

**Ezekiel 17**  
**'God's Hands In My Affliction'**  
**Pastor JD Farag**

KAPONO: Would you join me in a word of prayer?

Heavenly Father, yes Lord, would You let this song be our prayer this evening? Lord, open our eyes and our ears to You this evening, Lord, in this time that You have allowed for us to gather here. So thank You, Lord. Would You bless the teaching?

Thank You, thank You, thank You, Lord. We ask these things in Your mighty and precious name, Jesus. We say, amen.

PASTOR JD: Amen and amen. Good evening to you. Glad you're here tonight. Want to welcome those of you online as well. So glad you're joining with us as well.

Before we get started, I want to know – actually very excited. Looking forward to next Thursday. I want to let you know that we have a very special guest, Pia Ambord that's going to...

Oh, yeah. Okay.

She's from Switzerland. She's actually here tonight. I don't want to embarrass her. Why don't you stand up? Why not?

[ Applause ]

This is my friend Pia from Switzerland. Did I say that she's my friend? Yeah, she's my friend.

Anyway, we've – we were first – I think we first met a number of years ago in Israel and on the mainland. Not Switzerland, though. But anyway, I've invited her. She is our special guest.

And next Thursday, beginning at 7:00, we're going to have Pia and I together, and we're going to discuss, and it's going to be my privilege to discuss with her about this amazing ministry, talk about frontline ministry of bringing Jesus to the red-light district. And we're also going to be discussing some other related topics that I'm certain you will be very encouraged by and blessed by, maybe even possibly challenged by.

You know, we get so – I hope it doesn't come off wrong. You know, living in Hawaii, we're so insulated and isolated. And sometimes I think we fall prey, for lack of a better way of saying it, to this, you know, bubble type of a dynamic where we don't realize there's a whole world out there and we live such – and we're so blessed to live, you know, here in Hawaii.

But anyway, some of the things that Pia's going to share, I know are going to be, quite frankly, raw, very real. But God. God loves these precious women. And we're also going to get into some other areas that are going to be a little bit delicate in terms of the subject matters. So probably not a good night to bring your kids.

We do have children's ministry upstairs, but your younger kids, if they want to join you, it's your discernment and your discretion. So anyway, next Thursday, 7 p.m.

Not sure yet – actually, I don't even know that – I didn't tell you anything. You're just now finding out about this, right? Yeah, this is what I do to my staff. They work well under pressure. Last minute, you know, it's kind of like, Oh, by the way.

I think it was Pastor Chuck Smith who said, blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken. That's not a biblical, you know, beatitude.

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But anyway, so this is, I guess, as good of a time as any to let you guys know, next Thursday night we're going to be up here. We'll do the same format that we have in the past, maybe a couple of songs at the front. But we are going to want to take the first 30 minutes to discuss the censor sensitive topics before we go live at 7:30 on Facebook and YouTube.

So there you have it. Wow, that was quite the announcement.

So let's get in the word. Looking forward to what God has for us. Just one chapter tonight, Chapter 17. We, of course, made it through, survived Chapter 16 with 15 last week. But I chose to only take and tackle Chapter 17 for a couple of reasons, chief of which is that it speaks to how God's hand is in the afflictions in my life. Let me expound just briefly.

The prophet Ezekiel, as we're going to see, is told to pose a riddle and speak a parable concerning prophetically and even specifically, the unthinkable calamities that are coming upon Israel, namely Judah.

Now, of course, we look back in retrospect. This is history. But at this juncture it's still prophecy about that which is going to come to pass yet future. And it is catastrophic in every sense of the word. What we're going to see is God, as only He can, always has His hand in our catastrophic circumstances, irrespective of whether or not they come of our own doing. Maybe better said, whether it was something we did that we brought on ourself, this affliction, this catastrophe, this calamity, or if through no fault of our own, we find ourselves in a situation where we're going through this trial, this affliction, this calamity and this catastrophe.

It may not seem like it – and this is what's going to come screaming out of this chapter tonight. It may not seem like it – in fact, the circumstances in your life, again, whether or not they're of your own doing, deserved or undeserved, you're in the midst of this situation that is so perplexing and it's riddled – I use that word for a reason. And I'm going to talk about that in a moment. But I mean, it's just riddled with such perplexity and everything about what you're in the midst of contradicts the word of God, the love of God.

By the way, on Sunday, spoiler alert, the 1 John teaching is going to be about doubting God's love in those times in our lives when we're going through trials and difficulties. I think I titled it something along the lines of, "Trust In God's Love When You're Hurting."

