

Christ in 2 Kings

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Courtney and I were in Amsterdam last year, and we met a man named Yusuf. Yusuf was born in Somalia, on the Horn of Africa, in the mid-1980s. And as a kid, he was nearly drafted as a child soldier in Somalia.

So, his entire childhood, he spent in fear and danger fleeing the Somalian authorities who were trying to recruit him as a child soldier. He decided one day that he had to get out of the country that he was born in.

And so, he sought a way to flee as a refugee from his home country.

Finally, the opportunity came up for Yusuf to fly from Somalia to the UK, which was a long process, because they had to wait for a passport with a man who looked enough like him to convince the authorities to let him get on the plane.

He didn't have access to his own passport. So, for months and months and months, even years, he waited for the perfect passport to arrive.

And then Yusuf got together all his money, bought a ticket, and got a plane from Somalia to London that stopped for a layover in Amsterdam. Now, Yusuf didn't speak any English or any Dutch.

So when the plane landed in Amsterdam for a layover, he got off the plane. And it took him months to realise he was not in London, but he was in Amsterdam.

So there was Yusuf alone, undocumented, without access to government services or healthcare in Amsterdam, an EXILE. We're going to pick up Yusuf's story later. Last week, we looked at Christ in 1 Kings.

1 and 2 Kings, originally 1 scroll, is the story which is the end of the long saga stretching from the Book of Joshua to the Book of 2 Kings, the story of Israel entering the Promised Land and eventually leaving.

Last week, we looked at the theme of Kingdom. We traced Kingdom throughout 1 Kings. Remember, there are 3 aspects to Kingdom, God's people under God's rule in God's place.

God's people, God's rule, God's place. We traced that theme last week from how it started to how it's going. Because over the course of the books of 1 and 2 Kings, there's a really big difference from how it started to how it's going.

It started so good. The people of Israel united under pretty good kings, Saul, David, and Solomon, united as the people of God under the rule of God in the promised land, the place of God. But 2 Kings ends in EXILE.

And this message is part 2 of last week's sermon. We're going to pick up where we left off last week in EXILE. First came the Assyrian Empire.

We read briefly last week, 2 Kings, Chapter 17, because of the Northern 10 tribes of Israel, because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant that they swore with Yahweh, because they were unwilling to repent at the prophets' words.

God sent the Northern Kingdom of Israel into EXILE. It happened in around 722 BC. The Kingdom of Assyria came from the East and took the Northern 10 tribes.

And Assyria had a particular EXILE policy that was assimilation. So Assyria come along, they take all of the 10 tribes and scatter them throughout the entire empire. With the result that the 10 tribes lose their culture and their ethnic heritage.

They marry with the other peoples. And so those 10 tribes in the North of Israel are called the Lost 10 Tribes, because they are lost into the nations.

In fact, if we could skip ahead 700 years to the time of the New Testament, the legacy of the 10 tribes is the Samaritan people. And so in the Gospels, you frequently have Jews and Samaritans in conflict.

The reason for the conflict is that the Jews see the Samaritans as a compromised half-breed. Because they were Jewish, but they have intermarried and mixed with all the nations, and they're no longer pure-blood people of Abraham.

So first came the Assyrian Empire. We read the story of Jonah. Jonah was a prophet who was called to go to the capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, and preach the Gospel there.

Ten tribes in the north exiled and lost to history. After Assyria came the Babylonian Empire, the next global superpower. Babylon defeated Assyria, pretty much took over all of their land, and they exiled the people of Judah.

Because of Judah's unfaithfulness to the terms of Yahweh's covenant, because of their unwillingness to repent at the prophets' words, Babylon in 586 BC took Judah into exile. Now, Babylon had a different exile policy to Assyria.

Assyria took the people and spread them out.

Babylon's tactic was to take the best and brightest of the Judeans and carry them off to Babylon and to teach them their culture, give them new names, teach them a new language, and to extract the best out of these subjugated peoples while leaving

the peasants to work the land and pay tax to Babylon. So that's a different strategy, which means that Babylon allowed the tribe of Judah to remain intact, to keep its cultural and ethnic heritage in contrast to the 10 tribes in the north.

We read the Book of Daniel is a book set in the Babylonian Empire. You know that struggle that Daniel, Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego have with living as trying to be faithful to Yahweh but living in the midst of the Babylonian Empire.

This is an empire story. Two tribes in the south exiled at the end of 2 Kings. After Babylon came the Persian Empire, the next great superpower to rule the known world.

The story of Esther takes place in this Persian time. There was a great persecution that broke out against God's people and God raised up Esther for such a time as this to deliver her people into safety.

