

“Exile, False Hope, and Salvation”

Pastor Jacob Hanson

07/26/2020

### **Opening Prayer**

Good Morning, and welcome out here to Pleasant Corners for our combined services with PCUMC and KUMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be here with you today as always. We are in the middle of an interesting time. Beloved, this sort of stuff is, unfortunately, nothing new. In our sermon series on Ezekiel so far we have examined how destruction and repentance are related and we have talked about how serious the call was that God gave to this prophet some 2,500 years ago. Today’s message is no different in its seriousness to us, as we can absolutely apply Ezekiel’s lessons on exile, false hopes, and true salvation. Beloved, the King still lives, and that is where our hope should lie. But before we get into that, we first should go over the background of this Old Testament book.

The book of Ezekiel was written between the years of 573 and 591 B.C., at the beginning of the period known as the Exile for Israel. The purpose for this book is fourfold. In it Ezekiel preaches that repentance is needed, that God is greater than all, that judgement comes for those who trust in anything other than the Lord, and that in the middle of condemnation there is still a future and a hope for those who repent. While destruction and exile did come as a result of the nation being unrepentant, the Lord does provide clues as to His coming salvation for them from the Babylonians... and us from our sin. In understanding this book and how it fits together, a book that most of us have never read, it is important to remember to focus on the big pictures. It is easy to get lost and confused with Ezekiel’s prophetic imagery, with the language that is used, and with the Jewish undertones that are in it that

many of us may not understand. But if you focus on the big pictures as you read this, that God desires repentance, that He is greater than all, that judgement comes for those who trust in something other than Christ, and that there is a future for us if we do repent, then it will make this book much clearer to understand. Perhaps another way of thinking about it would be to try to get one kernel of truth out of each message and hold onto it. You don't have to understand everything, this isn't a beginners Bible book, but if you gain just a kernel of truth in each big section that we look at, you will be well on your way to understanding the book of Ezekiel. With that in mind, our focus for today is on how Israel chose to trust in a false hope instead of the Lord, and salvation was still promised for those who would turn back towards Him because the king still lived.

In our first reading from Ezekiel 12:1-11 Ezekiel is given a command by the Lord. "Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself baggage for exile and go into exile by day in their sight; even go into exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand though they are a rebellious house." The command for Ezekiel here is to give the people of Jerusalem a clear vision of what they can expect if they continue to trust in themselves and their idols. Ezekiel packs up his bags in shame, digs a hole in the wall, and covers his face as he walks from his home in Jerusalem to another place. It is in a similar fashion, he preaches, that the nation of Israel will be taken away. The people who have rejected the Lord will be forced out of their homes, will pack up what they can carry, and will be taken to another place in shame through the broken down walls that previously protected them. Ezekiel says as the Lord commands "Say, 'I

am a sign to you. As I have done, so it will be done to them; they will go into exile, into captivity.” There are not many among us who can understand the pain and trauma of being forced from your home, leaving behind everything that was given to you, and being dragged away in chains to a foreign nation. From a spiritual perspective we see that this is the result of continued idolatry and sin, from a secular perspective we will see that God uses the powers in the world for His purposes. In our second reading we can see this with how God deals with Zedekiah.

In Ezekiel 17:12-21 the Lord proclaims a harsh judgement against king Zedekiah. Zedekiah was Jehoiachin’s replacement upon the throne of Judah. If you remember Jehoiachin was a brand new king when he was taken off to Babylon along with the cream of the crop in Judah. (This included Ezekiel.) Zedekiah was Jehoiachin’s uncle, and he was picked by Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) to take Jehoiachin’s place. Zedekiah pledged allegiance to Babylon, that he would serve Nebuchadnezzar, that he would pay tribute and not rebel. Zedekiah, more importantly, did not serve the Lord well at all. He was known as an evil king, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and instead of trusting the Lord for deliverance from foreign powers he trusted Egypt. In time Zedekiah did rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, and having already been in rebellion with Judah against the Lord, the nation was then completely destroyed and the people taken in chains to Babylon. “As I live,” declares the Lord God, ‘Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives.’” Continuing in verse 19 “Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘As I live, surely My oath which he

despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head.” Zedekiah, someone who had the throne put in his hands, someone who had the potential to turn the nation back towards the Lord and serve the Lord well... put his trust in earthly kings and his own strength. It was this false hope in something that didn’t save, namely his trust in false idols and his trust in Pharaoh, that led to his destruction... and the destruction of Judah. The prophecies that Ezekiel had given, the prophecies that had been given by Isaiah and Jeremiah at the same time, about the coming destruction of Judah finally came true.

If you were to look at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, a book in the Bible that lays out the history of Judah’s kings, you would see that when the exile comes the destruction is complete. The Israelites are taken away in chains, king Zedekiah has his whole royal line killed in front of him before he himself is blinded and led away in chains, and the city of Jerusalem is left in ruins. The destruction that was warned and foretold comes to pass, and all hope is lost. Or so it would seem. At the end of Ezekiel 17, verses 22-24, we get a weird couple of verse that give hope.

“Thus says the Lord God, ‘I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will perform it.’” This strange set of verse with its imagery of a branch actually speaks volumes to us. This branch that is taken from the top is planted, grows itself into a great and

mighty tree, and stands in the place of the previous tree that is destroyed. Beloved, Ezekiel here is talking about Jesus.

Zedekiah, the king who trusted falsely, was destroyed. The nation was obliterated, and the people were in exile... but the rightful king who preceded Zedekiah, Jehoiachin, actually lives in Babylon and does well. It is Jehoiachin's lineage that eventually produced Jesus many generations later. Even when the people reaped their own destruction, the Lord kept His promise to make Israel great and to bless the whole world through them. Jesus is that branch, plucked from the top of the kingly tree, that is planted and grows and flourishes. It isn't by man's hand that salvation comes to the Jews and then to the whole world. It isn't by Zedekiah's works or his trust in Pharaoh that they are saved. It is by the Lord's hand that salvation comes, and even in spite of the horrible destruction that takes place there was yet hope because the king lived. Beloved, taking this into our modern day, we should place our hopes and trust in the one above because the King lives.

Right now is a tough time for all of us. It is easy to despair, and it is easy to place our hopes into earthly rulers and leaders. Beloved, don't place your hope in something that will disappoint, place your hope in Christ. What do I mean? I mean that no matter what happens here and now, we can still have joy looking forward to the future because the King lives. For the Israelites the promise of a return of the rightful king to the throne was hoped for because Jehoiachin and his offspring survived, resulting in Jesus. For us we can have that joy because Jesus did not remain in the ground but rose again and reigns at the right hand of God the Father almighty. In this time of great struggle, in this time filled with depression, anxiety, fear, hatred, and strife we can still have joy beloved... because our king lives. Don't place your hope for the

future in a political figure, your own strength, your money, or anything else... place it in Christ, and know that you will not be disappointed. Our King lives yet. Let us pray.

**Closing Prayer**