Here you are in this situation and you're struggling, you're hurting, you're perplexed, you're even, dare I say, confused. And it doesn't help that you've got the promises of God. I was just actually talking to my wife about this.

One of our favorite verses, as it is for many, is Jeremiah 29:11. You know it well. Where God just, I mean, so lovingly reminds us that He has a plan for our lives, He has a plan for us. And that plan is not to harm us, but to give us instead a future and a hope. He –

it may seem like our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, that God is absent, that God is silent, and that everything about what we're going through contradicts the promises like that in the Word of God. It challenges. It contradicts the love of God because you're going through something and you're in the midst of this furnace of affliction, if you will. And yet on this side, you've got the promises of God, the word of God, the unfailing, unconditional, unfathomable love of God. Yet it's overshadowed by the circumstances in which you find yourself.

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And then you come upon a chapter like this in the word of God, Ezekiel 17 and you find throughout that the hand of God is in the midst of everything that's happening, even though everything that's happening contradicts even the notion of the hand of God being in it.

In fact, the truth be made known, it's like God has taken His hand off of your situation and that's why you're in that affliction. I mean, His fingerprints are nowhere to be found. You want to do a forensic investigation and you want to start looking for fingerprints and the handprint of God. Anything, you'll take anything. I don't see God in this. God, where are You?

Oh, I didn't go anywhere.

Yeah, but God...

And then, well, you know how it goes, right? You can write the next chapter in that book. If you're anything like me, it's God, I don't understand. I cannot see how. And I'm holding on, hanging on by a thread to my faith that You're going to do it. But I'm looking at the situation in my affliction, and I just can't see a way for You to do it. I just don't know that You're going to do it.

It's almost if, you'll forgive the humor, it's almost like you're going to be the first person in the history of mankind to void the promises of God. You know, in other words, throughout all of human history, God worked all things together for the good to those who loved Him and are the called according to His purpose. Throughout all of human history, what men meant for evil, and it was evil, but God meant it for good. And then you come along. Yeah, not this time. This would be the first case, unprecedented in human history that the promises of God, the love of God, the hand of God has failed. I don't know what happened. The wrong file got pulled. Something got severed, maybe the connection got disconnected. But this is the first time in human history that the hand of God, the love of God, the will of God, is just not going to pull through.

Are we off to a good start? We haven't even opened up in prayer yet. This is just the introduction. I'm just kind of priming the pump. I don't know how it's working out. So maybe we should just pray and go for it.

Father in heaven, thank You. Thank You once again for chapters like this that are in our Bibles because we know they're in our Bibles for a reason. And we also are keenly aware that the only way we're going to know the reason why we have a chapter like this in our Bible is if the Holy Spirit is our teacher and our guide tonight, because the Holy Spirit is the only one who can lead us into all truth. And so Lord, we need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes, to open the eyes of our understanding to what it is that You want to minister to us.

Maybe for some, just simply remind us, especially for those who are in the midst of a trial that are in that furnace of affliction and You're nowhere to be found, and everything that is happening in their lives is contradicting everything that You promised in Your word. Lord, would You, as only You can minister to us and recalibrate us, because we're off track and we need You to get us back on track, back on that path, that highway of holiness.

Lead us into the truth, Lord, because the enemy is all about lying to us, "You're not going to make it through this one." Please, Lord, stop those lies. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, enable us to think on those things that are pure and peaceable and gentle and easy to be entreated and full of mercy and good fruits, things that are noble and true, of a good report.

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So Lord, thank You. We're with great anticipation looking forward to what You're going to teach us and show us and minister to us tonight. So speak Lord. Your servants are listening. In Jesus name, Amen.

All right.

Now, real quick, just hang on because it's going to get gnarly.

I still love that word. I don't care if you think it's – that's so 80s. Whatever.

It's going to be a little bit gnarly because we're going to see what's going to happen here and the way it's going to be posed to Israel. But we're going to see the hand of God, even though it's nowhere to be found, His handprint is nowhere to be found. But the hand of God is still in the midst, having the final word in this situation concerning His people.

It's been said rightly that God rules overall and overrules all. And His hand, though not seen, is always there in the midst of our affliction in order to bring about a grand and glorious end in the end.

So verse 1, **“And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, Full of feathers of various colors, came to Lebanon and took from the cedar the highest branch. He cropped off its topmost young twig and carried it to a land of trade. He set it in a city of merchants.**

**Then [Verse 5] he took some of the seed of the land and planted it in a fertile field. He placed it by abundant waters and set it like a willow tree. And it grew and became a spreading vine of low stature. Its branches turned toward him, but its roots were under it. So it became a vine, brought forth branches, and put forth shoots. [Hang on. Verse 7] “But there was another great eagle with large wings and many feathers. And behold, this vine bent its roots toward him...”**

You know how vines will gravitate towards the sun and grow in that direction? This is the parable, the analogy, the riddle.

