

PASTOR SCOTT: Hey, Freshwater. I wanted to tell you an awesome story that's happened here in Freshwater, in our community, over the last several months. Many of you heard about Joe and Janet Grasso, and them pulling two moms and their babies in from Mongolia. Their babies, toddlers, really, had really severe heart problems. They brought them here to the Cleveland Clinic. They've taken them, and what started as a couple weeks ended up being a lot more with the Covid-19 shutdown.

This church, Freshwater, so many of you helped them with food, diapers, coming over to sit with them. It is an amazing story, not only of God healing these babies, like, they're doing great, but one of the mothers, Monda (phonetic), actually became a Christian. She was baptized here at Freshwater last Sunday. She wanted to get baptized. She asked, and said, "I need to be baptized before I go back to Mongolia."

A few of us got together, and she just talked about how much she loves Jesus. I want to read her story to you guys because it

is so encouraging. Just listen in to her story here that she wrote herself.

She says, "My name is Monda. I live with my husband and three kids. I'm a herder in the countryside of Mongolia. Before I knew about Jesus and the one true God, I worshipped the mountains and water. I had many idols.

My little daughter, Engi, was born in January 2019 with a heart defect. When she was two months old, she was diagnosed with it. I needed \$200 million in my currency for a heart surgery, and we didn't have that kind of," she says, "big amount of money. I was so afraid I was going to lose my little baby."

Then her cardiologist suggested to her, or "to me about Samaritan's Purse. We were so happy to have a chance for our baby to survive. One year later, we came to America, to Cleveland. After we came to Cleveland, we studied the Bible every day and began to understand about the one true God.

"I came to realize that even though I didn't know about God, he knew about me. God had made a plan for me before I was born. I'm

God's child. He will never leave me alone. Also, God gave me the precious gift that I'll never forget and always remember, my daughter's health. Along with nice people and two wonderful host families and an interpreter, I am so thankful to God. I am so glad to be God's beloved child. I will serve him forever."

It is just an amazing story. I'm sure you're seeing some of the video clips right there and pictures. Freshwater, you are part of that. I believe this time of prayer that we're in, it's answered prayer. That is answered prayer right there. So don't despair or don't begin to think that God is silent and things aren't happening. God's on the move. Let's keep praying. Let's keep praying. Let's see him rattle some bones and open some more graves, all right? See you soon.

(Band played "Only King Forever" and "Everything and Nothing Less.")

PASTOR SEAN: It's been a minute, Freshwater. I'm not going to lie, I have loved the time God has blessed me with, with families being close and some distractions being

eliminated. Man, I can not wait until I'm able to hang out with more than just those in my house and the two jokers I share this room with each week. Again, don't get me wrong, I love all of those people, but I need a crowd real soon.

As a side note, some of you have been commenting on the peanut gallery Scott sometimes has to deal with. Here's a behind the scenes look. Usually, it's me over there by the camera, and Jake is over there. Often, the two of us are just trying not to laugh.

Well, let me get to the real reason you're here. I'm excited and terrified that I get to share this part of Ezekiel with you. Excited because at the heart of what we'll look at today is good news. It's powerful and triumphant. Terrified because so many people come to this topic with so many preconceived notions, that it's become a point of contention. Some well-intentioned and some a bit more conspiratorial.

Maybe today we start from scratch. Maybe today we see the thread of God's bigger plan and message, as we put aside our tinfoil

hats and see the Scripture as something new. There is no way I could give this topic the justice it deserves in the time I have. What I hope to do is show what I think God's intent is.

So what's the topic? Apocalyptic literature. I want to show you why God uses these epic visions and prophecies to encourage his people. You heard that right, encourage his people. Many of us hear a word like apocalyptic and instantly go to a dark place. That is more about what we've made it into than what God wants his people to hear.

