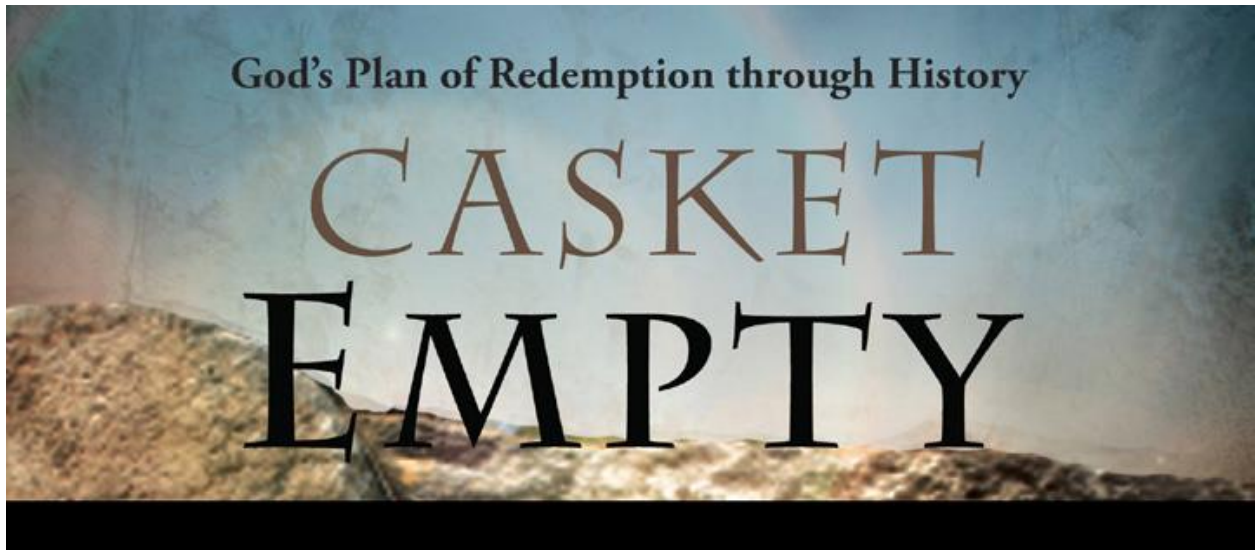


*E is for Expectations*  
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
February 18, 2018

**TEXT: Daniel 2:1-28**



This Sunday we begin the New Testament portion of our sermon series *CASKET EMPTY: God's Plan of Redemption Through History*. As we begin this series, I want to make of full confession, and the confession is that I love the Word of God. I really do. It is interesting; it is inspiring; it is motivating; it is compelling; and it gives us a vision of how we are supposed to live. Above all those great things, it reveals to us the person and character of God, the only true living God. Although the Bible is filled with 66 different books, in three different languages, over thousands of years, it's actually one redemptive story from Genesis to Revelation. The unity of the Bible is in the character of God and His saving plan for humanity in Christ. We need this unity of Scripture to focus our attention on God's mission in the world. So, we are picking up the story that we began in the fall. We used the acronym CASKET to walk us through the Old Testament. Do you remember it? C is for CREATION; A is for ABRAHAM; S is for SINAI; K is for KINGS; E is for EXILE; T is for TEMPLE.

We turn our attention now to the New Testament portion of the story, and the acronym is EMPTY. E is for EXPECTATIONS; M is for MESSIAH; P is for PENTECOST. T is for TEACHING; and Y is for YET-TO-COME. This will emerge as we move through the New Testament over these next several weeks together. This morning we pick up God's story with EXPECTATIONS. The period

of EXPECTATIONS is the interval between Malachi and Matthew. It is sometimes called the intertestamental period. It is sometimes mistakenly described as a period of silence or divine inactivity, but if we know anything about the character of God from the Scriptures, God is never inactive. He is at work in the world, and what I want us to see is that God has a sovereign movement of history throughout this period that will prepare the world to receive Jesus Christ. This sovereign movement of history is something that God promises and predicts in advance, and I want you to know that this sovereign movement of history is not just for our benefit. It is remarkable that God reveals His plan first and foremost to a Babylonian king, because God's saving plan includes gathering people who do not yet believe in Him. Do you believe that? That is where this whole series is going, because if you understand the Word of God, then He will compel your own missionary service and witness. Paul says *the love of Christ compels us*. There is no way to guilt-trip people into sharing their faith in Christ. If you share your faith in Christ motivated by guilt, your witness will be tepid at best, but if the love of Christ has gripped your heart and filled you with an irrepressible joy, and you see the sovereign movement of God in history in the world and in your own life, it is hard to keep that to yourself. That is where we want to go as a congregation.