**“...and stretched its branches toward him, from the garden terrace where it had been planted, that he might water it. It was planted [Verse 8] in good soil by many waters, to bring forth branches, bear fruit, and become a majestic vine.” ’ “Say, [Verse 9] ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Will it thrive?”**

Remember now this is a riddle, a parable. Let me see if I can put this into modern-day terms. You have to understand, in those days this was a thing. See, they didn't have Netflix, so you couldn't binge on Netflix series. So instead they would, they were on the edge of their seat, bingeing on parables and riddles. This was a thing that they did back in the day. I mention that because if you think about it, the riddle, the question and by the way, the parable, as well, Jesus. And maybe this is the reason why we should ask why. Why did Jesus teach in parables? You'll notice oftentimes in the gospels, when Jesus, many times is cornered and they attempt to, big mistake, trap Him, trick Him with a question.

Oh, we got Him now! Your disciples say that You apparently have communicated that they shouldn't pay taxes to Caesar. We got Him! This is going to be good.

Jesus is like, Hey, Peter, get a fish. There's a coin in its mouth! That's – never seen that before. “Whose face is on the coin?” “Caesar.” Oh. “Pay to Caesar what is Caesar's and God, what is God's.”

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I like how the late Larry Burkett said it. "Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and God that which is God's. But don't give unto Caesar that which is God's." I'll give you a moment on that.

That was a riddle, too, right there. You see, when you pose a question, you are forcing someone to actually think through it. When you pose a riddle, it's kind of like the challenge of a puzzle.

How many people are addicted to crossword puzzles? I have a theory, by the way. This is just my own personal opinion as to why it is. And you know what opinions are. They're like armpits. Everybody's got a couple and sometimes they kind of stink, so we'll leave it at that. But my theory is, is that the addiction that keeps people coming back to those crossword puzzles or those, you know, Netflix binges on series is it stimulates a certain dopamine release in the brain that makes you keep coming back for more. It's stimulating.

In fact, the – I don't want to get too neurological here. I'm – but there's something to this. The way the brain operates, and see, God designed it. He has the schematics, the blueprint for the human brain, the mind. So we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

But the way that they actually restore damaged brains is through exercises like that, because the brain in the neuroplasticity, as it's known, has to now work and create new connections that have been severed. When those, the neurotransmitters have been damaged and the receptors have been damaged, there's no longer those connections and there has been brain damage that has taken place.

This is why they've found – I'm taking it way further again. But I'll try to bring it back to the Bible study already in progress.

But, you know, they've actually found people that, you know, will lose a limb or experience some sort of trauma, physical trauma. The brain is so amazing that it overcompensates for the disability. Or if there's a limb missing or damage done somewhere in the body, the brain over compensates for it and adjusts and it's constantly changing.

You – (Frustrated sigh) Tonight's teaching should be titled, (Chuckle) "What You Always Wanted To Know About The Human Brain But Were Always Afraid To Ask." I don't know.

[ Laughter ]

You know, this is – and again, this is, I can quote Scripture after Scripture. Replete throughout Scripture, you'll find this to be true. You know, we're to "love the Lord God with all of our heart, soul, mind." Okay, so think on these things. As the proverb says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

You know, a lot of the habits that are formed, addictions, these are neurological connections and pathways in the brain that by the grace of God, because we are so fearfully and wonderfully made, the brain can actually change.

When you see the brain scan of someone who's doing drugs or watching porn or addicted to gaming, this is, I mean, terrifying, gaming, it kills the brain. And you see the brain scan. So here's a healthy brain.

I'll never forget that old commercial, remember? This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs. I've never been able to eat an egg the same way again after that commercial.

[ Laughter ]

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That's my brain in that pan! But (Chuckle) that was unnecessary, but whatever.

But you can change your brain within a period, a very short period of time. That's the mercy and the grace of God. And you develop new pathways in the brain. And it doesn't take very long. The brain, it just, it reconnects and rewires and reboots and restarts. And you can actually repair the damage to the brain. And it has a lot to do with what we think on because "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

And so you'll see these brain scans and there's a numbness that occurs and it's because the dopamine neurotransmitters have been fried. They've been overtaxed, overstimulated. And so that's why it takes more and more and more and more in order to achieve that same high, that same feeling.

