

The exile * 2 Kings 17

October 3, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning I am very excited to begin a new sermon series with you called 'Hi-Fi/Lo-Fi: The prophets and the exile.' This really is the culmination of a five year plan I've been working on to walk you through the whole of the OT. If you've been with me through the last five years, you've got a good sense of how the OT fits together (and if you haven't, those messages are all up on the website). And you know something? That means that by December, you will understand how the Bible fits together better than I did when I started seminary, so I think that's pretty cool.

Now, in this series, I want to walk with you through the period of the prophets and the exile and give you a bird's eye view of what's going on in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all those hard to pronounce prophets.

And I'm going to do that through the lens of 'Hi-Fi.' If you're a little younger, you might be wondering what exactly this Hi-Fi/Lo-fi thing is all about. Well, back in the day, hi-fi originally meant 'high fidelity' – that is, the sound that came out of the speaker was highly faithful to the original sound and lo was low fidelity. It's like HD Def and Standard in computer terms or 1080p versus 240. So I want to take that idea of hifi and lofi to ask – what happens when a low fidelity people turn their back on a high fidelity God? In other words, what happens when a people of little faith turn their back on a highly faithful God? Because that's the prophets and the exile in a nutshell. Hi-fi God, lo-fi people. So I want to see what happens when they interact in the next few months.

Now today, we're going to pick up where we left off last year with King David and King Solomon and put all of the pieces on the board. Really, I want to give you a framework for understanding everything I'm going to say in the next two months.

But you know what? I've had so much fun in the last few months answering Q's from the Pews, I'm going to use one more to frame our discussion today. Because this is not just a history lesson; it is entirely relevant to us. Because this period of the prophets and the exile ultimately ask us:

Is sin really that big a deal? Like are we really accountable for our actions? You probably wondered what was up with that image I sent you – that's a real billboard saying 'just because you did it, doesn't mean you're guilty' – and that's the motto a lot of people live by. Sin is a non-issue. That's the way of the world. But is it God's way? Let's look into the Bible to find out.

Now we're going to focus on 2 Kings 17 but I need to catch you up to get the whole picture. If you think back to last year, you'll remember that King Saul and King David united the twelve tribes of Israel into one great nation, Israel. And then Solomon took over as king and he was a great king and a wise king, until he wasn't. The allure of women and riches just got to be a little touch much for him and he wandered off the way of God and into sin (1 Kings 11). And his son, Rehoboam, following in his father's footsteps, straight into the bushes and before you knew it, Israel had split into two kingdoms, with two kings, one in the North, called Israel, and one in the South, called Judah (1 Kings 12:16-33). And it stayed that way, for quite a while, Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Now, when the people had a good and faithful king, the people were faithful to God. But when they didn't (which happened a lot), they were unfaithful. And generation after generation, they slowly and

gradually slid away from God to cozy up with sin. They became more and more like the nations around them.

Now way back in Deuteronomy, God had warned them about just this very thing. He had graciously chosen the people of Israel, through no merit of their own; He had delivered them out of Egypt, given them life and health and freedom and that same life and health and freedom and status was available to the people in the time of the kings. God had been faithful to their ancestors and He was more than willing to be faithful to them. But if the people turned their backs on this HiFi God – if they were lo-fi towards Him - then God would have no choice but to turn His back on them and send them into Exile (That's what He said He would do in Deuteronomy 29:27-28).ⁱ

And so God sent prophets to them, to remind them of this reality, to turn away from sin and call them back from the brink. God sent Isaiah and Jeremiah and Micah and Amos to say 'Guys, you're being very unfaithful to a faithful God.' But time and again, the people didn't listen. The KINGS didn't listen and they set the standard for the people and so the spiritual life of the kingdom just spiralled down and down and down, until finally, 2 Kings 17. Let's look at it together.

"In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. 2 He did evil in the eyes of the LORD..." (2Ki 17:1-2 NIV).

And so, verse 6, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria (2Ki 17:6 NIV). That was 722 BC; the northern kingdom went into exile in Assyria.

Now why? Why did they get torn out of their land, the Promised Land that God had given them?

7 All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (This is really important. God is not acting on an arbitrary whim here. He has already worked to benefit these people. God graciously chose to make Israel His own. It's not because they were great or impressive; it's just that God chose to commit Himself to these people and pour out His love on them. HiFi God. The question is: how will the people respond to God's fidelity?)

'They worshiped other gods

8 and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced (2Ki 17:7-8 NIV). They turned their back on the God who had loved them.

Verse 10 - 10 They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. 11 ... They did wicked things that provoked the LORD to anger.