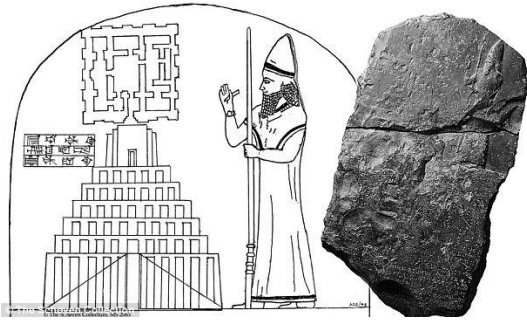
Throughout the period of EXPECTATIONS, I want you to see that God is active in the world. He is active on the one side to draw the nations of the world into greater contact with His people and they are given access to His Word. We will see that this morning. At the same time, God prepares His people by humbling us through suffering. He refines us to hope only in Him alone. We will seek both of these movements. So, He draws the attention of the nations and He humbles the hearts of His own people so that their confidence and expectations are fixed exclusively upon Him.

Let's look at our text which takes us into a paradigm for understanding the period of EXPECTATIONS. Daniel 2:1 begins:

*"In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him."*

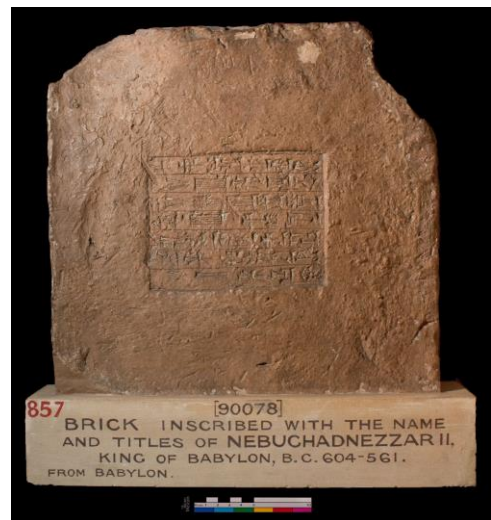
Nebuchadnezzar's second year was in 603 BC. He was still elated from his victory over Egypt in the battle of Charchemish, one of the most decisive battles of the ancient world. Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder. He was someone who had tremendous confidence. We call him Nebuchadnezzar, and some translations render the Akkadian more accurately by saying Nebuchadrezzar, but his name actually in Akkadian is Nabu-kuduri-usur, which just rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? I love that name. That name Nabu is one of the main gods of the Babylonian pantheon. A kuduru stone is the boundary stone, marking the limits of your realm, and usur means to protect, and so his name is a prayer that Nabu the god would protect and guard the

boundary of his empire. It's a great name for a king ruling over a vast domain. The only image that we have of Nebuchadnezzar is this damaged stela.

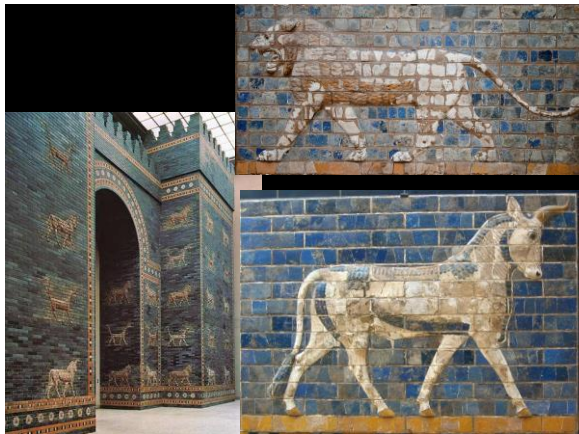


You see him as a great builder, confident in his stance. He has in his right hand a stylus ready to write in cuneiform. He has an architectural plan for the ziggurat, seven stories, rising up. The top of the stela is the ziggurat with an aerial view. You see in his left hand the building rod, the measuring shaft, which is six-feet high. By the way, we still use the six system from the Babylonians.