So I had an illustration. I think is the best illustration ever heard. Think of these paths in this way in your brain. So if you continue to walk down a certain path, the grass will not grow on that path because it's constantly being used. It's the road well traveled, right? That's a path that you take. So the grass is matted down and hardened and there's no new growth. Okay, so you could say safely it's dead.

Okay, but what if you stop using that path and going that direction? Well, then the grass starts growing back on that path. Now you've created a new pathway because now instead I'm going to go down this path and it doesn't take that long. And this is how the human brain, how God made the human brain.

Okay, Now let's get back to our Bible study. That was no extra charge.

Where were we?

Verse 9, right?

Help me out. Someone just be gracious to me here. Oh, good. Yeah.

So rhetorical questions. So here's these parables now. They've got to solve the riddle. They're on the edge of their seat and doubtless there's even this, you know, collaboration amongst them, too. Okay, so a great eagle, who does the great eagle represent? And now we got another great eagle. Who does that eagle represent? And it takes the top, the cream of the crop and it takes it and plants it over here.

But then here comes another eagle and it's going to uproot it. **"Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots, cut off its fruit, and leave it to wither? All of its spring leaves will wither, and no great power or many people will be needed to pluck it up by its roots. Behold [Verse 10], it is planted, will it thrive? [Question, riddle, parable, puzzle] Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it? It will wither in the garden terrace where it grew." " [Verse 11] Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Say now to [Forgive me for chuckling] the rebellious house:..."**

Who do you think He's talking about? Judah.

And then he's told to ask them this: **"Do you know what these things mean?"**

(♪ Humming the Jeopardy song♪) Time's up!

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Okay, well, I'm going to tell you the answer to the riddle. I'm going to solve the puzzle, and I'm gonna explain the meaning of the parable. By the way, you're – this parable's about you. So here we go.

**“Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, ‘Indeed the king of Babylon [That's the first great eagle] went to Jerusalem and took its king [That's speaking of Jehoiachin] and princes, and led them with him to Babylon.”**

This is the second captivity, remember? Now there were three and this is the second captivity when they took them captive. And in that second, taking them captive, because remember, the eagle came and took them, right? The cream of the crop, the best of the best. You know who they were? Who the parable is speaking of? The likes of a Daniel Ezekiel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego et al. The best of the best, the top of the crop, the cream of the crop, the top of the plant. These are the top students. (Said with an accent) Sorry, that's an older movie. So that was the first great eagle.

**“And they took its king [Judah's King Jehoiachin] and the princes [Like Daniel, etc], and led them with him to Babylon. And he took the king's offspring, [This is Zedekiah who would become the vassal king] [Now listen very carefully] He took the king's offspring, made a covenant with him, and put him under oath.”**

In other words, the great Eagle Babylon, king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, he takes captive, it's horrific, Jehoiachin, and he says to his offspring, Zedekiah: Zedekiah, here's what we're going to do. You're going to become a puppet king under me. And if you abide by and make a covenant with me on this, you'll be under oath and it will go well for you.

**“He also took away the mighty of the land, that the kingdom might be brought low...”**

In other words, he's going to keep him down. But you're still going to be under me, but you're going to be king, Zedekiah. **“...and not lift itself up, [Don't rise up against me] but that by keeping his covenant it might stand. “**

In other words, if you keep this covenant, you don't break this agreement because I'm going to set you up. I'm going to let you stay in Judah, in Jerusalem, and I will allow you to be king. But you will be under me, under oath. And if you do that, we're not going to have any problems here.

**“But he rebelled against him [How so?] by sending his ambassadors to Egypt [A type of the world. Hang on to that], that they might give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? [Question mark] Will he who does such things escape? [Question mark] Can he break a covenant and still be delivered? [Question mark] ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD...”**

Now, when... (Chuckle) Does the Lord live?

Yes. No beginning, no end.

You know it's serious when it starts off with, **“As I live' says the Lord.”** It's like when you're a little kid, you know it's serious when your mother or your father uses your whole name or says – prefaces it with something like, “As God as my witness.” You're in big trouble, man. This is not going to end well. Well, this is what this has the idea of.

**‘As I live' says the Lord GOD, ‘surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke — with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Nor will Pharaoh [Whom he sought out in Egypt, a type of the world] [Still hang on to that] with his**

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**mighty army and great company do anything in the war, when they heap up a siege mound [Which they did] and build a wall to cut off many persons."**

In other words, this second great eagle is Egypt, who this Zedekiah breaking this agreement with Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon that set him up as a vassal king, he instead breaks that and betrays that oath, breaks that covenant and seeks out Egypt's help to ally politically and militarily with Egypt to go against Babylon.