The Persians have another different exile strategy. The Assyrians pull apart, the Babylonians take the best, but the Persians allowed the Judeans to return to their homeland.

And so we read in Ezra 1, 2 Chronicles 36, what is called the Cyrus Decree, King Cyrus of Persia says, you Judeans, if you want, you can go back to your homeland, rebuild your temple, rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and I'll even give you some money

and some trees to help you with that project. Now before you think how kind-hearted of Persia, the reason is they think they can squeeze more tax out of Judea if they do it this way.

So Persia allows the exiles to return home to the promised land, but not with their own king. Persia is still in charge, heavily subjugating these people with severe taxes. That's Persia's exile policy.

After Persia came the Greek Empire, the next superpower to rule the known world. Do you remember Alexander the Great from history? He was from Macedon, modern day Macedonia in the north.

He swept south and conquered all of the known world, spreading Greek language and culture, and it's called Hellenization, the process of making Greek. We actually don't have anything in our Bibles from the Greek Empire.

In fact, the time of the Greek Empire is literally the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament. 400 years of silence, there's no Greek Empire stories in our Protestant Bible.

In a Catholic Bible, there are 2 books, 1 and 2 Maccabees, which take place in that Greek period. But we don't have any stories in our Bible. After Greece came the Roman Empire, the fifth of the successive superpowers.

And this is the time of the New Testament. We know the Roman Empire well. Caesar Augustus was emperor when Jesus was born.

He famously issued a decree that a census be taken. And so Jesus, Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem. The emperor when Jesus was crucified was Tiberius.

The Roman Empire is in charge. And their policy of exile is similar to Persia's. They will allow the Judeans to live in their homeland.

They'll even allow a little puppet king like Herod, who has like a bit of power, but not much power, as long as they tax them heavily. And Rome's strategy was to have their very own people be the ones who collect the tax.

They were called tax collectors. And you can understand why that was such a hated profession, why there's so much conflict in the Gospels. So 5 successive empires, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, A, B, P, G, R.

5 powers that ruled the same area, one after the other, after the other, after the other, after the other.

We were talking about this in Life Hub a couple of weeks ago, and Hanna Poehler came up with a great mnemonic, always be prepared to give a reason. That's good, for the hope you have. That's the verse.

Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. 5 successive empires that ruled the people of God. Exile, exile, exile, exile.

It's in this context that Trottie's, I was going to say Trottie's Psalm 137. It's not his Psalm. It's Israel's Psalm, but Trottie read it for us.

It's in the context of exile that Psalm 137 is written. So let me read it again. Psalm 137.

By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs. Our tormentors demanded songs of joy.

They said, sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the songs of Yahweh while in a foreign land? If I forget you Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.

May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. Remember Yahweh, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. Tear it down, they cried, tear it down to its foundations.

Door to Babylon, doomed to destruction. Happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

That is an exile psalm of lament. The rivers of Babylon is how the psalm opens. Babylon had one river, the Euphrates River.

It was built on the Euphrates River, but the Babylonians built irrigation canals branching off the Euphrates River. That's where they placed the subjugated exiled Judeans to work the lands, to produce crops for the empire.

It's right in that context by the irrigation channels where the Judeans are forced by slavery by subjugation to produce food for the empire.

It's in that context that Psalm 137 is written as a lament, lamenting the loss of their kingdom and the exile. The ending is pretty intense, isn't it? It's hard to read that in 2026.

It says, Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. Geographically, there are not many rocks in Babylon. Palestine is a rocky place.

So what the exiles are doing is not actually wishing that they could dash the Babylonian infants against the rocks. They're remembering what the Babylonians did to their children.

Back in Palestine, when the Babylonian Empire came under King Nebuchadnezzar, they took their children and dashed them against the rocks.

And so here, God's people are not actually longing to take revenge against Babylon, but they're using those feelings and giving them to God in lament. That's what lament is, giving to God our real feelings.

It's a really important part of life and faith. Israel are praying these words, remembering these words, as a lament to remind God to be just. He is the one who takes justice.

It's a lament. The word remember is key in Psalm 137. I think it's key because when you look at the grammar of Psalm 137, it's actually written in the past tense.

It says, by the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion, past tense.

So scholars think that Psalm 137 originally was written in exile, but it was used by those who returned from exile to remember what had happened when they were back in Babylon. So it says, remember, remember, remember.

That's really crucial because when Judea returned to their homeland, and they rebuilt the temple under Ezra, Nehemiah, they rebuilt the walls, Haggai, Zechariah, these books that we're going to get to later this year or maybe next year.

