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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes

## INTRODUCTION

Tonight's message is "Learning God's 3Rs." You have to be at least as old as I am or older to understand what we used to say about learning the three "Rs." They are: Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic. For sure spelling was not one of them! I wondered about that. We are teaching our kids "reading" starts with an "R" but 'riting and 'rithmetic...hmm. If you could learn your reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic, then you were going to be pretty well educated. Well in the Bible we can learn, "God's 3Rs."

I heard a real funny story the other day about something that happened to a child. This child had the habit of telling lies. Not only did he tell lies he told *whoppers*! One morning he got up and his mother said, "Did you sleep well last night?" He said, "Well, actually No." He said, "In the middle of the night a flying saucer landed in the backyard and I went out to investigate. They let me fly in their flying saucer and we flew to Mars and then to Venus and then to Pluto and then we came back home before breakfast." His mother said, "Did you really do that?" "Oh I really did, Mama!" Finally, she had had all she could take with her son lying. So, she called the preacher. She said, "Preacher, I want you to talk to my son because all he does is tell lies, lies, lies! Maybe you can help him. I can't!" So, they took him down to the preacher's office and the preacher said, "Now, son. What did you tell your mother happened last night?" He said, "Oh preacher, last night a flying saucer landed behind my house and I went out there and these little green men took me on a flying saucer ride. We went to Mars and then to Venus and then to Pluto and then we came home before breakfast." The preacher said, "Son, did that really happen?" He said, "Yes, preacher. It really happened!" The preacher thought he would use "reverse psychology." Rather than saying, "Well, son don't lie!" he thought he would tell a lie that was even bigger and more of a whopper than that little boy's lie. He said, "Why, son. I believe you! It kind of reminds me of the time I was preaching in this church up in the mountains and right in the middle of my sermon, a big old two-ton grizzly bear tore the back doors off that church. That bear came roaring into that church and I mean he went up one pew and down the next pew and he ate up every single person in that church! Nobody was left but me and that big old bear was up there facing me and before that bear jumped on me a little dog ran in from the side door and ate that bear all up!" The preacher said, "Son do you believe that story? The little boy's eyes were as big as baseballs and he said, "I sure do, preacher. That was my dog!"

When you come to the word of God and you come to what God has done, there is no lie there. This is the absolute truth. What we have been studying on Sunday nights is the history of the Old Testament and I am not going to take you all the way back to Genesis but let's go back to where Moses was in Egypt and he said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" The movie, "Prince of Egypt" is all about that. "Let my people go!" and when Pharaoh let the people of Israel go, that's a picture of us becoming Christians. It's an allegory, because in Egypt it's a picture of slavery. Before you become a Christian, before you give your life to Jesus Christ, you are in slavery to sin. Coming out of Egypt is a picture of what happens to us when we become a Christian. We leave the land of sin. In fact they passed through the Red Sea and the waters stood on either side and they passed through the waters and the Bible teaches in the New Testament in I Corinthians that's a picture of baptism. They had been saved. They invited Jesus to come into their hearts.

Then they moved on to the Promised Land. Although they didn't go right into the Promised

Land, Joshua led them into the Promised Land the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. That is not a picture of heaven as some have supposed. That is a picture of the victorious, spirit-filled Christian life. Living in the land of promise is something we can experience in this lifetime.

They had some judges for awhile then they had some kings. The greatest king was David and Solomon, his son, was a great king. Then they had a whole bunch of kings and they didn't do very well. In fact, they drifted far away from God until we come to the point of this message tonight. Tonight is a message directed toward people who have come out of Egypt. They are Christians and they have come to the place of growing as a Christian for a while but then in the middle of that, something happens and they get out of favor with God. This is a beautiful picture of it in the Old Testament.

## **I. REMOVAL BY GOD'S HAND**

There are 3 Rs you need to follow. This is a pattern in the Bible. R number one is removal by God's hand. Whenever you come to a place of rebellion in your Christian life, like the children of Israel came to a place of rebellion, God will remove you from a place of blessing. Let's get our theology straight: God does not remove us from salvation! I believe once you are truly born again saved, you can never be unsaved. There are a lot of people talking about, "Well I knew somebody that used to be a Christian and now they are not a Christian anymore." The truth was they never were a Christian in the first place! The faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first.