Well, what's the problem with that? Well, I'm glad you asked.

There's a lot of problems with this, chief of which is that for 35 plus years, Jeremiah prophesied that they were not to seek out the help of Egypt, nor were they to fight against Babylon. And if they were to fight against Babylon or rise up against Babylon, they would be met with their own death. However, if they agreed and were amicable and were taken captive, they would be captive for 70 years in Babylon.

In other words, I've decreed it. This is your judgment and I've said it and it will be done. God said it. That settles it. It will come to pass. Don't fight against Me. I've already prophesied to you. Don't seek out Egypt's help.

Oh how quick are we? How quick are we? Lest we be too hard on Zedekiah, who thinks somehow okay, yeah, he's, you know, shaking hands, making this deal. I'm just using that by way of illustration, but in the back of his mind he's thinking, I'm going to, I'm going to break this. I'm going to go get Egypt and I'm going to ally with Egypt and we're going to rise up and defeat you.

Well, that military confrontation did happen, by the way. You know how it went down? We have it recorded. So Egypt does come build up the siege mounds as they would, that was common strategy in warfare in that day. But even with the alliance with the Egyptian army and Judah, they were no match for the Babylonians.

Hmm. I wonder why. Maybe that's why God said, don't do that.

Okay. So the Egyptian army comes in like, Okay, let's go! Maybe not. And they run away. Big mistake. What's the takeaway here?

Lest again, we be too hard on Zedekiah, how quick are we to seek out the Egypt of this world, worldly ways to solve spiritual problems; political alliances?

This is a problem that is not political, it is spiritual. Your problem is not that you need someone like Egypt. How quick are we to run to the ways of the world and fight a spiritual battle with carnal weaponry?

I think of Peter, when Jesus was arrested, he takes his sword, cuts off Malchus' ear, and Jesus heals him. I think that guy got saved. I would have if I'm a Malchus and that happened. Peter cuts off the ear. Jesus says, Peter, put your sword away, man. That's a carnal weapon. This is a spiritual thing happening here tonight. And then, Oh, by the way, Malchus, I'm so sorry, what Peter did. He puts his ear back on. If I'm Malchus, I'm saved. I think we're going to see Malchus in heaven. Just again, one of my opinions.

What's your point? Paul said it. **"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal."** The way that we fight a spiritual battle is not by going to the ways of the Egypt of this world. But how quick are we to make



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alliances with Egypt, with the world, and rely on the world, the ways of the world taking matters into our own hands because after all, God doesn't seem to care? I haven't seen God around here in quite a while. I'm going to take matters into my own hands because I don't see the hand of God, so I better do something.

So he makes this alliance with Egypt, seeking out Pharaoh to his own peril and he broke the covenant.

And one would think, I mean, it's kind of strange, isn't it? You would think that Babylon's the bad guy. Babylon: bad. Judah: good, God's people. Except for, again, 35, some believe as many as 40 years, Jeremiah unsuccessfully prophesied very specifically that they were going into Babylonian captivity and God, because He knows the end from the beginning knew that they would try to take matters into their own hands, going contrary to God, they would seek out Egypt's help.

And so there was even prophecies recorded replete throughout the Book of Jeremiah, which we studied verse-by-verse, you know, don't try to go to Egypt. They're going to be of no help to you. They're not going to solve your problem. Your problem is with Me. I'm the only one that can solve your problem.

Yeah, but, God, where are you? I don't see you doing anything at all.

There's one account – you'll again forgive me. I digress, but this, not so bad this time. This won't be a neurological dissertation, I promise you.

So in the Exodus in Egypt, Moses is, I mean, he's at the end of himself. He's had it. You know, it's humorous, the conversation between Moses and God is kind of like the mom and the dad, you know?

"Well, yeah, YOUR son!"

"Oh, my son? Oh, he's my son now. Yeah."

"No, he's not mine. That comes from your side of the family. YOUR son."

Well, Moses and God had that conversation. "No, they're not my people. YOUR people." And God's going, "No, they're not mine." They don't want to take ownership of them. They've had it because of the murmuring and the complaining and I mean constant complaining. God does miracle after miracle. Parts the Red Sea, they walk on dry ground, He drowns the Egyptians. Three days later they're complaining again.

And even before, pre Red Sea, if I can say it like that, they just got done witnessing ten plagues. I mean miraculous supernatural events, the likes of which no one would ever imagine seeing in their lifetime. And then they come to the Red Sea and then, I mean it – and don't get – come down on them because we would have –

we always shed ourselves in a favorable light, don't we? If we were there, I know what you would say, because you're like me.