They were remembering how far short this kingdom was than the one that came before. In Ezra chapter 3, they rebuild the new temple, the second temple, and it says there was such a noise, but there was something weird about the noise.

The young people were singing and dancing, being like, the temple is back, God is going to come back. But the old people, do you remember what they were doing?

Weeping because they remembered the former temple, and this temple had nothing on the former temple. The glory of Yahweh never descended in the cloud on the second temple the way that it did on the first.

So Psalm 137 is a Psalm about memory, remembering the good old days, the kingdom, Saul, David, Solomon, those days when we lived in the promised land under the rule of God, as the people of God. It's remembering that because we are still in exile.

After these five empires, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, always be prepared to give a reason. After these five empires, Israel never really came back from exile because they never returned to the glory days.

God's presence didn't fill the temple. They didn't have their own king on the throne. And so Psalm 137 is a lament remembering what they have lost.

That's how the Old Testament ends. It ends in exile. Now technically, Israel were back in the land, but they were still in spiritual exile.

God's promises were not yet fulfilled. And so the story of the Old Testament, the story of Israel is a story of exile. But come to think of it, isn't the story of all humanity a story of exile?

In Genesis 1, page 1 of the Bible, God creates the heavens and the earth, and he says it was good. And so God's will is perfectly done. Heaven and earth overlapping, that's the kingdom.

And then in Genesis 2, God creates Adam and Eve, God's people. He places them in a garden called Delight, Eden in Hebrew, God's place. And he puts them as his image to bear his rule.

God's people in God's place under God's rule is kingdom. So humanity started in the kingdom of God, the Garden of Eden. But then on page 3 of the Bible, Genesis 3, Adam and Eve reject God's rule, and they fall under the power of sin.

We read this in Genesis 3, 23. So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life. That's EXILE. EXILE is the story of Adam and Eve.

Notice what direction they go. East. That's East from your perspective.

True East is that way, but I'm going to point this way. They exiled East out of Eden. Remember that.

On page 4 of the Bible, there are two brothers, Cain and Abel. They both bring an offering to God. God smiles on one and not on the other.

God says to Cain, sin is trying to rule over you, but you must rule over it. But he doesn't listen. Cain murders his brother Abel, and then we read this in Genesis 4.

So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. What direction? East, on page 11.

The whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved, what direction? Eastward.

They found a plane in Shinar and settled there. That's the story of the Tower of Babel. We could go on and on and on and trace the word east.

The point is, all of humanity is in exile to what direction? Final question. Do you know where Babylon is relative to the Promised Land?

East. Israel's story and humanity's story is a story of exile.

From Genesis to the end of 2 Kings, in fact, the end of the Old Testament, the biblical authors are portraying human beings as being in exile out of the place of God, disconnected as the people of God, and not living under the rule of God.

That is exile. Israel's story is a story of exile. All humanity's story is a story of exile to the East.

I think our story today is in many ways a story of exile. You and I know this world is not as it should be. Cancer shouldn't tear our bodies apart.

Babies shouldn't die in the womb. Relationships shouldn't be broken. Violence shouldn't be perpetuated against the most vulnerable.

This world might be our lower case H home, the place that we live, but it is not capital H home. This world is not as it should be. Do you know what Friday was this past Friday?

25 years since 9-11. This world is not as it should be. We know, as human beings, Christian and non-Christian, we know that something is not right.

It's not meant to be this way. Interestingly, in a couple of weeks, we as a church have been in this building for 7 years. At the start of October, we had our first service.

Can I show of hands who was at that opening service 7 years ago? I remember, I was 19 years old. I was so excited.

I, as, you know, pastor's kid, Perks, got an early tour of the building when it was under construction. And I remember thinking, man, this is it. Once we're in the new building, we are off like this.

The kingdom of God is here when we come into this new building. Seven years later, we're so grateful for this building, but it hasn't solved all of our problems. We're still human beings.

We're still a church that is seeking God. It's a great building, but as a 19-year-old, I think I put too much hope in this building. We know that even in good things in life, they're not perfect.

We still long for something more. One of my favorite things to do is to go for a walk after work with Courtney and Esther. And often, we walk down Pretoria, which faces west.

So often, if it's not cloudy, you see the sun setting perfectly down the road. It's one of my favorite parts of my day.

And when I see a beautiful sunrise, a sunset or a sunrise, listen to a certain beautiful type of music, it does something to my soul. Do you know that feeling?

