr. said it was America's responsibility to protect because we are the leaders of the world.

Fairly arrogant thing to say, really. Typically American, but fairly arrogant thing to say. Because they were on the winning side of World War II, they were the economic powerhouse of the world, they've got Hollywood and Arnold Schwarzenegger, in their arrogance, they just assumed that they would always be on top of the world, that they would always be right and that they are always victorious. The fact is, though, that they'd only been a major world player for around about 80, 90 years. In that time, they'd been defeated in Vietnam, been sorely bruised in Korea and Somalia, and now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[1 : 41] Yet, in their arrogance, they think they will never be defeated, they will always be on top of the world. Why? It's got to be linked to the thought that God is on our side as we battle the forces of evil.

If you've ever visited America, you'll know what I mean. The first thing you encounter when going into the United States is US customs, homeland security.

They're the guys dressed up in black paramilitary stuff with bulletproof vests and guns. They're the guys who wanted to go to Iraq but got given a desk job instead.

And so they are looking for someone to shoot. I remember coming one day from Canada into the United States.

Must be the riskiest border in the world. And I was going in with someone with an Australian passport, also a couple of people. One person with an American passport, two others with Australian passports.

[2 : 46] And one of them needed to get the green card. And so we pulled in, hopped out of the car, went in and stood in line. One person stepped over the yellow line accidentally, was just standing on the wrong side of the yellow line.

And the customs guy comes right up into his face and says, back off over the line. It's like, whoa, we're in a major security risk area here. Another person was standing in the line.

We were standing there for 45 minutes and the line didn't go anywhere in 45 minutes. And there was a man dressed up in a suit heading down into the US.

And as the customs guy walked along the line, he said to him, excuse me, sir, how long will this take? And he said, how long are you expecting to live? And he said, well, I don't really know, but this seems to be taking a while.

And he said to him, that's the price you pay to come to the United States. And of course, he comes to me and I whip out my Australian passport.

[4 : 00] Coalition of the willing, coalition of the willing. Coalition of the willing. The US has little reason for its arrogance, but by the time of the monarchy in Israel, they did have good reason.

With the promised land and the temple and the Ark of the King, Israel had been on top for over a thousand years. Their history was pretty impressive. We started this series on the kingdom of God back in the book of Genesis, right at the beginning.

And the framework for understanding the kingdom of God and therefore the kingdom of Israel was established in the garden. God's people in God's special place under the rule of God.

And God ruled them through his mighty word. Genesis 3, however, reveals rebellion against God's word and his rule. It's sin.

It's people who have no right to rule, rising up against the one who has the right to rule, ignoring his word and doing their own thing. And the outcome is expulsion from God's presence and everything is cursed.

[5 : 08] The good news is, we discovered very quickly, that God has not abandoned his world. He even gives Adam and Eve a very small glimpse there that he will one day rise up someone who will crush the head of Satan.

And as we see, the Bible progresses, God has a plan to undo and reverse the impact of their rebellion. In Genesis 12, God makes a promise that he will undo Genesis 3 through one man and his descendants.

And God's plan is to bless this man and his descendants by giving them a special place where he will rule over them and dwell with them. The plan was for the whole world to be blessed through these special people.

And in Exodus 19, as we saw, expands on it, explains that the way God was going to bless this world was to set apart a bunch of people who would be different than everyone else.

They were people who would be obedient to God's word. The way that they would be different is that they would wholeheartedly love God and that they would obey him and that they would love their neighbours as themselves.

[6 : 19] The book of Joshua takes us into the beginning of the conquest of this special place of God, his promised land. It was hard and slow because of the numerous enemies which occupied the land and the numerous enemies of their heart which they did battle on on the inside.

And we saw last week in 2 Samuel 7 that they did finally rid the land of all of God's enemies under King David. The promised land is here.

It's ours. Fulfillment. We have arrived at the destination. And David's son Solomon sets about building a permanent temple in Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant in its place in its permanent home and God would be a permanent fixture.

Israel is on top of the world. And they thought that they would always be on top of the world because in the middle of their land was the city of Jerusalem.

In the middle of the city of Jerusalem stood a permanent temple and in the middle of the permanent temple was the Ark of the Covenant which held the word of God and God's presence was assured.

[7 : 37] Such was the arrogance of the people of Israel. And it isn't long and we see the enemy within is still a problem. 1 Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba comes and Solomon shares the wisdom he has gained from God.

That is, the people of Israel are now blessing the nations. That's in 1 Kings 10. And the beginning of 1 Kings 11 we read, Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in his love.

Turns out they are no different than anyone else. Ezekiel 33 gives us a glimpse into the attitude of the people of God as they consistently ignore the word of God.

As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls at the doors and the houses saying to each other, Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord. And so my people come to you as they usually do and sit before you to listen to your words. But they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.