That is why our time is not in intervals of 10 but intervals of six, but we don't have enough time to talk about that. But, if you have ever wondered why you tell time with 60 seconds and in multiples of six, it is because of the Babylonians, and you see the six-foot stick in his hand. He is confident. Of course he is confident. He is a great builder. He intended to build a vast city, and on every one of those bricks required to build the city of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar stamped his own name. Imagine, 15 million of these bricks were required to build Babylonian and its walls, and every one of them was stamped with Nebuchadnezzar's name! He is confident. It's a beautiful



city with a lavish gate. This is the



Ishtar gate as you come in the city. It's in Berlin to this day, and pieces of it are in Chicago. This is the gate through which Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Aegean exiles went. This King is confident, sure of his reign, and so it is startling to read in the Word of God that he has a dream that is disturbing to him. He summons his court astrologers to

interpret the dream. In Daniel 2:3, we read:

*“And the king said to them, ‘I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.’”*

His astrologers respond to the king in the court language of the day, the international language of the day, which is Aramaic. We say the Bible is written in three languages: in Hebrew, Greek, and the lesser-known third one is Aramaic. Daniel 2, beginning with verse four, begins with the Aramaic sections of the Bible. They speak in the international language of the day, and they say in Daniel 2:3:

*“O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”*

The king is so rattled that he wants to know for sure the meaning of the dream, and he says: “No, you tell me the dream I had and its interpretation.” They said, “King, it doesn't work that way. You tell us the dream and we interpret it for you.” Then he says, “Let me tell you how it works.” In Daniel 2:5, he says:

*“The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.”*

And they say a second time in Daniel 2:7:

*“Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.”*

The king responds in Daniel 2:8:

*“I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm—“*

They say in Daniel 2:10:

*“There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.”*

The king becomes furious and threatens to kill them. We must remember that the court servants include Daniel and his companions, so the issue to kill those serving in court includes Daniel and his friends.

What you do if you are in that situation? Daniel and his friends go to God in prayer. They seek mercy from God and God reveals to Daniel both the dream and its meaning. Daniel bursts into praise in Daniel 2:20-21:

*“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings;”*

There is a breathtaking vision of God's sovereign plan and purpose in view. Daniel requests an audience before the king, and he is brought in before the king. The king asks in Daniel 2:26:

*“Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?”*

And Daniel says clearly to the king in Daniel 2:27-28:

*“No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.”*

There is a God in heaven who has a plan for this world. Do you believe that? There is a God in heaven knows what He's doing, who is actually running the world, and He has made known to

the king what will take place in the latter days. This is Old Testament language for God's saving purpose, the end times, the latter days, the future. God has announced the future in advance to a Babylonian king who doesn't even know Him. It's His sovereign, saving plan, as we will see, and Daniel unfolds the dream and tells it to the king. It's a dream of a great image, or statute. It's mighty, of exceeding brilliance and glory, and this statue stood before the king. It was awesome in appearance. Its head was of gold; its chest and arms of silver; its middle and thighs of bronze; and its legs of iron, and its feet of mixed iron and clay. As the king looked at this statue, he looked and saw there is a stone that was cut without human hands, and it struck the image on its feet and broke it into pieces. The iron and clay and bronze and silver and gold were shattered and became like chaff in the summer threshing floor, and the wind carried them away. Not a trace could be found. But as the king looked, that stone cut without human hands became a great mountain and filled the earth, and the king was overwhelmed. If you had that dream and you could ask just one question about that dream, the question that must be explained and answered is: "What is the meaning of that stone?" The dream is a vision. It's like a video clip, and you see this awesome thing, and then a stone strikes it and tears it down, and it becomes a mountain that fills the earth.

Daniel interprets the dream for the king: This dream is a dream of the succession of kingdoms of decreasing glory until a stone cut without human hands is interpreted in Daniel 2:44:

*"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever."*

This dream is of a sovereign progression of kingdoms—four kingdoms that culminate in the kingdom of God that is everlasting and will never be destroyed. Notice that the kingdom of God is launched; it is built with a stone that is unhewn, not cut with human hands. There is only one other piece of architecture in the Bible that is built with unhewn stones. The altar is made with unhewn stones. There is an altar that will strike the kingdoms of this world: a death, a resurrection that will topple this world's kingdoms and will then grow into a mountain that has room for all peoples. That's the vision, and it is breath-taking in scope, and it is given to a pagan king. Daniel is given the complementary vision with the same plot line in Daniel 7 where he sees a sequence of four kingdoms. The kings of these kingdoms are depicted like beastly rulers coming out of the sea, and the fifth ruler, the Ruler of the kingdom of God, is one like a Son of Man, a royal, image-bearing son. In Daniel 7:13, Daniel says:

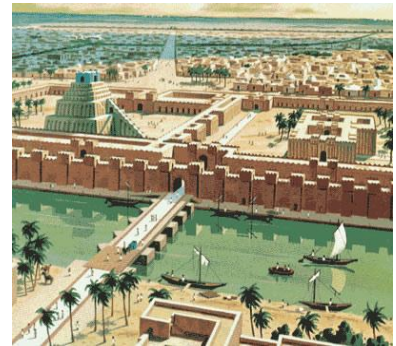
*"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His*

*kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”*

The King of the kingdom of God is a royal, image-bearing Son to whom was given dominion of all peoples, and He is known as the Son of Man. When our Lord Jesus walked this earth, His favorite self-designation was the *Son of Man*. When Jesus was brought before the highest religious court of His day and asked the question: “Tell us plainly, are you the Messiah or not?” Jesus' answer is to quote Daniel 7. Daniel 7 is perhaps the most important Old Testament text for understanding the ministry of our Lord. He is the King of this kingdom, and His dominion is everlasting. He is called Jesus: He will save us from our sins. His name is not a prayer that God would protect the limits of His kingdom, because His kingdom is without limits. It is equal to the new heavens and the new earth, and yet His kingdom will be inaugurated through suffering. The stone that is placed as the foundation for the King of the kingdom of God will not be a polished stone dressed in the quarry and moved with slave labor. It will be an altar stone on which the kingdom of God will rise and fill the earth. Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 give us this sovereign plan of history, and I want to ask this morning: “How does it play out?”

For many of us, the intertestamental period is a blank page. It is unknown, and I want to walk us through it, briefly—‘only’ 10 pages of the manuscript, 400 years of history in ten minutes! Can we do this? I think we can. How does it play out? The head of gold is Babylon. How do we see God's sovereign, loving power during this period as He builds expectations for a King? We start with Babylon, the head of gold, and it's in this period that God is at work giving divine discipline to His people. God takes His people into exile to show us that sin matters, and we are taken out of the land, not irreversibly, but as divine discipline.

God shows us a real judgment for our sins. By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion, the Psalmist sings (Psalm 137:1), but Babylon falls in the night. Its glory and splendor falls in one night. This is Daniel 5, the feast of Belshazzar. Greek historians, like Herodotus, describe the same event, that the Persians came. They diverted the waters of the Euphrates and took the city in one night. Then God's people



moved to that second king in the kingdom of Persia. This is a period where we receive divine protection. Babylon teaches us divine discipline; Persia teaches us divine protection. God takes us now, and we are under the sovereignty of the Persian Empire, the chest of silver. You remember from the end of our fall series that the founder of the Persian Empire is Cyrus the Great. Do you remember him: *lugal-gal-lugal* – the big man among the big men? Remember that God moved his heart to issue a decree to send us back: the edict of Cyrus. God is in control of the nations. God protects us through the Persian rule and moves the heart of the Persian kings like a watercourse to accomplish His purpose. He protects us by sending us back. Not only does He send us back to the land with a partial return, but He moves the successive Persian

kings like Darius to pay for the rebuilding of the temple. Darius was a king of phenomenal wealth and power. I don't know what you eat off at your dinner table. Some of you are committed to efficiency and use paper. Some of you are committed to efficiency and don't care about the environment, so you use Styrofoam. Some of you inherited china that you are always thinking "How can we use this? Who will wash it?" But I suspect that none of us eat off of the things from which Darius ate. Darius's dinner bowls look like this. They were made of gold, and the remarkable thing about Darius' dinner bowls, this one in particular, is that its wealth and splendor is evident. His name is carved in clear old Persian around the rim: "This belongs to Darius, the king of Persia." Another remarkable thing about this bowl is that it is in Cincinnati in the Art Museum. That's Jonathan's hand. God moves the heart of this king to pay for the rebuilding of the sanctuary.



