

## **A People of God's Own Choosing Isaiah 14:1-2**

Our text this morning is Isaiah, chapter 14, verses 1 and 2. Before the reading we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Our Father in heaven, we do indeed come before you to hear from you, from your word, by your Spirit. We ask, Father, that you would help me as I speak. We ask that you would help us all as we listen. Please give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 14, verses 1 and 2: <sup>1</sup>For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. <sup>2</sup>And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them." Amen.

If you remember last time we were in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah was prophesying of the downfall of Babylon, the judgment of a nation, or a kingdom called Babylon. Babylon was going to eventually invade Judah, destroy Jerusalem, and take the people captive. And Isaiah's word to the people was, "Do not fear. All of these things are coming according to the providence and the work of God. Do not attach yourself spiritually to Babylon. Babylon is not greater than your God, simply because God has allowed them to attack and destroy Jerusalem." He's giving them an encouraging word; an encouraging word that ultimately their enemies will face justice, that God will do their enemies as they deserve.

And if you remember, we looked at the fact that God has the right to take a wicked, idolatrous, bloodthirsty nation like Babylon, and use them for His purposes, in this case, to discipline the covenant people, the covenant nation. And then having used them for His purposes, He judges them for their wickedness in the things that they did. He judges them for attacking His people.

And God has the right to do this. He is God. As Paul said in our earlier reading from the book of Romans, "Can the clay speak back to the potter and say to the potter, 'Why have you made me like this?'" No. God raises up kingdoms; God raises up evil kingdoms for His own purpose, and yet He Himself is utterly sinless. He's not responsible for their sin. He is simply using them according to their nature. They, being people, are born in sin, and God uses them according to the sinful nature in which they are born. They are of a kingdom, or they are of a family—the family of Adam the first—and as such, they're born under the condemnation of God, and as such, God has the right to judge and to use them as He wills. It's as simple as that.

But there's always this word of hope. There's always this promise of restoration. And chapter 14, verses 1 and 2, contain the word of hope and restoration. And if you quickly look at verses 3 to 23, immediately after the word of hope and restoration, God once again speaks of the certainty of His judgment on Babylon, and He actually speaks particularly of His judgment upon a king of Babylon. Now I've held off on that until next week, because I realize there is really so much in the first two verses that I couldn't do justice to the coming judgment upon the king of Babylon.

This song about the fall of a Babylonian king is actually a song about the fall of any type of Babylonian king. The king described we could call an antichrist, and it's a song about the fall of any type of antichrist, any man who sets himself up as God and a ruler—for example, a Hitler, or a Stalin. In the end, they all end up in the grave. Their blanket is maggots and their bed is worms. That's what God says happens to those kings who want to set themselves up as a god.

But, in chapter 14, verses 1 and 2, is a word for God's elect people, a word for God's people whom He is drawing into His kingdom and into His church. It continues a few themes that we've picked up over the last few chapters in the book of Isaiah, particularly the theme of the Exodus. Let's start reading chapter 14, verse 1:

“For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.” Notice that God, being compassionate—“The LORD will have compassion on Jacob”—chooses. He elects. He chooses people upon whom to pour out His compassion. It's always been that way. If man is lost in sin, how can man be saved other than by the reaching out of God?

When Abraham, the father of this Jewish nation, was drawn from the place where he dwelt, Ur of the Chaldees, does the Scripture tell us that there was anything particularly good about Abraham? Nothing. Would he have gone from Ur of the Chaldees on that great journey to his Promised Land upon his own desires, based upon his own ideas and his own goodness and his own faith? There's nothing to indicate that Abraham was in any way a good man. There's a reference in Scripture that says that he came from a line that were worshippers of the moon. They were idolaters.

And yet God chose Abraham and bestowed His blessings and His grace upon Abraham. He elected Abraham. He drew Abraham into a relationship with Himself. He gave Abraham justifying grace. He justified Abraham. Abraham was a faithful, believing man. Well it says here that God “will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel.”

Now Israel often is called “Jacob” because Jacob was the patriarch who had the twelve sons. Abraham had only Isaac and Ishmael, but Ishmael was not the child of the promise. The child of the promise, the elect child as we read in Romans, was Isaac. And Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. But Esau was not the elect child. Before they were even born, we are told in Romans chapter 9, whilst they were womb-mates—twin brothers, before they were born and had never done anything either good or bad—God chose Jacob. Jacob was the one He chose. And then you follow the story—Jacob becomes the patriarch who fathers the twelve tribes of Israel, who fathers the nation. And so Israel is also often called Jacob. “The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land.”