[9 : 11] Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well for they hear your words but they do not put them into practice.

The people of God would simultaneously sit, hear and enjoy the word of God and then ignore it like it was just some kind of a love song.

They would go through all the motions of worship but their hearts were far from God. And so throughout Israel's history for the time of Samuel onwards the prophetic office was closely linked to the conditions laid down by God for enjoyment of covenant blessings.

Although Israel's salvation has for its basis God's gracious act of saving the people out of Egypt there is a close link between the enjoyment of the final outcome of that salvation and Israel's obedience.

Now on the surface that appears to mean that Israel's salvation was achieved by obedience to the law but that is not the case.

[10 : 29] Grace first comes in the saving acts of God and then the law binds the saved people to God as his people.

And should these people refuse to accept their responsibility to live as God's people then they must suffer removal from the land of blessing.

Exile in the same way that they had previously experienced out of Eden. The relationship of good works to salvation is essentially the same in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In both salvation is by grace but grace never stands alone with our good works. To put it another way we may say that no one is saved because of obedience but no one is saved without obedience.

So the ministry of the prophets was calling the people of God back to covenant obedience. Even when the kingdom of Israel split under Solomon and they start to slide into destruction the ministries of the likes of Elijah and Elisha combined in an effort to bring the people back to covenant obedience.

[11 : 52] In their arrogance though the people of God by and large refused to obey and listen to the word of God from the mouth of the prophets. Their sinful hearts were far from God.

And it gets that bad that by Ezekiel by the time of the prophets of Ezekiel and other pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets they were defiling God's temple with idolatrous worship.

A defilement that spread everywhere in the land. In other words God's special promised land was now viewed as putrid by God according to Ezekiel 6 and 7.

And the penalty for this defilement was expulsion out of the land. Israel had chosen uncleanness they have chosen to ignore the word of God and so they will have uncleanness in its full measure. They will be driven out of God's land into an unclean land. Uncleanness will not just be their hearts but uncleanness will be their total environment.

[13 : 10] And so the unthinkable happens in Ezekiel 10. The thing that Israel thought would never happen God leaves his temple.

And now it is no more than a few stones heaped on top of one another and with his departure God hands the city and the nation over to be destroyed and it happened in 586 BC.

According to chapter 1 of Ezekiel Ezekiel is one of God's people that's been kicked out of God's place and wondering at this point what has happened to all the promises of God.

all our hope was wrapped up in this land in this temple in this ark and now it is all gone. God what have you done?

Perhaps you can imagine the 30 year old Ezekiel wandering beside the Kibar River thinking about his future. As a 30 year old man son of Busi the priest he would have began his priestly ministry in the temple and now he's 800 kilometers from home in a foreign land under the rule of a foreign empire he was a captive he was a slave he was a long way from home both physically and spiritually.

[14 : 45] All of he knew about God and his promises were 800 kilometers away the temple was the center of God's activity with his people but without a land and without a Jerusalem and without a temple without an ark what is left is God dead?

Has God abandoned his promises? Has God forgotten about his people? Good questions.

And yet in Ezekiel 1 verse 1 tells us that Ezekiel saw the heavens opened and I saw visions of God on the Kiba River 800 kilometers away from Jerusalem in a foreign land as a captive no priest no temple only a few of the people of God Ezekiel gets a really strange sight he gets a vision of God where God should not be God shows up God has not forgotten his covenant promises to Abraham and David yes right now the people of God were put in the time out corner for their rebellion their sin and their impurity and even though the majority of the messages of the prophets is one of judgment it is also a message of hope in Ezekiel 36

God makes a remarkable promise he says for I will take you out of the nations I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit in you and move you from the inside that is to follow my decrees and to be careful to keep my laws and so through the mouth of this prophet God reaffirms his covenant

prophecies to his exiled people the people of God are now looking forward to a new age and the new age will be an age in which

God says I will clean you I will purify you from your defilement and your impurities I will take the initiative to deal with the problem and the problem is your heart I will pronounce you clean Jeremiah prophesies at the same kind of time and calls it full and complete forgiveness in Jeremiah 31 that is what they're looking forward to in this new age and central this new age will be the ruach the wind major theme running through the prophets looking at this time the wind which is translated the spirit the new age that Ezekiel and others prophesy about will be the age and with the spirit God's spirit God's wind will be placed within God's people changing them from the inside so that they will be responsive and that they will delight to obey the word of the

[18:29] Lord we notice in chapter 37 we see how this will be done with Ezekiel's remarkable vision of the valley of dry bones as Ezekiel prophesies the word of God the spirit goes out and breathes into the dead bones and a miracle happens dead people come to life through the spirit of God working through the word of God it's a miracle the nation which is dead through God's spirit going out through his word now comes alive life and the work of the spirit and the word will be inseparable in the new age the word and the spirit together will bring about new life and so what is the final goal of this new life that these new people are looking forward to in this new age it's seen in the very last chapters of

Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48 and God shows Ezekiel a new and permanent temple and chapter 43 of Ezekiel we read this then the man brought me to the gate facing east and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east his voice was like the roar of rushing waters and the land was radiant with his glory the vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kibar river when I fell face down the glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gates facing east and then the spirit came and lifted me up and brought me in to the inner court of the temple and the glory of the

Lord filled the temple God and his people through the spirit are now united as one that's the glory of the new age the Ezekiel who saw the glory of God depart in chapter 10 and 11 now watches God return in this new age and he himself is wrapped up in it and taken into the inner court the final verse of Ezekiel is the whole thing in a nutshell and the name of the city from that time on will be the Lord is there the Lord is there God will now be forever with his people because he has purified them and made them fit for his presence they are clean they have the spirit and they are now united with God forever so how is he going to do that how does he deal with the sin that separates them in the first place Ezekiel doesn't say a lot about it but he does give us some hints hints is when God calls Ezekiel the son of man and the son of man symbolizes the bearing of the sin on his body when Ezekiel is told to lie on his side in chapter 4 and in chapter 16 God promises a time when he himself will make atonement for the faithless Israel that is God himself will purify their sin and God also promises a time when he will judge the people's useless shepherds as it says in chapter 34 and place over them one shepherd my servant David don't forget the promises we heard last week from 2 Tamerals chapter 7 that God says the descendant of

David will sit on my throne forever and so here we have in chapter 34 I will place over them one shepherd my servant David and he will tend them and he will tend them and be their shepherd I the Lord will be their God and my servant David will be prince among them the shepherd who tends the sheep is none other than the good shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ who picks up from Ezekiel 34 in John chapter 10 and refers to himself as the good shepherd and why is he the good shepherd shepherd because he lays down his life for the sheep he is the sacrificial lamb and it's because of his sacrifice that God is able to pass over our sins as we saw in the second sermon of this series and so through Christ we are purified the spirit of God comes and we are united with God right now in the heavenly realms right now people of God right now and yet we look forward to it too we look forward to the complete complete fulfillment of that perfection of being in the inner sanctuary with God and actually seeing him face to face and so right now this side of heaven we who are purified by Christ live in an impure world and we live by faith and not by sight and we live in impure bodies and that means this side of heaven it's a struggle both in the flesh and in our souls when you don't feel pure can I trust God's promise that he has in fact dealt with my sins and that I have complete access to God the Father when I don't feel like it when what is before me consistently that I see is my own sinfulness

[25 : 17] Romans 7 puts it like this for in my inner being I delight in God's law but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members what a wretched man I am what's the answer to this struggle of being pure and impure next verse who will rescue me from this body of death and take me to the perfection of heaven where there's no tears when it's all clean when I'll not just do it by faith but experience it physically thanks be to God through Jesus Christ and so I live by faith in Christ 2 Corinthians 5 talks about the same groaning as we long for heaven and that's where it says in verse 7 we live by faith and not by sight the battle is to deal with our sin and to trust in the promises of God so all these promises of the gift of the spirit the purification of sins eternal life are not meant to make me apathetic they are not meant to cause me to be lazy this side of heaven there is a battle of endurance and holiness and faith raging this side of heaven and the promises are there as in 1 John chapter 1 verse 7 if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of

Jesus his son purifies us from all sin if we confess our sins he is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world and yet don't just sit there because the very next verse says we know that we have come to know him that is if we've come to enjoy in all this purity and forgiveness of sins if we obey his commands the man who says I know him but does not do what he says is a liar and the truth is not in him but if anyone obeys his word God's love is truly made complete in him whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did in other words don't make the mistake of Israel's history listen to

Jesus the good shepherd when he leads us with his words words like Sam just read out to us not everyone who says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven not but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven many will say to me on that day Lord Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles and then I will tell them plainly I never knew you away from me you evil doers therefore application everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on the rock Jesus says don't make the mistake of the people of God have made in the past listen to my word and obey my word you see the people of God in the time of the monarchy were tempted to trust their wealth and their political stability in the Davidic line and even in the temple itself while ignoring the word of

God they slipped into apathy because they thought that they had actually arrived at the complete kingdom and the warning from their time and the mouth of Jesus is be careful of enjoy listening to the word of God while ignoring its call to obedience and my friends I would love to see revival come to St Paul's but revivals don't happen by talking about them true revivals have happened only when people have gained a right idea of God and his majesty and his holiness revivals have happened when people grew in their sense of accountability before God when they grew in their sense of their sin and when they grew in their sense of Christ's completed saving work on the cross all those things together in their understanding also of their call to obedience to Christ these are the times when God visits his church pours out his spirit and dead bones come alive amen them 150 to this in Jesus