



Isaiah 6  
The Story  
The Kingdoms' Fall<sup>i</sup>

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This morning we continue this series called, “The Story” which is all about the big picture of the Bible: the story of God’s creative and redemptive work. We’ve seen God bring creation into existence from nothing, we’ve seen him form the nation of Israel from scratch, through whom he’s going to reveal himself and His plan to draw people back to himself, because creation has wandered away from their Creator. So he instructs the nation of Israel in how life with God works, what it means to live by faith...they get the Law in order to have some rules to live by which can be summarized as “love God and love your neighbor.”

But Israel was not faithful to living in relationship with each other or with God very well, and weren’t much of a shining light for the Lord an awful lot of the time. God was patient with them for hundreds of years...warning them through prophets...seeking to draw them back. But they continue to slip in the wrong direction. Eventually, the nation splits in two – the Northern Kingdom called Israel, and the Southern one, called Judah. God could have moved on and gone to plan B with another people group...but God had made a covenant, an unconditional promise, that the Messiah, the one who would make a way back to God, would come from Israel. In particular, the promise was that the Messiah would come from David’s lineage, the tribe of Judah.

But the last week or two we’ve seen the nation not only divide, but begin to disintegrate as they wandered further and further away from Yahweh, their God. Eventually, the northern Kingdom falls. This happens in about 722 B.C. The southern kingdom falls some 125 years later, in 597 B.C. Both of those dates are semi-fluid because the process of being taken over, and the process of many of the people being taken into exile and scattered into to different parts of Assyria and Babylon – who were the conquering countries – none of that happens over night. It’s a several year process, and seems to come in waves, or stages. The Babylonian takeover of Judah took nearly 20 years, for example, and was really complete in 586 B.C. when the temple that King Solomon built was torn down.

Regardless of exact dates and what you consider to be the point at which they're conquered, the result is the same, as both Kingdoms fall. So this is a tough time in the history of Israel. These are not fun years, and it's not just a handful of them. We're talking a few hundred years from when they started to wander in their faithfulness to their complete downfall...and then several decades in exile.

And into this fall of the Kingdoms comes the voice of various prophets. We've looked at some who prophesied words of warning and caution and tried to get Israel back into right relationship with the Lord. That continues with Ezekiel, whose call to the prophetic ministry begins the book of Ezekiel. He enters the picture with Judah already under siege, and at least partly conquered. And his message begins with continued warnings of future consequences for their waywardness. **“The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says.’ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them” (Ezekiel 2:4-5).**

“Obstinate” and “stubborn” are not words we want spoken of us, but sometimes they're true, right? If you're married with kids, you have undoubtedly experienced this in your own household. There are times of obstinance...stubbornness...outright disobedience. It's really kind of tragic when it happens in our household, and I'm really trying not to be this way. 😊

There's probably more truth in that than I care to admit...but it's the raising of kids that I have in mind. As we parents know: children sometimes get this way. **And whether we'd like to admit it or not, God's “children” (you and I!) get that way sometimes, too.** We see it in the life of Judah and Israel a whole bunch, and we see it in the lives of Christians as well. We can be real good at pointing it out in others, right? But if we could see the forest for the trees, we'd realize that it is true in our lives also – in our relationships with others, and in our relationship with the Lord. This is why spiritual disciplines are so important – to pray, study Scripture, worship, steward our time our treasure and our talent...these are spiritual disciplines. But sometimes it takes a little discipline from the Lord to get us on track. And this is not just an Old

Testament thing. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** reads, “**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It’s all useful for “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” And it’s not a righteousness of our own, it’s a righteousness that comes to us from God, through faith in Jesus, as the Holy Spirit works in us and makes us right in God’s eyes.

The people of Judah were anything but righteous and they needed “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training.” Now, for Ezekiel, and for anyone who would step into this kind of role of speaking into the lives of God’s people, this is kind of a scary task to deliver this message. It takes courage and it takes encouragement to keep at it. That’s why the Lord says to him in verse 6, “Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them.” God is encouraging him in his ministry. He’s letting him know, “Hey, this is not what they’re going to want to hear...but you need to say it anyway. This is the only way they’re going to get back on track.” **This kind of tough love message that had already been ignored for so long as prophets before delivered it, is the message they don’t want to hear, and it’s the message that he’d rather not give...but it’s the message they need.** And to reinforce the necessity of the message and the content of the message, he has this vision of God asking him to eat the scrolls that contain the message God wants him to give – the first one is the hard message, the second is sweet and “tastes like honey” and we’ll get to that one in a bit. But the point of this is: make this a part of you...absorb it into you so you don’t forget it and don’t deviate from it.

And I’ll tell you what: the scariest and hardest part of the calling of a pastor is this role of prophet, when this is the kind of message being delivered (the first one). In a moment we’ll turn a corner and look at a different kind of message Ezekiel gave. **Prophets don’t always have messages of doom and gloom. And remember, when they did, it was with the hope that the people would turn around and get going in the right direction so the doom and gloom didn’t come true.** But this stuff here...this is a hard message for Ezekiel. And every pastor has to wear this hat at times of his or

her ministry (as we all do – not just pastors), because every Christian and every church needs to hear this kind of message at some point. And to give someone, or to give a church body, a message of rebuke or correction...even some messages of teaching and training...these can be hard...and it's a hard message for a church to hear.