12 They worshiped idols, [in terrible ways – vss. 16 and 17]...

And yet, God, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love gave them time to turn from those sins. 13 The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees...

14 But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God (2Ki 17:13-14 NIV).

And so, verse 18:

18 So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, 19 and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. (Same thing happened to them in 587; Babylon came to took 'em into Exile).

20 Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence (2Ki 17:18-20 NIV).

Sin separated the people from God.

Verse 35 and on reminds us that this was not arbitrary. Verse 35 reminds us of the covenant commitment that God had made to Israel. He brought them up out of Egypt, He promised to preserve them, He promised to deliver them from the hands of their enemies... and yet, this lo-fi people chose sin over their hi-fi God. And so He sent them away. He sent them into Exile.

Is sin a big deal? Yes. It separates us from God. It separates us from the source of all life, the God who is good, the God who is in His very nature love. Sin separates us from Him.

Now before we go any further, I just want to show you one little thing that will help you to understand some stuff in Jesus' time. You know how we always say 'the good Samaritan – nobody liked Samaritans' and the Samaritan woman at the well – here's why – verse 24 – the king of Assyria took the Israelites out of Israel and repopulated it with people from foreign nations. And they intermingled with the Israelites who were left and verse 29, make their own gods wherever they settled, and so now you have this 'mutt' Israelite breed – part Israelite, part foreigner – and those are your Samaritans that 'pureblood' Israelites like the Pharisees wanted nothing to do with. Tuck that away for next time we're in the Gospels.

Let's get back to our main point. Is sin a big deal? Yes. The experience of Israel here shows us that sin is a big deal because it separates us from God. It separates us from the hifi God who is the very essence of love and of life. And in a very real way, 2 Kings 17 is like those pictures of diseased lungs on cigarette packages. They put the pictures there to say 'don't let this happen to you.' 2 Kings 17 was written to say to Judah 'Don't let this happen to you. Embrace God's faithfulness and you be faithful to.' And it says that to us, too.

Admittedly though, that's not the whole story. Because the Exile is both a warning and an invitation. Yes, God sent these people out of His presence, but even then, He relented. He had mercy. God DID eventually bring a faithful remnant of the people back. Ezra and Nehemiah tell those stories.

God brought back a small portion of faithful people, and they're the ones who would later become the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the apostles. But even they had to deal with the problem of sin separating them from God. They were just as self-centred and spiritually exiled as their forefathers had been.

And they tried by their own good works to claw their way back to God, but that was like trying to fill the grand canyon a teaspoon at a time. The gap was just too much.

But again, the HIFI God chose to show just how HIFI He was. The HiFi God acted to redeem us lofi people. He sent His Son Jesus to die, to pay for our low fidelity and to bring us back to God. His sacrifice simply pulled the two sides of the canyon together, so that anyone willing to humble themselves and turn from sin could cross over to be with God. Jesus' atoning death brings us back from spiritual exile.

Sin separates us from God but Jesus brings us back. Pride, anger, lust, selfishness - they separate us from God, but Jesus paid the cost for those sins to bring us back.

If sin separates us from God and Jesus bring us back, then let's turn our backs on sin and fix our hearts on Christ.

That's the takeaway from the exile in light of the Cross. Israelite or not, sin puts us in a spiritual exile, separated from God and not lookin' good. Our low level fidelity to a high fidelity God means that we are cast out from Him, and for all eternity if we do nothing about it.

But our high fidelity God bought us back through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. Just like the remnant Israelites, we can come back into God's presence and find forgiveness and mercy and grace.

But the question remains - then what? If God has forgiven us, do we keep our eyes on sin? Keep up the lo-fi lifestyle? Uh-uh. A high fidelity God calls for a high fidelity life. It's not that we are earning God's favour, but that, since He has graciously given it to us, we live in fidelity to Him.

So I want you to stop and to think – if you're a follower of Jesus, does your lifestyle now look different from what it did before you believed? Are you living like a new creation, led along by the Holy Spirit? Or are you taking salvation for granted? Are you living a demonstrably different, God-oriented life or do you look just the same as before? I doubt that any of us have Asherah poles set up in your backyard, but we are just as prone to take grace for granted as Israel was.

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BENEDICTION

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1-2 NIV).

ⁱ 63 Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. (Deu 28:63 NIV).

27 "Therefore the LORD's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. 28 In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now" (Deu 29:27-28 NIV). (This is written as if it has already happened in order to anticipate the hypothetical outcome if God's people ignored the covenant that He was making with them that day in Deuteronomy 29).