I would have never said that.

Yes, you would. In fact, you would have been the one with the megaphone.

**"Were there not enough graves in Egypt? God had to bring us out here to kill us."**

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Really?

So anyway, this goes on and on and on, ad nauseum. And finally, Moses is like, **"God, I've done everything You've commanded me to do. I've done everything. But You haven't done anything, [And he uses these two words] at all."**

Translated: God, where are You? I don't see Your hand in this at all. You're nowhere to be found. I've got to take matters into my own hands, it looks like.

And of course, God's response, just classic, just textbook. It's just again, I find humor in it. Just says kind of like, "Mo, bro, that's what you think. You don't think I've done anything at all?"

Have you ever been in that place in your life where it's like, God, it doesn't seem like You're doing anything at all. And we emphasize, you got to growl with the "at all." I mean, You're not doing anything. But when you add, "at all," it's kind of like God going, you mean I'm not doing anything? I've done nothing? I've done nothing at all? I'll stop there.

This is Zedekiah. "God, You're not doing anything at all [Last time], so I'm going to have to do something since You're not doing anything. So I'm going to go get Egypt's help because You apparently aren't going to lend Your hand of help to us because I don't see your hand anywhere in any of this." So that's what he does. He breaks the covenant. He breaks the oath. God takes that seriously.

**"As I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head."**

That's kind of strange again, because you would think Babylon's the bad guy. But he's disobeying God. He's defying and rebelling against the commands of God to not seek out Egypt and to not fight the Babylonian captivity. And he's doing both? That's like a double homicide right there. It's a double whammy.

So verse 20, **"I will spread My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed [And here it is. Watch this] against Me."**

I imagine Nebuchadnezzar, meanwhile, back in Babylon, going, No, that was against me. No, I'm the one who started this whole thing to begin with. My hand's still in this. I know you don't see it either, but what he just did was directly against Me.

**"All his fugitives [Verse 21] with all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken."**

Now, before we get to verse 22 and turn a corner through verse 24 to the end of the chapter, this is where God, again, as only He can, though heretofore it seemed like He was not in this, is going to show up and not only remind us that He's always been in it, ruling over it, overruling it. His hand has always been in it, on it. He's been orchestrating the circumstances and choreographing the steps for His purpose, for His glory.

One of the things I'm learning in my walk with the Lord is that you can't trust how you feel. Feelings are not to be trusted. Have feelings. We all have feelings. ♪ *Feelings* ♪ Sorry.

[ Laughter ]

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Have feelings; don't let feelings have you. See when you have feelings and you let feelings have you, then feelings dictate to you and they supersede the word of God. It's kind of like, "You know, I'm just not feeling it." Oh, well, then no problem then, I guess because the righteous shall live by feelings.

[ Laughter ]

You got the point, right? **"The righteous shall live by faith."**

See, therein lies the problem. Here, Zedekiah and Judah – you know what's so sad about all of this is that it didn't need to happen. Had Zedekiah but obeyed the commands of God, the Word of God, not rebelled against God and broken the covenant with Nebuchadnezzar, he would have enjoyed, even as a vassal king plenty all the days of his life, because that was planted and prospered and grew and bore fruit. But then when you went to Egypt, the other great eagle, it came and it just uprooted it.

That's what happens when you try to take matters into your own hands and turn to the world for help. And we always do so under the banner of, well, God doesn't seem to care. Where's God in this? Why is God allowing this?

And this is the lie, okay? And it would seem to be a firm grasp of the obvious, but it's kind of like, you know, we talk about abandonment issues, you feel like God's abandoned you. But that's a lie.

How do you know?

Because the truth is **"He will never leave you or forsake you."** **"Lo, I will be with you always, even until the utmost ends of the earth."** I'll never abandon you. No, I'm still there.

Yeah, but it doesn't feel like it.

Again, I guess that if you just aren't feeling it. Are you going to live by feelings or are you going to live by faith?

What's faith? **"The substance of things hoped for, the evidence [Keyword] of that which is yet unseen."**

I don't see God's hand anywhere in this.

Yeah, they have a word for it. It's called faith.

And by the way, could it be, and I'm preaching to the preacher here right now, could it be that God has allowed that situation, affliction in your life for the simple reason that He wants to test your faith? Are you going to believe and keep the faith and remain steadfast in this crisis of faith?

See, we see a crisis of faith as being, losing your faith. You know, I'm losing hope, I've lost faith. But there's a different kind of crisis of faith that I would suggest is worse. Let me explain.