But we've got to ask, Who's Isaiah talking about? Is he talking about another national gathering, another great exodus of a blood group, or an ethnos, a nation of people interrelated like God did in the first Exodus? Or is there a different picture in mind for the people who are here being called “Jacob” and “Israel”? Is He saving all the Jews, or does He have purposes—once again, is He electing? And I think we'll see if we just turn back in the book of Isaiah to Isaiah chapter 10 that, No, He's not in this instance electing or choosing a complete and a whole nation.

Isaiah chapter 10. We're going to read verses 20 to 23: <sup>20</sup> "In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. <sup>21</sup> A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. <sup>22</sup> For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. <sup>23</sup> For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth." A remnant.

Now is that remnant the people who come from Babylon back to Palestine, or back to Canaan, or back Judah? Is that the remnant? No. They're not actually the remnant. Who are the remnant? The remnant are the people who put their faith in, or lean on Yahweh, or lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

Later on, after the captivity, tens of thousands of Jews come out of Babylon. And the name of the kingdom has actually changed. Babylon becomes Persia, because it's Persia that invades and overtakes Babylon and the people are now held in captivity in Persia. King Cyrus gives a decree—"Let the Jews return to their homeland and rebuild themselves a temple. Let the Jews in that temple offer up all of the right sacrifices and pray for the life of the king—Pray for me! Send them back and let them pray for me to their God." That was the decree of Cyrus.

Now not all the Jews return to Judah, or to Jerusalem, but tens of thousands do. But not even all of those tens of thousands are the truly faithful. If you read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, there you see that there are many among them who are quite happy to return to the old ways. They take wives from amongst the peoples surrounding them. They marry, in other words, heathens.

Now go back into what first caused the trouble in Israel. What first caused the trouble in Israel? It was a problem with marriage. Who? King Solomon. Who was he marrying? Any pretty girl he saw, for whatever reason that pleased him. He would marry anyone. And those wives whom he married from all of those foreign nations, those idolatrous wives—what influence did they have on Solomon? They encouraged him to worship, or sacrifice to demons—to idolatrous gods, to the gods of the surrounding nations. And God judged Israel from that moment onwards. God said, "You've gone too far."

So we see that in this return of the remnant from Babylon, or as I've said, later on Persia, to Jerusalem, in this return, not even all those who returned are the faithful remnant. The faithful remnant are the ones who lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant that Isaiah's speaking of—now turn in your Bible back to Isaiah chapter 14—is the same remnant that he was speaking of before. The people whom the Lord has compassion on, the people whom the Lord chooses, are the people who are leaning on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. And He says He will set them in their own land.

Now this is where you have to see that there is more than just one level in the prophecies. He "will set them in their own land"—let's keep reading—"and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. <sup>2</sup> And the peoples will take them and bring them to their

place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.”

You see, we know that the return of the people back to Jerusalem, the return of those who were called back to Jerusalem, never attained that height. Jerusalem never became a major powerful city again, conquering, taking captives. Jerusalem never became a city that ruled a kingdom again. It was ruled over by other kingdoms. It was overrun by the Greeks, it was overrun by the Romans. Although the people are called back, Jerusalem itself never becomes a conquering city.

So what I'm suggesting to you is that if we think carefully about this, the fulfillment of this is actually coming through Christ and the preaching of the kingdom of God. There's enough here—Isaiah speaking to the people of his day and the generations that come after, the generations that are taken into captivity—there's enough here for him to be saying to them, “You'll be called back to the Promised Land. You'll come back to Jerusalem. You'll come back to this land that was given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Be encouraged. Be faithful. Hold on to the faith that God has given you.”

Now there's something here that's not fulfilled in that recall, but Christianity goes on and it conquers the world. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes and the Holy Spirit descends upon the church at the Day of Pentecost, what happens then? The church starts to spread out into the world, and through the preaching of the gospel, and through the obedience of the Christian people who loved not their lives even unto death, the church conquered, 300 or 400 years later. You could say that Rome was now a Christian empire, that the Christians far outweighed the heathens surrounding them. Christianity conquered. And you get this picture, or this idea, of captives and slaves being taken into the kingdom for the glory of God.