Apocalypse or apocalyptic means to reveal or uncover. Many of us use the word to denote the end of things. I know I have. We constantly hear things like Snowpocalypse. We've done it to another closely related word, the word Armageddon. It is used almost as a synonym to apocalypse and almost always related to something that is scary. Again, we've used it incorrectly. Armageddon refers to a place, that place being Megiddo in the Middle East.

Our fascination or avoidance of how Jesus will complete things, combined with a pop

culture that loves to sensationalize cataclysmic events, have made the books in Scripture that prophesy the use of God's amazing power into a sort of sideshow, even in some places unapproachable. That should not be the case.

Yes, in the case of the major apocalyptic literatures in the Bible, it does reveal or uncover how God will make complete his plan for us and the earth, but it is a piece of a bigger narrative. The Bible is, in part, a love story to us from a loving and all-powerful God. These moments in Scripture of fantastic, literal, and symbolic revelation are part of that love story.

Where are the apocalyptic parts of scripture? The larger sections are found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation. A side note, some have titled the book of Revelation, "The apocalypse of St. John." Apocalypse, revelation, to reveal, to uncover. See how that works?

I think the sections of Scripture that deal with the coming conclusion of God's work can be seen through three lenses. Divine

execution, hope, and glory. That is his divine execution, hope for us, and ultimately, glory for him.

First, here is where we are in the timeline. Look at this graphic. It spans almost 400 years. Scott has mentioned that there were two kingdoms for the Hebrew people, and that they split and were taken into captivity. The first kingdom of Israel is taken into captivity around 720 BC. Babylon finishes the job by conquering the second kingdom, Judah, around 585 BC.

The prophet we have been following is Ezekiel. His prophecies were delivered to the Hebrew people, the Jews, while in exile. All the prophets, and more, were sent to the people of Israel. It wasn't until 535 BC when Jesus -- when the Jews, excuse me, begin to come back to Jerusalem to rebuild.

So that's where we are as we turn to Ezekiel 38 and 39. I'll be reading a large portion, so it may feel like story time, but I want Scripture to speak for itself.

Ezekiel 38:1-6. The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, set your face

toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophecy against him and say, 'This is what the Lord God says, Look, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws, and I bring you out with all your army, including horses and riders, who are all splendidly dressed, a huge assembly armed with large and small shields, all of them brandishing swords.

"Persia, Cush, and Put are all with them, all of them with shields and helmets. Gomer with all its troops, and Beth-togarmah from the remotest parts of the north along with all its troops. Many peoples are with you. Be prepared and get yourself ready, you and your whole assembly that has been mobilized around you. You will be their guard. After a long time, you will be summoned.

"In the last years, you will enter the land that has been restored from war and regathered from many peoples to the mountains of Israel, which had long been a ruin. They were brought out from the people, and all of them now live securely. You, all of your

troops, and many peoples with you will advance, coming like a thunderstorm. You will be like a cloud covering the land.'

That is what the Lord God says. On that day, thoughts will arrive in your mind, and you will devise an evil plan. You will say, 'I will advance against a land of open villages. I will come against a tranquil people who are living securely, all of them without walls and without bars and without gates,' in order to seize spoil and carry off plunder, to turn your hand against them now, inhabited against people gathered from a nations, who have been acquiring cattle and possessions and who live at the center of the world.

"Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish with all its rulers will ask you, 'Have you come to see spoil? Have you mobilized your assembly to carry off plunder? You take off with silver and gold, to take cattle and possessions, to seize plenty of spoil?'

"Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, This is what the Lord God says,

"On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know this and come from your place in the remotest parts of the north, you and many people with you, who are all riding horses, a huge assembly, a powerful army? You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud covering the land. It will happen in the last days, Gog, that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know, when I demonstrate my holiness through you in their sight."

Wow. Let's walk through the first act of this prophecy. This does not look good for the people of Israel. This is a lot of problems heading their way. Here is where we start to see the divine execution of God's plan. First, it's attention grabbing. You can see the grand vision on huge magnitude in other parts of the Bible, when God brings about his revelation.