This crisis of faith is because you have faith, so much so, your faith is such that you know that God could instantly change your circumstances, but doesn't. And that crisis of faith, I think, is more intense than the crisis of faith, where one just loses faith, confidence, because you know, that God effortlessly, instantly – He doesn't even have to –

I think about it in the gospels when Jesus – oh, the faith, He would always point it out. Oh, my daughter is demon possessed. My son needs a healing. You don't even need to go. All You gotta do is speak the word and they'll be healed. Jesus is like, Whoa! And this is a teachable moment. Did you

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see the faith like that? I haven't seen faith like this in all of Israel. By the way, your son's healed, sir. By the way, Mom, your daughter is no longer demon possessed. He did it instantly. All He did was speak the word.

That's the problem. We know God can do it like that, but for some reason He's chosen not to this time. And we start taking it personally. Like what's going on here?

You know the healings? Yeah, this is why there's not a pattern in the healings. None of the healings followed any kind of a formula because you know what would happen if that were the case. We would just insert tab A into slot B in order to get healing C.

Remember that one account, the pool of Siloam? The blind man – (Chuckle) again, I find the humor in it. Jesus, He spits and makes mud and puts it on the eyes and the guy is healed of his blindness. But He doesn't do that the next time He heals someone that's blind.

Why?

Because He knows that we'll start up the First Church of the Spit in the Mud to Heal the Blind. So now we've basically put God into this finite box of our own understanding. And now God has to do the same thing the same way at the same time every time. And when He doesn't, we freak out.

Maybe that's why you're going through it, because God wants to test your faith, prove your faith, even when everything in your life contradicts everything you know about the God in whom you put your faith. So here you are, "God, where are You?"

Can I just do it one more time? You haven't done anything "at all."

I know. I will. But I'm going to do it in My way, in My time for My glory. Are you going to be okay with that? Because apparently, you're not okay with it right now, which is why we're having this conversation. This is why we're having this crisis of faith. Because you know what I'm able to do. There's nothing too hard for the Lord. He's the God of the impossible. He could take an impossible situation and like that, change it. He wouldn't even have to spit. He can just do it. And He doesn't.

Why not God?

Because I want you to trust Me in those times when you don't see a path or a way.

Here's what I want to do in testing your faith. Yes, I'm going to bring it to a crisis point. But here's what's going to happen. You're going to come out of this because I'm going to see you through it and I'm going to do it in such a way so that it's unmistakably Me. You're going to see this here in just a moment. We're almost done. So that you'll know that I am the Lord.

In other words, there's no other explanation. In other words, it's not just that God's going to do it. It's the way God does it so there's no question mark on the end of it. Like, well...

Remember – did I share this last week? This is – well I'm just going to share it again, briefly.

Remember when Lazarus died and then Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus and said, Hey, Your friend that You love is sick? And Jesus is like, okay, cool. And He waits like two or three days and He finally shows up.

Martha You got to love Martha, sisters, right? Remember Martha? She was in the kitchen. Now she's not. She runs out to Jesus. "What took you so long? If you had come earlier, Your friend, my brother

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Lazarus, he wouldn't have died." "Oh, I waited to test your faith to see if you would be okay with Me doing a greater miracle." So there's no question mark.

Because, see, if I would have come when you wanted Me to and did what you wanted Me to at the time that you wanted Me to, there would have been a question mark because, oh, maybe he would have gotten better anyway. No, I'm going to, we're going to put not a question mark on the end of this, but an exclamation point.

I mean, so, I mean, in fact, you got to love the King James. Before He resurrects Lazarus, He's told – because you've got to inform Jesus, you know, you've got to apprise Jesus of the current conditions on the ground, apparently. **"By now, Lord, he stinketh."** The King James. His body had already started to decompose. If You wouldn't have taken so long, we wouldn't have – he wouldn't stinketh.

[ Laughter ]

Jesus said, I know. Watch what's going to happen to your faith now. Because he's already decomposing, I'm going to raise him from the dead. Nobody is going to go, Oh, he would have gotten better anyway.

[ Laughter ]

Am I right?

So God's delays are not God's denials. Never misinterpret or misunderstand or make life altering decisions on the basis –

I think about Saul. Samuel says wait seven days, seven days.

It's the seventh day. Where's Samuel? I don't see him anywhere. He's nowhere to be found. So he takes matters into his own hands. Cost him his life, cost him the throne as King of Israel.

See, we make decisions based on our timetable, on our schedule, because God didn't do what we wanted Him to do when we wanted Him to do it, in the way we wanted Him to do it, and in the color that we wanted Him to do it in.