Just turn very quickly to the book of Acts chapter 1, starting reading at verse 4. Now this is after the crucifixion, after the resurrection, before Jesus ascends on high to be enthroned at the right hand of the Father. He's with the disciples. “<sup>4</sup> And while staying with them he”—that's Jesus—“ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ <sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ <sup>7</sup> He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’”

There's something important to see there. First of all, that word “But”—what does it mean? When someone makes a statement and “but” comes up in that statement, what are they saying? It negates what came before. For example, Ephesians chapter 2: “You were dead in your sins, *but* God...” So you *were* dead, “*but* God.” And Ephesians chapter 2 goes on to talk about you were made alive. “You were dead, *but* you have been made alive.”

Now I want us to look here. The disciples ask a question, verse 6: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” What are they thinking? Well, they might for example have in mind Isaiah chapter 14, verses 1 and 2. “<sup>2</sup> And the peoples will take them and bring them to their

place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them." That might be one of the passages they had in mind. "And is it at this time that you'll restore the kingdom of Israel? Is it at this time that we go out and conquer and rule the world?"

Jesus answers, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> *But...*" But. What does "but" do? It negates what came before. What came before? What came before was the idea that the Jews were going to conquer the world. "At this time—Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. *But...*"

You see, Jesus is not negating the things that the Father has fixed by His own authority; He's negating the idea that "at this time the kingdom will be restored to Israel, *but* you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Israel is going to conquer the world, but not the kingdom of Israel, not a land called Israel, not an army called Israel. And they're not going to conquer with swords and shields. They're not going to conquer with spears and cavalry. They're not going to conquer with siege engines. They're going to conquer with the gospel, because Israel is the church. The church has become Israel. These men, these twelve men, are the prototype of the church. They're the beginning and the birth of the church, and they're going to be clothed with power on high, to do what? To go out into the world and take captives into the kingdom of God, to take prisoners for Christ.

Mankind was created a serving creature. Mankind was created a serving, worshipping, working creature. And we all serve, worship, and work—everybody. The only question is, Who do you serve and worship and work for? Because if you serve and worship and work for the living God, you have the freedom for which you were originally created. You're fulfilling the purpose for which you were originally created. We're a serving, worshipping, working creature.

And if we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the gospel, are subduing nations, drawing people into the kingdom of God, we've taken over that role that was given to Israel that you saw fulfilled, for example, in the warfare conducted by King David. You're no longer conquering the world with a sword, unless you're using that as a metaphor for the word of God, the sharp two-edged sword that divides soul and spirit. We conquer the world with the word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom is not restored to Israel, physically. Why? "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The church is being sent out into the world. The church is going to go out from Jerusalem into the world with the word of God. That's how the world's to be conquered—by and through the power of the gospel. And so we have this prophecy.

Turn back to Isaiah 14, this prophecy, these promises—"Sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them."

And so we've still got Exodus-type pictures. I mean, what was the great promise that God drew His people out of Egypt with? "You're going into a promised land, a land that flows with milk and honey. You're coming out of this hard land of slavery and captivity. You're being dragged, or taken to a land where blessings fall upon you."

Well now, using Exodus-type language, Isaiah is speaking about a promised land for the faithful—for those who actually believe; for the remnant of the remnant, who are the ones who truly lean upon the God of Israel; the ones who truly worship Yahweh; the ones who have true, justifying faith. And I don't see that the fulfillment of that promise is acreage in the Middle East. The fulfillment of that promise—if you want to use the word "acreage"—is acreage in the new heavens and the new earth. It's acreage in the eternal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the promised land. That's where we're to get to. That's where God is taking His people.

Let's have a look at this and see if we can sort of track this out in Scripture. Turn to the book of Hebrews, chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11, as I'm sure you know, is the "faith hall of fame," the "by faith, by faith"—"by faith Abel, by faith Enoch, by faith Noah, by faith Abraham," etc. Let's have a look at chapter 11, and I want to start reading at verse 8:

<sup>8</sup>By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

So read carefully what it's saying. Abraham went to a land. It was a land of promise. There he lived with Isaac and Jacob. But even when he got to the promised land, he was looking forward. What was he looking forward to? Verse 10: "He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." I don't think that means that Abraham was looking forward to Jerusalem, when David and Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. He was looking forward to life in the presence of God, in the eternal city of God.

Move down to verses 17 to 19. We're still speaking of Abraham. <sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup>of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' <sup>19</sup>He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."