God's protection is evident during the time of Nehemiah. This cup could have been the cup that Nehemiah held before the Persian kings. It's a drinking cup, and it looks like this—tremendous



wealth, and yet God moves the heart of the Persian King to pay. He protects us during the time of Nehemiah. The walls of the city are rebuilt. During the time of Esther, He protects us from those who would destroy us. But the kingdoms move on. The Persian king yields to the power of Alexander of Macedon, who conquers the world in the fourth century BC and destroys the Persian Empire. Greek historians record that as Alexander conquers the known world and he sweeps down through Israel conquering

Gaza, he goes up to visit Jerusalem. As he goes up to visit Jerusalem—ancient Greek historians record this, the Jewish historian Josephus records this event—as Alexander goes up to meet the delegation from Jerusalem, as he comes outside the city and sees the high priest of Israel come, Alexander bows to the ground, and his leading general Parmenio says, "What in the world are you doing? The whole earth is bowing down to you, and you bow down to him?" Alexander replies,

"I did not worship him, but I worship the God who has given him his high priesthood, because I saw this person in a dream, dressed in this very outfit, while I was still in Macedonia, and when I considered how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, I boldly passed over the sea and I have seen no other dressed in this way. Now, seeing this man and remembering that vision, I

believe I bring this army under Divine conduct.”

Do you believe in a God that is big enough? This is a BIG God. He tells Nebuchadnezzar the plan for human history and how His kingdom will be inaugurated through suffering. He moves the heart of Persian kings to issue decrees to pay for the temple, to protect our lives. He reveals the garments of the high priest to Alexander before he leaves Macedonia, and when he arrives in Jerusalem, he bows down and pays homage to the real God. Our God is big and powerful, and the high priests come out, and when they receive the adoration of Alexander, they unroll the scrolls of Daniel and say, “You see, this was predicted beforehand.” God is not even close to being finished preparing the soil, preparing the earth, preparing the heart of the nations, and ours. God moves the heart of one of Alexander's successors Ptolemy II who ends up ruling in Alexandria, one of the 32 cities that Alexander founded named Alexandria. He moves the heart of Ptolemy II, who was a man of culture and learning, and Ptolemy II built a library of Alexandria, and he tried to gather all the known books of the world. Someone told Ptolemy II: “There is a book of great wisdom. It reveals God and His purpose, and the only problem is no one can read it because it's in Hebrew characters.” Ptolemy II said, “Let's translate it.” He sent a



message to the high priest in Jerusalem, and he gathered 72 scholars on the island of Pharos, where Ptolemy II built the lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the wonders of the ancient world. The lighthouse was 450 feet high. Polished bronze mirrors radiated the signal fire, and it could be seen for 100 miles. He built it 10 feet shorter than the architectural wonder in his backyard, the Great Pyramid of Giza, out of deference for antiquity. If we had built that,

we would have built it six inches higher. He built it 10 feet shorter, not because he couldn't, but because he venerated antiquity. It is on this place a Greek king pays for this immense project. It's the largest translation project of the ancient world, and it is this version that is called the Septuagint, the translation of the 70. It is the version most quoted in the New Testament, and it is making God's Word available for the nations of the world, and He moved the heart of one of Alexander's successors to pay for it.

It is 250 BC, and the world is almost ready. The fourth kingdom, iron and clay, yields to the power of Rome. Pompey is a successor to this kingdom. He inaugurates Roman rule in Israel. Pompey's successor is Julius Caesar Augustus who rules through client kingship, like that of Herod. Rome is a military power, mighty, strong, yet very brittle—iron and clay, hard to hold together. God's people suffer greatly during the reign of Roman rule, both through direct rule and their client kings. Pompey, when he subdued a slave revolt of Spartacus, to make a political statement, crucified people at 30-meter intervals along the Appian Way for 20 miles coming



into the city. Powerful, aggressive, mighty, and God's people are humbled at this time, and yet they know that the next move of God in the world is that stone. As low as God's people are brought, ambassadors go from Israel to appeal to Caesar saying, "We've suffered more under Herod's reign than from the time we left into Babylon." Great suffering, but that suffering works an expectation in us at last to look to God alone, because we are tempted along the way to seek solutions and help from the head of gold, from the chest of silver, from the thighs of bronze. We are tempted throughout to look to the nations for solutions when God is saying, "The nations will come and they will go, but My kingdom is an everlasting one." We are left wondering for 600 years about that stone. What happens to that stone? The kingdoms come and go from this world, and God's people in humility look to the Scriptures, and they read passages like Isaiah 28:16:

*"Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be put to shame.'"*

They read in Psalm 118:22-23:

*"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."*

When our Lord Jesus came into Jerusalem at the first day of holy week, He asked those He was teaching in the temple courts, in Matthew 21:42:

*"Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"*

"Have you never read it?" Jesus asks. You see, because we will seek the solution from the kingdoms of this world, we will think that the answer to our deepest need is more money, more power.