That's by the way, that's the antithesis of faith. They call that sight. Seeing is believing. The opposite is true. Didn't I tell you that if you will believe, that you will see? It's not seeing is believing. I'll believe it when I see it. No, when you see it, then you'll believe it. I mean, when you believe it, then you'll see it. Boy, that's a good indication I need to bring it in for a close.

**"Thus says the Lord GOD: [Verse 22. Watch this now] "Thus says the Lord GOD: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one..."**

*[Oh, who's that?]* That's the Messiah, yet future. When's this going to happen? At the Second Coming and at the commencement of the millennial reign, the Kingdom age. This is the Isaiah prophecy. I can't give you the chapter and verse, my mind and memory fail me, but where God is going to bring a Savior out of the root of Jesse, the house of Jesse, the lineage of David, a young twig, a tender one, this is the Messiah,

**"...and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of**

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**every sort; [In Christ, there's no distinction.] [Jew, Gentile, Arab, Middle Eastern, Chinese, all the above] in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that [And here it is] I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it."**

Well, I guess Your hand was in it. And now You've gone done it just as You said You would. You didn't do it when I wanted You to do it. But You have spoken and have done it.

Let me close this way. The chapter ends and the Bible study with it with this life lesson, this take away that I believe God wants us to take home with us from this Bible study. Actually, it's twofold.

First, no matter how bad it gets or no matter how bad I've been, it absolutely cannot change how good God always is. He is only always good, even though you don't see it or can't feel it. Yeah, but that, – this was, – and God, – we talked a little bit about this last week.

God still did it?

Yeah.

So much for You haven't done anything at all.

No, I just did it all. ALL. I just didn't do it, because your ways are not My ways. My ways are higher than your ways. Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who can understand the ways of the Lord? No, I'm going to do it this way because I am going to, by way of a parable, even a riddle, if you will, I am going to raise up a tree from the root of Jesse, the Savior of the world. That's My final plan, and I'm going to restore you. That was My plan all along, even though you never saw it. My hand was directing every minor detail of everything in your life.

You know, if God can create the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that in them is, and the stars, He not only, – how numerous are the stars? He created and positioned each and every star. Uncountable, uncountable. And not only that, He knows each star's name. That's pretty impressive, you know, because we don't remember anybody's name even after they tell you my name is...

You know, have you tried the association, you know? This a true story. A long time ago a guy by the name of Paul introduced himself and I tried this association. He was tall. I thought, okay, I got this one. I'll remember, Paul: tall.

The next week, "Hey, Pastor JD, man, God really blessed me." I'm looking at the guy. I'm looking at this tall guy. What was your name again?

[ Laughter ]

What's your point? Do you have a point? Yes, I have a point and I'll close and I'll end with it, Okay? Don't you think that if God, God's hand is in that, that God's hand is also in whatever's happening in your life? I mean, not a hair on your head falls to the ground. I mean, He, His hand, He's on it. He's in it.

And don't let how you feel about it or what you see or don't see in it dictate to you whether or not God is in it. In fact a pretty good indication that if that's how you feel about it, that God is in it and that's why God's allowing it, because He wants to prove you. He wants to demonstrate His faithfulness to you and He has to allow you to go through this very difficult, painful experience where it seems like He's nowhere to be found. Yet He is controlling everything, He's directing everything.

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He's allowing everything all for His glory. He will never allow anything to happen in our lives unless in the end it's for our good and His glory.

Whatever you do, don't take matters into your own hands, in your frustration and your impatience. Ask Sarah, how that worked out for her and Abraham. You know, in the Middle East, they're still suffering the consequences of that decision in haste.

I'm kind glad that they did, because those are my people. And God blessed Hagar and Ishmael.

Why don't you stand. Kaponu, come on up.

Father in Heaven, thank You for the grace of Your people, their patience with my, just my idiosyncrasies and the way I find humor and just my teaching style.

Lord I just pray that you'll take this teaching tonight and fine tune it to the need of every heart of everyone who needs to hear this, myself included. Again, I'm preaching to myself up here.

Please, Lord, there are times where it just gets so hard, it's so painful, so perplexing, and Your hand is nowhere to be found. Would You just as only You can and are always so faithful, to just give us that much needed reminder? Oh, no, I'm in this. I'm in this. You'll see. You'll see.

Thank You, Lord. Thank You, Lord, for directing everything in our lives. Thank You for Your hand in everything that we experience in our lives. And thank You for the end that brings You glory.

In Jesus name. Amen.