Abraham considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. Abraham had faith that mankind would be resurrected; or he at least understood that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham's faith was justifying faith. Abraham wasn't holding on to the hope of an earthly Jerusalem, an earthly temple, and an earthly king. He was holding on to the hope of a heavenly Jerusalem, a heavenly temple, a heavenly King. The book of Hebrews that we're looking at at this moment, speaks to the Jews about these subjects.

Think about it this way. To a Jew, what's the kingdom of God? It's the land in the Middle East called Palestine, or Israel—depends which map you look at. In that land there's a temple. In those temples there are sacrifices made by a priest. There are atonements made again and again and again. There are prayers said, there are feasts, etc., etc.

The book of Hebrews tells a group of Hebrew Christians, converted Christians, “Don't look back. You're worried about a land? We're going to the land that Abraham was waiting for. You're worried about sacrifices? The Lord Jesus Christ is the sacrifice. He shed His blood once and for all. You're worried about the intercession of a priest? The Lord Jesus Christ is our one high priest, a priest after the order of Melchizedek—He, He intercedes for us. You're worried about prophets? Well, we've got a word from God, a word more sure. We've got the Scriptures. God has spoken to us by His Son. You're worried about a king? The King is the Lord Jesus Christ, and He reigns on high in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

The word to these converted Jewish Christians is, “Don't look back, because what was before was just a shadow of the things that are to come. Be like Abraham, looking forward to the city whose maker and foundation is God Himself, whose designer and builder is God. He was looking forward to that city, even when he lived in the Promised Land. When he lived in the Promised Land, it's telling us that he didn't consider the promises to be fulfilled. There was more to come!” Isaiah is giving us pictures that are just drawn from Scripture—drawn from the things that have happened before. And what he's saying is similar to the book of Hebrews: “Don't look back. Look forward.”

God's people should always be looking forward and being filled with hope—the hope of the resurrection; the hope of the new creation; the hope of people converted and called into the kingdom; the hope of the gospel conquering the earth. How does the gospel conquer the earth? When the peoples hear the gospel, the elect are saved and the unelect are hardened. That's the gospel going forth and conquering, the gospel going forth and taking captives, making slaves.

Turn to Second Corinthians chapter 2. This passage in Isaiah speaks of people being taken captive and made servants to God's people—being made servants to Israel in God's holy land: “They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.” I want us to read just a little thing that Paul says in Second Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14. Paul says, “<sup>14</sup> But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.”

The important phrase there, or the one that I really want you to understand is “triumphal procession.” That's actually a particular phrase referring to the Empire of Rome. A triumphal procession is this: If you're a general in the Roman armies and you win a major war, you win a major battle, you conquer a nation for Rome, you get to have a triumphal procession through the streets of Rome to the center of Rome. And you go by on your gold-plated chariot with the great horses leading you by, and the people are standing by the sides of the road cheering, and what follows you? Your army. And then after your army, what follows you? Your captives, your slaves, the ones that you have taken captive, whom you have conquered. They follow you through the streets. You're having a triumph—a triumphal procession. And at the end of the triumphal procession, those slaves were slaughtered.

Now don't take the picture too far. God's not saving people in order to destroy people. But what Paul is saying is that the apostles going out and preaching the gospel, and the Christians being sent out by the apostles to preach the gospel, they're like a general returning to Rome, having his triumphal procession. They're dragging their captives behind them. They're dragging people into the kingdom in their wake.

How much of the Bible uses phrases like "redeemed" or "slaves"? How much of the Bible talks about Christians as people who have been redeemed from the marketplace? We, my friends, we've been purchased. We've been bought. It's all slavery language—a slave on the auction block, purchased, bought by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word "slave" in Greek is *doulos*, and the word "Lord" in Greek is *kurios*. Now if you were a *doulos*, you had an owner, and your owner was called *kurios*. We often don't realize that. There is a definite association between the New Testament authors calling the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord, and the Old Testament authors who start to substitute the word Lord for the holy name of God, Yahweh. And so they're saying, "The Lord, the Lord, God, the Son of God." There's a definite association there.

But there's also just simply the language of the society of that day. If you were a *doulos*, you had a *kurios*. If you were a slave, you had an owner, and your owner was your lord. And we're slaves. And we have a *kurios*—a Lord, and He is our owner. We've been purchased. We've been bought into the kingdom.