We will never think that the solution to the problem of this world is an altar where the sin of the world can be addressed. Jesus asked the assembled crowds on Palm Sunday: "Haven't you read in the Scripture about the stone that was rejected? It was cast aside and it has become the cornerstone that holds this world together." Our Lord was rejected, but He was offered as a sacrifice for the sin of the world outside the city, and that rejected stone is Christ. Though He was rejected and crucified, He said that would happen, and "on the third day, I will rise." When Jesus' followers came to the tomb, they saw the stone had been rolled back, and the angel said: "I know you are looking for Jesus. He is not here; He is risen just as He said." When we hear early Christian preaching, like from Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, he addresses the crowd of Pentecost in Acts 4:8-10, and he says:

*"Rulers of the people and elders, . . . let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised*

*from the dead. . .”*

Peter then says in acts 4:11-12:

*“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. He holds this world together. He is the cornerstone, and the image of the cornerstone can be the image of a stone set in the middle of an archway. The cornerstone can also be used to describe the foundation stone on which the whole structure rises, and I think that is the image. This altar stone is the way that the King of the kingdom of God builds His everlasting kingdom.

The New Testament confession is that Jesus is the stone. First Peter 2:4-5:

*“As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. . . “*

The apostle Paul says in Romans 10:11:

*“Everyone who believes in Him (that is that rejected stone) will not be put to shame.”*

The death and resurrection of Jesus is not only the center of the Scripture, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the center of world history. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the inauguration of the kingdom of God, and that's why it must be the controlling vision of our lives. When we come to Him, we come to the winning side. When we come to Him, we see God's saving purpose fulfilled.

Let me apply this very briefly to us. Almost all the opening sermon series at Kenwood have shared the first application: **Get the book**. It's very humbling and exciting for me that this book I wrote. I am thankful for your support. It took me five years to do it. If you ask me sometime, I'll tell you the story of how when I was very close to finishing it, how much I needed God's help and how He just carried me over the finish line. I stayed up all night three nights because it had to be turned in and I knew that God was working and wanted to get it out to be used. It's really exciting to share the fruits of this here. It's beyond my wildest imagination that this material is being taught all over the world. It is being taught in rural Guatemala as a mobile training for pastors. It is being taught in Malawi in Africa to pastors who don't have their own copy of the Bible and are leading churches. It was just published in Korean and is being translated right now into Mandarin Chinese and used to train pastors of the underground church in China. It's being translated into Arabic right now by the persecuted church. It's amazing what God is doing. So I invite you to get it, to read it and talk about it together. More specifically, and more pastorally for us this morning, is that I want you to **never imagine the God of the Bible is silent or**

**inactive.** Never think that. The God of the Bible is always active, always working everything according to His will and purpose, and if that is true for the nations, for history, for the heart of kings, then don't you think He can be trusted with your life? I mean really, concretely, don't you think He can be trust? Lastly, I want to challenge us to **repent for the ways that we are attracted to this world and put our hopes there.** We all do that. I do that. You do that. God's Word says this world doesn't actually get better and better and better; it gets a little worse and worse and worse. We know that. It shouldn't surprise us, but His remedy, His solution, is a sacrifice that topples kingdoms of this world and becomes a mountain that draws all people to Himself. Our God is great and awesome! Let's pray.

Dear Lord, we magnify You, great and awesome God. We delight in You, and we praise You for Your power. Lord, we thank You that You choose to exercised Your power to reveal Your purpose to a pagan king, and You unfold the meaning for him and for us. Father, each of us is going through something difficult right now and we are tempted to wonder if You are in control and if Your will is being carried out. There are moments when don't see yet what You're doing, and I pray You fill our hearts with confidence in Your greatness, that You can be trusted with all things, including our lives, our jobs, our children, our hopes. We trust You afresh. Lord, I pray that You would breathe the power of the Holy Spirit upon our church a renewed and refreshed confidence in You, that Your kingdom grows through suffering, that Your kingdom would have no limits and no end. I pray, Lord, that the ground underneath our feet this week would rise, even incrementally, and that we would feel that great mountain coming just a little closer to filling the earth. Lord, we praise You, we worship You, and we honor You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.