Maybe good food, good friendship, a good joke, a sunrise, a sunset, something beautiful, a taste of transcendence, this kind of feeling of the world as it should be. But then in my experience, as soon as we grasp this thing, it goes.

That's what Ecclesiastes says, meaningless, vapor. You try and grab it and it goes. CS.

Lewis talks about this. He says, we cannot tell it, he means talk about it, because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience.

We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that settled the matter.

These things, the beauty, the memory of our own past, the sunset, the food, the community, are good images of what we really desire, but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers.

This is the main bit. For they are not the thing itself. They are only the scent of a flower we have not yet found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.

Isn't that good? Doesn't that capture the human feeling? We see glimpses of the kingdom of God, glimpses of beauty and goodness and truth, but they're fleeting.

I put it to you that the biblical word for that is exile. The fact that we began life in a kingdom, the Garden of Eden, humanity, but we are in exile out of God's presence and we long to return. All humanity is in exile.

We are in exile and Israel are in exile. And that's how the Old Testament ends. From Malachi to Matthew is 400 years of nothing.

Silence. The Old Testament ends on a held breath, waiting for the fulfilment of the story until Jesus arrives. Jesus' first words in the Gospel of Matthew are these.

The time has come, Jesus said. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.

Time is the Greek *kairos*. The God appointed season is here. God's time has happened.

The kingdom of God has come near. That means that the empires of earth have had their time, and the kingdom of God is here.

The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, same thing, is, as Willard defines it, the range of God's effective will, where what God wants done is done.

And Jesus brings the kingdom of earth, the kingdom of heaven to earth, because he's the king of the kingdom.

So every word that Jesus says, every place he goes, every healing, every teaching, every parable, every deliverance, ultimately his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and the giving of the spirit, is bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.

Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven to earth. Remember, kingdom is God's people, God's place, God's rule. So God's people, Jesus redefines the people of God, not by the ethnic boundary of being a Jew through circumcision, but through faith in him.

Galatians 3 verse 28, Paul says, there's neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. God's people redefined. Jesus says to all, come follow me.

What about God's place in Acts chapter 1 verse 8? Jesus says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Hornsby and in all Sydney and the Central Coast and to the ends of the earth.

That's what it means. So where is God's place? Everywhere?

His people are? Because the kingdom comes through his people, so where his people go, the kingdom comes. This is God's place fulfilled in Jesus.

What about God's rule? The last words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 28. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

All authority has been given to Jesus, and he gives kind of a sheriff's badge, a deputy's badge version of that authority to us, that we are to live under God's rule, to partner with God in bringing his kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus brings the kingdom of God to earth, but it was not the kingdom that Israel expected.

The one that they wanted was to overthrow the five superpowers, to overthrow Rome, to lead them in a violent revolution that would topple their overlords and reestablish Israel as a kind of political kingdom, but that's not the kind of king that

Jesus was. Instead, the kingdom that Jesus brings brought and still is bringing is the one that's marked by the cross, Jesus willingly dying to the power of the empire and rising again in love and calling his people to do the same thing.

The kingdom of God is here in Jesus, God's people, God's place and God's rule. And that means that the exile is over. The exile ends in the kingdom.

The exile ends in the kingdom. Israel's exile, humanity's exile, our exile, your exile, ends in the kingdom because the kingdom of God has come near in Jesus. And so Jesus says in response that we're called to do 2 things.

The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe, repent and believe.

We looked at repent last week, metanoia is the Greek word to literally think about the way that you have been thinking, rethink your strategy for life, to repent. Remember the image of the ruins of Ephesus that I put up last week?

Repentance is kind of realizing that that's my life. I've made a ruin of my life and I'm rethinking my strategy for life. But Jesus says there's a second thing to do and that is believe.

Trust is the word. Pistis in Greek. To show allegiance, fidelity, loyalty to.

To trust Jesus like you trust the chair that you're sitting on. Does anyone in the room not trust the chair you're sitting on? No, because you're sitting on the chair.

That's what we're called to do in Jesus. To depend on him. To live such lives that he has to be real and he has to come through or we're gonna fall and hit the floor.

To depend on him. Put our weight on him. Yes, to believe things about him, that he's real, that he died for our sins on the cross, that he rose again.

But not only that, to depend on him every day. To rethink our strategy for life and to put our trust in Jesus. That's what we're called to do.

We're called to the kingdom because the kingdom of God has come near. The exile ends in the kingdom. In Jesus, the exile is over.

The kingdom of God is coming on earth as it is in heaven. But it's not fully here yet. We often talk about the now and not yet.

We've been talking about the now. The kingdom is here now, but it is also not yet here in fullness.