### **Lesson: Rebellion will cause you to lose your position of blessing**

If you are truly born again, you won't fall away but you may come to a place of disobedience and rebellion. Do you know what will happen? God will remove you! Not from salvation but he will remove you from your place of blessing. The lesson is this: Rebellion will cause you to lose your position of blessing. We're not going to read it again, because we studied it in the last message. The last chapter of 2 Chronicles, chapter 36, is about what happened to the children of Israel. They rebelled and rebelled against God and he didn't say, "You are no longer my people." He didn't divorce himself from them. He didn't tear himself away from them being his people and him being their God. Instead He said, "I am going to remove you from the Promised Land for awhile." They were removed for seventy years. Why seventy? God told them when they entered the Promised Land that they had better observe a Sabbath year. In other words, you have six years and on the seventh year you rest all of your crops and all of your fields: A Sabbath year. For 490 years—from the time Saul was king until King Zedekiah—they didn't observe the Sabbath year. 490 divided by 7 is 70 years. For exactly seventy years the Jews, the people of Israel, were removed from God's position of blessing.

Let me tell you what that means to us. I have known some people who at one time were "on fire" for God. They were faithful for Jesus but their fire went out; they became cold and indifferent and backslidden. They did not lose their salvation. God picked them up from their place of blessing and in essence He put them aside. These people are still saved. If they die, they are not going to go to hell. They'll go to heaven but they won't go to heaven happy or proud, because

they have been taken from the position of blessing. That's what God did to the entire nation of Israel when Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonians against them in 586 B.C. and they totally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. God took the people of Israel and put them in a foreign land, Babylonia, for 70 years. That's step number one. That's the way it happens. Removal by God's hand!

## II. RESTORATION TO GOD'S PLAN

Here's step number two in the process: Restoration to God's plan. Thank God the people of Israel realized the mistake they made so they repented. By the way, on Sunday mornings I have been preaching through Daniel on Sunday mornings I am in this Old Testament series and amazingly these two series have intersected right here at this point, because if you will look at the text I have printed on your outline for you one of the best examples of a prayer of repentance during this Babylonian exile of 70 years was prayed by none other than Daniel, himself. In fact, this happens to be part of the text we're going to look at next Sunday morning:

Daniel 9:2-5. "In the first year of his reign, [talking about Cyrus] I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.'

Daniel is spiritually keen enough to realize his whole people had been removed from God's land by God's hand and suddenly they were in exile. So he falls on his knees. He fasts, he prays, he put on sackcloth and ashes, which was a picture of mourning and he said, "God, I'm sorry. Not only do I confess my sin, I confess the sins of all the people of Israel. God we have done you wrong. God, we are sorry."

### **Lesson: Confession and repentance lead to cleansing**

Here's the lesson we learn from this: Confession and repentance lead to cleansing. What do you do when you get in this position when suddenly God removes you from a position of blessing and you find yourself sort of in spiritual exile? You do exactly what Daniel did. You realize it, you fall on your knees, you pray and confess your sins and you repent. That is an absolute necessity. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Do you know what it means to confess your sins? You are not telling God anything new when you confess sins to him. Sometimes people think confession is like when the cops arrest you and they take you in this little room and they shine a light on your face and they say, "All right. 'Fess up! Tell us what you did!" "Okay, I'll tell you. I did this..." and you are informing them of something they didn't know. When you confess to God, you are not telling him anything He doesn't already know. He knows what you did. He knew that thought you thought before you even thought it! He knew that bad word you spoke before you spoke it. He knew that bad thing you did before you did it. So, when you confess to

God and you say, "God this is what I did." God doesn't say, "Oh, *really!*" He knows. The word *confess* means you agree with God that what you did was wrong. God already knows it's wrong. You admit to God, "God, I agree with you. What I did was wrong!" Confession and repentance lead always to cleansing.

### III. A RETURN TO GOD'S LAND

Here's the third R: A return to God's land. There are the three R's: Removal, Restoration, Return. I call your attention to the book of Ezra. The book of Ezra is all about how the people of Israel, upon Daniel's prayer of repentance, finally return to Israel.

Ezra 1:1-3. "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.'"