Turn to Luke chapter 17. It's the parable of the unprofitable servant. We usually use the word servant, but it's actually slave. Luke 17, verse 7: <sup>7</sup> "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come at once and recline at table"? <sup>8</sup> Will he not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink"? <sup>9</sup> Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." That's Jesus speaking, and that's a parable of life in the kingdom of God.

And what's He saying? "You're slaves. You've been put out to work. You're here to work. You're here to accomplish the will of God. And not only are you slaves, you're unworthy—unworthy servants, you, me, all of us, all Christians, we're unworthy servants. But we have an owner and a lord—the Lord Jesus Christ. Now there's great reward in serving the Lord, but we should never get big heads, and we've got to understand we're captives. We're captives—joyous captives, willing captives. We love being in the kingdom of God. We love being under the authority of God through Christ. Why? Because our natures have been changed by the power of God. God has made us willing and obedient to His will.

So we're the captives, we're the slaves being ruled over by God. But here's the thing—we become those who rule over our oppressors. Let's have a look at the last part. Turn back to Isaiah chapter 14, the last sentence of verse 2: "They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them."

They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them. Turn now to Romans chapter 6. We'll start reading at verse 15: "<sup>15</sup> What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup> I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

"<sup>20</sup> For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What's Paul saying? Well, he's saying a lot, but I'm going to draw just a few points out of this. Once you were slaves of sin, now you're slaves of righteousness. Once sin ruled over you. Notice he personifies sin—sin was your lord, so to speak. Sin was our lord. But now who rules over us? God. Verse 22 of Romans 6: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Scripture is the word of God about God, and God's dealings with humanity—a God who cannot lie; a God who keeps His promises; a God who fulfills. God speaks to His people in a language that they understand. This promise that God speaks through Isaiah to the faithful people who are hearing the preaching of Isaiah, what do they understand? They understand there's going to be a restoration. They're going to be set free from a place called Babylon. They're going to return to their place called Jerusalem, which they consider to be their homeland. They understand that they are once again going to have status in the eyes of God. And then God promises them victory—great victory. They're going to rule over those who once oppressed them.

Fulfillment comes over time. But the faithful, the justified, were faithful and justified then and there, in their lives in the world. And they were there being ruled over by God, and they were there and then living a life that is pleasing to God in the righteousness of God, the gift of God through justification by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were faithful in and to God. And yet they didn't see their land or their nation or their armies conquering all the world.

But we look at this through New Testament eyes. We see how God speaks of fulfillment. Jesus says to the apostles, "But you will receive power from on high. You will take the gospel out into all the world." Paul speaks of slaves being redeemed and purchased and brought into the kingdom, where they are now slaves of God, but they're ruling over sin. Sin no longer rules over

them, but they rule over sin. Everybody in the world, in the end, who's their captor? Who are they slave to? Those who are not in Christ, in the end, are slaves of sin.

What's the problem? Everybody's a slave of sin. It's as simple as that. You know, go to any problem in the world, any trouble, and in the end, that trouble is always sin. One way or another, people are slaves to their sin. Full stop. God sets us free from slavery to sin and makes us slaves to Himself, giving us power to rule over sin. We rule over that which once held us captive and oppressed us.

I'm aware that there are those who would hear what I'm saying and say, "Come on, you're allegorizing, or at least you're speaking far too figuratively." Okay, I just point you back to Isaiah chapter 10, verses 20 to 22, and then to Romans chapter 9, verses 27 and 28, and I ask anyone who wants to accuse me of figurative allegorizing, "What was Paul doing by the power of the Holy Spirit? How was Paul interpreting Scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit?"

Let's just have a look at that one more time. Isaiah chapter 10, verses 20 to 22. Let's read it: <sup>20</sup>"In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. <sup>21</sup>A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. <sup>22</sup>For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. <sup>23</sup>For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth." And I just remind you, Isaiah's speaking to the people of his day. He's warning them of the coming judgment, and he's saying that those who survive the coming judgment are the faithful. And the faithful are those who "lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth."

Now turn to Romans chapter 9, looking at verses 27 to 28: <sup>27</sup>"And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, <sup>28</sup>for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.'" Now I remind you, Romans chapter 9 is an extended discussion of the electing purposes of God—how God has chosen to elect only a very few of the descendants of Abraham by blood, but has chosen by faith now to elect from the Gentile nations all who will believe. Paul is taking that word of Isaiah and applying that word of Isaiah to what was happening in the church on that day—after the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus—and saying, "This is the fulfillment. This is how these words are fulfilled. The gospel is being preached, the elect are being called, and the elect by faith are being adopted as the children of Abraham."