The kingdom which Jesus inaugurated through his first coming will be consummated in his second, will be perfected, will fully arrive when Jesus comes back. And so we live in the overlap of the ages, this age and the age to come.

God's people, resurrection people, spirit indwelt people, us, we are called to live in the overlap of the ages, knowing that heaven has come to earth, but not yet fully. We're called to live in the overlap.

And so Peter, one of Jesus' close disciples, writes this in a letter. Dear friends, I urge you as what? Foreigners in exiles, interesting language, no?

As foreigners in exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul, live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Peter is saying that we are still living as exiles. It's confusing, the now and not yet thing. The exile is over in the kingdom, but the kingdom is not yet fully here, so the exile is not yet fully over in our experience.

We're called to live as exiled people in the overlap between heaven and earth, between the empires of earth and the kingdom of heaven.

In fact, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven while being subjects of the empires of earth. That's a tricky line for God's people to walk.

Spoiler alert, I was going to preface this, but there you go, that's fine. I'm, before I went to Bible College, I was worked as a graphic designer, so I'm quite visual. I appreciate visuals.

And I was thinking about this idea of how we're called as Christians to live in the kingdom of heaven while being in the empires of earth. And I had this image come to mind, and so I made it. It took me a while, but I made it.

I think that's what our life is meant to be, that we live in the tension of these two things.

We live in the destructive, oppressive empires of earth, like Daniel did, but we are citizens of the resurrection, that the first fruits of the resurrection, the sun has dawned on this dark world, but the day has not yet fully come.

Remember, Jesus often spoke about the mustard seed. The kingdom grows like a mustard seed. It's small, but it grows and grows.

We are called to live in the empire and the kingdom at once. How do we do that? Read the Book of Daniel, because Daniel walks that line.

Do you remember Daniel? That's his Hebrew name. He's one of the best and brightest of Babylon, and so Nebuchadnezzar takes him to Babylon, gives him a new name, new language, new culture, new diet.

And Daniel says, fine. Oh, I mean, he doesn't say fine about the diet, but he says, I'll take your name, I'll take your language, I'll learn your culture, but the minute you tell me to pray to Nebuchadnezzar as God, I will not do that.

And so remember the three, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They would not pray to Nebuchadnezzar, and so they were thrown in a furnace. The Book of Daniel is written by people in exile trying to walk that line between those 2 things.

And so today, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to live in the tension, live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, while being a subject of the empire of earth. The exile ends in Jesus. Christ in 2 Kings.

We've spent almost no time literally in 2 Kings, but we've plunged the depths of the theme of exile, which is the main theme of 2 Kings. Where is Christ in 2 Kings? He is the exile ender.

That's Christ in 2 Kings. So can we be people who live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, even amidst the empire of earth? And we need wisdom to know how to do that.

Youssef lived as an undocumented refugee in Amsterdam for 14 years, before he finally achieved permanent residency. During that time, he squatted from place to place, he was constantly kicked out, homeless.

He found a community of other Somali refugees. He was in prison numerous times in Amsterdam. Eventually, he got involved with an organization called We Are Here that advocate for refugee rights in Amsterdam.

And so he became an activist working to improve the living conditions for people just like him. Today, Youssef is a captain and a storyteller. He gives tours on literal boats that refugees fled from their country, in literal boats.

He takes us on tours around the canals of Amsterdam, telling some of the history of Amsterdam, but also his story as a refugee. That's where Courtney and I met Youssef.

I don't know if Youssef is a Christian or not, but I think he's a great example of what God's people are called to be. Living in exile away from our homeland, but as agents of the kingdom in that place.

Youssef has done so much good in telling his story, in partnering with organizations to improve the conditions of refugees. He's an agent of the kingdom, and we're called to do the same thing, because the exile ends in the kingdom. Let me pray.

Lord God, we acknowledge with fear and trembling the vocation that we have as your people.

We live in a world that is fallen and broken and walking in the darkness, and yet we praise you and we thank you that the light of resurrection has dawned on our hearts.

We thank you that you've made us alive in Christ, filled us with your spirit, and empowered us to be agents of your kingdom. God, we need wisdom above all things. We thank you that you give generously to all without finding fault.

So I pray for my brothers and sisters, for us foreigners and exiles, would you give us the wisdom to know how to be a witness for your kingdom in the middle of this world? We thank you that the exile ends in Christ and his kingdom.

And we look forward to the day when your kingdom comes, when it is all in all, you make all things new. We pray, come Lord Jesus, come. And until that day, we worship you and give you thanks.

In Jesus' name, Amen.