This church, several years ago, agreed that although it was a hard thing to acknowledge, the fact was, it had lost a lot of folks over the previous couple of decades, particularly families with kids. Many of the younger ones who used to be here simply grew up and moved out of the area...but young families did not fill in behind, for a variety of reasons. As a result, Rose Hill got pretty “top-heavy.” And so there was a season where someone had to acknowledge that and deliver the message, and call God’s people here back to being intentional about reaching the next generation, so that we would be a generationally balanced church. Might’ve been a pastor, or an elder, or the elders collectively, or a committee appointed to lead the congregation in a church assessment (like during the mission study and the mission study task force when Will Mason was the interim pastor)...there was probably a certain degree of general collective awareness...but someone probably had to give the message of “Here’s where we are...and here’s where we’re headed if we keep going in that direction.”

And if you’ve been here the last 5 years, you know that we’ve made decisions to intentionally reach the next generation of families that are flocking to our community. According to an article in the Kirkland Reporter a year ago or so: **From the 2015/2016 school year to the 2016/2017 school year, the Lake Washington School District gained 1,178 students, jumping from 6<sup>th</sup> largest to 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in the state, with 29,008 students. This growth trend began a couple years earlier, exceeded the projections by 40%, and is expected to continue until at least 2020.**<sup>ii</sup> (Maybe not at that rate...but still much faster than in previous years.) More than our fair share of those students in the district are right here in our part of Kirkland. So: **There’s an opportunity that God is giving us to jumpstart our response to that prophetic voice that was calling us to be generationally balanced.** The people of Rose Hill heard the prophetic voice and wanted to respond positively to that. And it’s as if God said, “Great! *You* get your

church in order and ready to receive them, bless them, and help nurture them as disciples of my son Jesus; and *I'll* flood your community with young families that need Jesus.”

And if you don't have kids, and you're wondering if you're welcome here too, the answer is a resounding, “Yes!” **We really do want to be generationally balanced as RH once was – and that means we want people of all ages, across all generations.** That makes for a healthier church and a stronger, more diverse, more vibrant faith community. Younger people need older people in their lives, and vice-versa. (You can define “younger” and “older” however you want...and having kids in the house or not is certainly not the dividing line, as though you're “older” the moment your last child moves out...but we all know that the older we get, the higher the dividing line goes, right? As my kids do now, I used to think 45 was kind of old. I don't think that so much anymore...Besides, at 45, I'm still squarely in my early 40's, right?) Kids bring energy and vibrancy into the life of a church, and people who've been around the block a few times bring wisdom and stability and experience that a church desperately needs, and that young families need in a personal kind of way, too. We need each other. We need Jesus first...but we also need each other.

And so the prophetic voice of warning, concern, and correction was heeded, and there is fruit beginning to be born. For instance, there were 24 individuals, representing 12 households, who came to Rose Hill in 2017 for the first time who have made Rose Hill their home church and are actively involved in the life of the church. A number of them (4 households) have kids in the home, several of them have kids who are grown don't have kids. So there's a variety, and the point is: good things are happening! If you are new to Rose Hill in the last few years: you are an answer to prayer, and I trust that we are an answer to your prayers for a church home. So: **The hard prophetic message from a few years ago that led this church to do some things differently is beginning to turn to a message of hope.**

And that takes us to the message that Ezekiel later got to share. Because as time went on and the exile grew in years, the message began to change. The people began to have a certain sense of repentance, and God began laying the

groundwork for the Israelites to return to their homeland, to rebuild Jerusalem and rebuild the nation.

**And so Ezekiel's message changes from one of warning to one of hope.** A new, and brighter future is laid out for them. Hope for revival, for right relationship with God, for new life, new energy, new community...all of this is tied together. It's all a gift of God's grace, and it is possible because the people slowly begin to have their hearts softened toward God and re-engage with Him. And one of the most vivid examples of this new message is a vision Ezekiel has of a valley filled with dry bones. Here's some of the vision that Ezekiel had: **This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.**" ...Then he said to me: **"Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord'" (Ezekiel 37:5-6, 11-14).**

It's a picture of the nation coming back to life, of being re-energized, re-established, re-engaged with God. It's a picture of God graciously moving in powerful ways. It's a picture of a new creation. And it brings hope into their lives. It invigorates them.

And so what we see is that in the midst of the fall of the Kingdoms, God has not abandoned them. Their fall is sort of a mixture of the natural consequences of their sin/the bad choices they made as a nation, and tough love from their heavenly Father. But God has not forgotten them. He has not forsaken them. **And there will be a new and better day for them in the future, and God will lead them, build them back up, and will provide a**

**King in the lineage of David whose kingdom will have no end, as he promised he would.**

God still makes and keeps these promises. He still revives his people and brings new life into them – in His churches, in individual lives, and in families. He’s with us in our own periods of exile, and he will lead us out of them, bringing and breathing new life into us. You and I are living testimonies to that. I used to be spiritually dead, like those dry bones. And I’ve still got a lot of growing to do, but God breathed new life into me, he continues to do that, and He has for you as well. He breathes new life into our dry bones. Someone has said that Jesus didn’t come to make bad people good, but to make dead people come alive. It’s true in an eternal sense, and it’s true here and now. The Kingdoms may have fallen...your life may feel like it’s collapsed. But the prophetic voice of warning and correction is turning to a voice of hope and a bright future. Because even in the midst of the fall, God is with us, and he is breathing new life into our dry bones. Let’s pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Today’s sermon correlates to Chapter 17 in “The Story.” We took orders for copies of the book, “The Story” at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for “NIV The Story Bible” at their website.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.kirklandreporter.com/news/lake-washington-schools-growing-faster-than-expected-now-the-3rd-largest-district-in-washington/>