So my answer to the people who say I'm allegorizing, and I'm figuratively speaking, and I'm taking things too far, is that that's how the apostles did it. That's how the apostles took Scripture and interpreted it. They saw God's promises being fulfilled in Christ through the church, through the preaching of the gospel. And that's what I'm trying to do here with this promise of God that He will once again choose and elect a people called Israel. He'll call them Israel. He'll call them the sons of Jacob, or the house of Jacob, and He'll give them a promised land. It's the same promised land that Abraham was looking forward to. He wasn't looking forward to Palestine, remember, of he wasn't looking forward to the Middle East, what we now call Israel. He was looking forward to that future city, whose builder is God.

Abraham got to Israel, remember. He bought a chunk of land in the Promised Land, there to bury his descendants and himself. He bought a grave site. He owned some land in the Promised Land, and he promised that Promised Land on to his children and his children's children, and on. He spoke prophetically. But even though he was there, he was still looking forward. Remember what we read in the book of Hebrews—he was still looking forward to an eternal city, to a city which was built and founded upon God, to live in the presence of God for eternal life.

And that's God's promise to us. You know, we're the very evidence of the fulfillment of God's promises. We're the very evidence of the faithfulness of God. We've been called into the kingdom. We've been given life in Christ. We've been blessed with justifying faith, just as God blessed Abraham with justifying faith. And we all know this isn't it. This life is good. Fellowship with the saints is good. It's great to be a part of the people of God. It's wonderful to be a part of the church of Christ, the universal church of Christ. It's great to be here. But do you want to be here in all eternity, with things the way they are? You don't, and I don't either.

I want to be in the presence of God and apart from sin. I want to be in the presence of God and know that life is good and eternal, and know that death is not in front of me, it's behind me. I want to be in the presence of God where I can't sin, where I have been re-made to such a level of perfection that I actually have no desire to sin. All of my desires will be good. Imagine that! What a feeling!

You wake up in the morning—let's imagine; I'm not saying I know, but let's imagine—new heavens, new earth. We're on an earth, we have mornings and evenings, and we have the sun coming up and going down, etc., etc. You wake up in the morning, in your eternal life upon the new earth, and not one single thought that crosses your mind is in any way evil. You wake up and you think, "I want to," and whatever you want to do is good, sanctified in Christ. "I want to swim," that's good; "I want to walk," that's good; "I want to run," that's good; "I want to sing," that's good; "I want to praise God," that's good; "I want to fellowship with the saints," that's good; and whatever else there may be. Because, my friends, it's better than we can imagine, and it's better than we know. It's better than anything that we can imagine or know. You just get this taste, this foretaste, of how good eternal life will be. You can't desire a wrong thing.

If you're anything like me, and I'll be honest and I hope you're being honest too—we're conflicted in this world. We're conflicted—wrong desires. We're always fighting against wrong desires. I can't say at this moment in my life that every time I wake up, every thought that crosses my mind is good, and everything I think I want to do is right. I've actually got to stop and test and measure. And I've got to work out what's right, what's wrong. I've got to restrain myself. I'm still fighting the fight against the sin that dwells within.

But the day will come where that fight is finished, it's over, it's behind us, and we can't desire the wrong thing. Every thought will be right, sanctified, joyous—rejoicing in the goodness of God. God's promise to His people is that they will rule over the things that once oppressed them. Now that promise begins to be fulfilled in this life, doesn't it? We're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We're given the help and the power of God to live this Christian life, but still we must fight against the indwelling sin. We must fight against the old desires. That's the Christian life.

I hope we understand that. We know that. It's not easy. It's not a walk through the park. The Christian life is not dancing across a path strewn with rose petals. We all know that.

But still, we know the fulfillment of promises. As I've said to you many times before—I am not yet the man I ought to be, but I can tell you for sure, I am not the man I once was. I'm on the way. You, my Christian friends, you're on the way. Promises are being fulfilled even now. Even now, God is faithful. God will fulfill His promises. Our salvation is sure. God is compassionate. He chooses; He overrules; He makes the clay the way He wants it; He shapes us into what He wants us to be. That's the promises of God, the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. Let's close in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you and praise you for the certainty of the answering of all of your promises, the certainty of fulfillment, the security that we have in Christ, that we can be indeed your elect and covenant people, rejoicing in the love of God. We thank you for these things in Jesus' name. Amen.