Who do you think influenced old Cyrus to think and talk like that? Well, there happened to be a man high up in the government named Daniel—God's man in the palace. Can you imagine that? Here they had been in exile for seventy years, that's like two generations. We're talking about people who moved and had kids and then they had kids. All their lives they heard about Israel. They heard about Jerusalem. They heard about the temple of God that was built at one time. All of their lives they grew up thinking, "Oh, I hope we can go back one day. I hope we can go back and rebuild the temple. I hope we can go back there to Jerusalem and worship our God again." Finally, Cyrus says, "Go back!" But they weren't allowed to go back to God's land of blessing until they repented and confessed their sins. If they had never done that, I don't know what would have happened but God knew it would happen all alone. Before you can ever return to a place of blessing in your life, you must do the same thing.

Look what happened when they finally got back and started to rebuild the temple that had been leveled by Nebuchadnezzar.

Ezra 3:10-11. "When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; His love to Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

Do you know what they are doing? The reason they were displaced by God is they stopped obeying the Bible. Here we see they have learned their lesson. They are saying, "Okay. Psalm 150, man! We want to follow the word of God exactly. We want to do everything by the letter. That's why it says in verse 10 they did it exactly as prescribed by King David.

By the way people sometimes think that biblical worship is quiet and withdrawn. Let’s see what *biblical* worship is like.

Ezra 3:12-16. “But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.”

What were these people shouting about? What were they excited about? I’ll tell you. At one time they had been right in the center in the place of God’s blessing. But because of sin and rebellion God had removed them to a place of exile. Some of you are there right now. You’ve been there for years. But then when they fell on their knees and repented and confessed their sins, God said, “You may return.” So they returned to God and his plan in God’s land. When they came back and started rebuilding their spiritual lives, it gave them greater joy than ever before. Is there any joy in your life or is that joy strangely missing? Could it be that you have not rebuilt and reconstructed your spiritual foundations? Do you know what the foundations of the Christian life are? They are simple! Prayer, reading your Bible every day, witnessing, going to church and fellowshiping with other believers. Those are the foundations of the Christian life and when you neglect those and you get away from those, there is no joy but when you start rebuilding those foundations, that’s when there is going to be great joy in your life.

We know from reading the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah that these people rebuilt the city of Jerusalem with the Bible in one hand and a trowel in the other. “What does God’s word say? That’s how I’m going to build my life!” That’s the only way God can bless you.

### **Lesson: Obedience is the road that returns you to a place of blessing**

Now here’s the final lesson that we learn in this little story and it is this. Obedience is the road that returns you to a place of blessing. A lot of you know I am a big fan of C. S. Lewis. Not only did C. S. Lewis write a lot of deep stuff for adults, he also wrote a wonderful children’s story called, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Children love to read and hear that story but it is also a deep allegory of the Christian life, because that’s what C. S. Lewis loved to do. He loved to take simple stories and hide all kinds of meanings in them. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, there is an old closet in an old house in England. Some boys and girls were playing hide-and-seek one day and they stumbled into this old wardrobe. They walked into it and when they walked into it, they actually walked *through* it and were suddenly in a totally different world. They were in Narnia. In the land of Narnia there was a witch, a queen, and she was bad. The witch feeds one of the kids, Edmund, something called “Turkish Delight” and it’s like a dessert. When Edmund eats this “Turkish Delight,” it’s the most delicious thing he has ever eaten in his whole life, but it is a food with a magical quality: The more you eat it, the more you crave it. It creates an insatiable appetite for “Turkish Delight.” So, when Edmund eats “Turkish Delight” he says, “Yumm! Give me some more! And he developed this intense desire to feed on “Turkish Delight.”

As I said, C. S. Lewis always hides spiritual truth in his stories. Do you know what that is?

That's a life of intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as revealed in his word. When you taste it, when you really taste it, when you know what it is not to have religion, not to go through the rituals of religion, but when you know what it is to have a personal living relationship with Jesus Christ, you can't get enough of it! It's the greatest thing you have ever tasted and you want more and more and more of it! Have you learned the lesson of God's 3Rs? Have you wandered away from his place of blessing and now you need to repent and return to his place of blessing?

## OUTLINE

### I. REMOVAL BY GOD'S HAND

Lesson: Rebellion will cause you to lose your position of blessing

### II. RESTORATION TO GOD'S PLAN

Lesson: Confession and repentance lead to cleansing

### III. A RETURN TO GOD'S LAND

Lesson: Obedience is the road that returns you to a place of blessing