

Only He Knows

Before last week, if I would have told you, imagine what it would be like to be in exile, there may have only been a few of you that would have an understanding of what I am talking about. There are a few of you that have been through some experiences in war, where you have felt isolated and alone, but thanks be to God not many of us have been through that. There may be a few of you that have been laid up in a hospital for a few months, but again these are extreme circumstances that the majority of us have not dealt with before. My entire life I have read over the old testament lessons that talk about the exile of Israel, and I have not had any experience that would make me able to relate to what they were going through.

Now before I get carried away the enemy that we are facing is not the same as the enemy that the Lord allowed those children of Israel to face. Not a house was left standing. Not two stones were left on top of each other in the temple. There was chaos and war all around them, there was no doubt about the danger that they were in. Death and destruction were in their streets all around them and people were torn out of their house taken away to a land that they didn't know. They were forced to worship false gods and if they didn't they were thrown into fiery furnaces, or pits full of hungry lions. You and I having to stay in our climate-controlled homes, with infinite hours of entertainment being streamed to us with the capability of talking to all of our family and friends and see their faces through our phones is a very different exile than what the children of Israel were facing. It's not that. It's not persecution.

But it still is uncomfortable. It still is normal that we aren't built for. Living with a couple of million people in this valley we aren't used to distancing or isolation. We aren't used to the fear of disease. We are used to being cut off from certain things. We aren't used to not being able to hang out with our friends in person. We aren't used to not being able to let our children play at the park, or go to school, or to go out to restraints. We aren't used to not being able to worship together with a community of believers in our church worshipping our God. For many of us, even though, we can agree that it could be worse, we can still feel cut off.

The text that I want to take some time to look at today is our lesson from the prophet Ezekiel this morning. He is talking to people that were cut off in the worst possible way. They weren't just not allowed to go to church, their

temple was destroyed. They weren't just not allowed to hang out with their family members, many of them were scattered, or killed. But the message that the Lord wanted to give to the people is I have the power to restore you.

So the Lord took Ezekiel and he brought him out to the middle of a valley and it was full of bones. And he didn't just have Ezekiel look at these bones from a distance, he led him back and forth among them and he was close enough to them that he realized that they were dried out. There hadn't been any life in these bones for a long time. Just bones.

And the Lord asks Ezekiel a question he said, "Son of Man can these bones live?"

How would you answer that question? You look out and see a valley of bones, and God asks you can these bones live what do you say?

If you go by your experience what you have seen before, what you have observed before, it's a simple answer. "Nope."

Can bones come back to life, nope? If you were chaperoning a field trip in the natural history museum and the tour guide says to you, look at these dinosaur bones, now tell me can these bones come back to life? The kids will all say in unison "Nooooooo" Because life is a one-way street. You don't go from bones to life. You go from life to bones. That's just the way it goes.

Now you have a little nation of Israel. One that has been swallowed up by a big empire of Babylon. They have been wiped off the face of the map. The best and the brightest have been brought into the Babylonian government and given new names. Israel has no military strength. They have no political power or leverage. They have no power or influence, all they have is their God.

So God shows Ezekiel his messenger this valley of dry bones as says, son of man can these bones live? And what does he say, "O God, only you know."

Only He knows. Only our God knows what he can and will do next for us. Even if what is right in front of us seems impossible for anyone to do.

This is not abstract. Some of you have seen this happen in your lives. There are members of this congregation that thought they were never going to see again. And then one day, the lights came back on. There are members of this congregation that thought they were never going to walk again, and they stand in the back of our church and talk to us every week. Only our God knows what he can and will do next for us.

God Help us answer the unknown questions that we have for him with, "O God, only you know." Because we have to be the first to admit we don't know. We don't know what tomorrow holds for us. We don't know what this afternoon holds for us. We don't know what is going to happen this summer even if all of our plans were so certain just a few weeks ago. We don't know.

God brought Ezekiel out there, he asked him that question, and then God told Isaiah to do something that might have seemed silly. Prophecy to the bones. Speak to the bones. Tell them what God is going to do for you, that he is going to breath come into them and he is going to make them come to life. And then they would know that he is the Lord."

Well, Ezekiel rather than looking up to heaven and saying, "God that is a waste of my time. What in the world am I doing talking to some dry bones in the middle of a valley, this isn't going to do anything." Ezekiel just faithfully does what the Lord asks him to. He prophesied as he was commanded.

And what do you know? The Lord did what he told Ezekiel he was going to do. As he was speaking tendons came out and started to attach themselves to the bones and then flesh appears on them, and then Ezekiel prophecies that life is going to come into the bones and it does. And then standing in front of him rather than just being a valley of dry bones, guess what was there, a big army, standing on their feet, living and strong.

When we follow the Lord, we see his strength.

Now there was a reason that God did this. God didn't do this for the sake of Ezekiel to show him an amazing thing that God can do. Ezekiel had that strong faith. Ezekiel was able to give that answer, O God only you know. He was one of the very few that were in Israel that would have responded that way. Most of the people that were in Israel looked at the status of their

nation is in exile, away from family and friends and away from where they were able to worship and they said our bones are dried up and our hope is gone, we are dried up.”

Well, guess what Ezekiel was going to be able to tell them. Do you think the king of Babylon is strong? You think that Nebedcadnezzur has a lot of power to tell any army to go and destroy any country. Guess what your God can do? He can turn a valley of bones into a vast army. And guess who's side the God who can turn bones into an army is on. He is on your side Israel. And guess what that has promised to do for you. He has promised to get you out of this exile and bring you back to the land that I promised to your forefathers and there you will settle. Not just visit, but I will give it back to you.

Guess what? That God is your God too. That makes me happy. I hope that makes you happy too. A God that can give life back to bones is watching out for you. And he does not want you to feel like a dry bone without any hope. We have Him on our side. We have God will raise from the dead watching out for us right now. We have a God that has adopted us as sons and daughters. He loves you. He will care for you. He will work through this difficult time to make us stronger.

How? Only he knows.

In some of this quietness. Breaks from work. Breaks from sports both participating in and watching. Breaks from social events. Breaks from many of the distractions that are in this world, it is a time for us to be led by the spirit. To go away from our normal routines and just look to the Lord and say God I am going to follow you today where you lead me, and I am going to do what you have always asked me to. Trust in your promises, and obey your commands. Because Lord you promise to give me the strength to accomplish these things, and you always forgive me when I fail to these things.

Take some time during all of these breaks, and try praying for 3 minutes a day. When is the last time you had a full three minute conversation with your God?

Instead of scrolling Netflix for 45 minutes looking for a new show to binge, read a chapter of the bible. See what your God has to say to you.

Instead of excusing the sinful behaviors that have crept into our lives. Pray to God for strength to overcome them.

Instead of wishing that some relationships in your life were better, talk to the people that you love. Pray for them. Practice forgiveness. Practice patience. Practice love. And pray for God to give you the strength to do that.

Only God knows what the outcome of some of these small actions is going to have in the long run. But if God has given us some time during the next couple of weeks to grow closer to him through prayer, to strengthen our faith through reading the scriptures, through confession and absolution making us a better servant of our Lord, and by strengthening the relationships between us and the people we love. And if this is the time that we use to create these habits that last a lifetime. These could be some of the most important days and best days that God has given to us in our lives.

You are not in exile. You are not cut off from God's love. You have hope and promises from God. You will be given the strength to carry these things out. Do what the Lord says. Let the Holy Spirit work through you and help you to live for the Lord.

Amen.