If Israel isn't listening after that opening scripture, then something is wrong. God just told them the entire world will be knocking on their door. Look at this graphic. You can see that from all directions,

Israel is about to be hit. The only place horsemen are not coming from is the Mediterranean. Even though these names have some significance to Israel, it wasn't necessarily about these actual nations, as much as it was about the whole evil world led to destroy Israel. Is it symbolic or literal? Only God really knows.

Next, we see, or maybe don't see, the ways and times that God will bring this about. These have been thoughts, guesses, speculations about when this will happen, or if it's already happened. A war that hits Israel from every direction.

Then there's this Gog of Magog guy; conspiracies about, is it Russia? Was it Hitler? Is it "insert name here" of someone you disagree with politically and doesn't like Jews?

Let me put your mind at ease. In the long run -- and you have to hear me out all the way to the end of this message -- does it really matter? Can you really know? You could speculate that from the text, it implies that Israel will be content at peace. They will

feel safe. They have no need for guards, walls, or any type of protection. That might be a good start.

Let's focus on what is a bit more clear. What we do know is that whoever Gog is, God will use their evil intention like a hook in the mouth. As we see in verse 16, it will be in the last days. Oh, and we know from a trusted source that we cannot know when that will be.

Look at Matthew 24:36. It says this, "Concerning the day and hour, no one, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."

That's right. Jesus didn't even know. That right there is some divine execution. What we need to see in this first act of 38 and 39 is this: It is orchestrated by God, it is big, it's against Israel, and it will be in God's timing. His divine execution does not end there. Let me summarize what happens in the rest of 38 and through 39 through verse 8.

When Gog leads his army into Israel, he is defeated. And not defeated in a

way that our modern armies defeat their enemies, but in a way that only the divine can. Here's part of the ways. Crashing mountains, plagues, confusion so they will kill each other, hailstones, fire and burning sulfur. Oh, and by the way, this form of God's divine execution is reflected in chapter 8 of the book of Revelation. It's all connected. Their defeat is so massive that God says their bodies will be a feast, a banquet for the birds and wild animals.

You see, divine execution here and elsewhere is complete. Not only is it complete, all the credit is reserved for Him. Israel didn't lift a finger. He will conquer. Going back to a previous thought about timing, there are some that have pointed to times in history where this could have already happened. The defeat of Germany in World War II. The six-day war between Israel and the Arab countries in 1967.

But I'm not sure I can find a time in history where this has happened yet. Why do I say that? Let's look further into the second act of this scripture. Verses 9 through 20 of

chapter 39, we see quantifiable outcomes of God's divine execution. First, in verse 9, Israel will burn the weapons of war for seven years. They will heap their houses with weapons of their enemies for seven years. Verses 11 through 16, it will take the whole house of Israel seven months to bury the armies of Gog. Seven months. There are so many bodies, that it will block the passage for travelers.

Let's do the math. If this is literal, the whole house of Israel, today, numbers about 14 million Jews. Let's just assume it's the able-bodied men who do the burying. Let's be real conservative, maybe 2 million. Let's say each man buries one body per day. Let's keep them law-abiding Jews that do not work on the Sabbath. That is about 140 days of body burying. Over seven months, that comes to 280 million dead bodies. I'm a history buff, and I do not recall reading anything about a one-day battle resulting in 280 million casualties.

This is not meant to be totally figured out right now. All this, whether

symbolic or literal, is meant to bring hope to a hurting people and glory to a powerful God. The final act of 38 and 39 is just that, hope and glory. It can be summed up in verses 39:21 and again in 28 and 29.

It says this, "I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the judgment I've executed and the hand I have laid on them. They will know that I am the Lord their God when I regather them to their land after having exiled them among the nations. I will leave none of them behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel. This is the declaration of the Lord God."

A hurting people that has been in exile, hearing this prophesy, would be uplifted. They would have hope of restoration and peace. They would be encouraged by a God, a Father, willing to forgive a wayward child. They were a people completely out of control, seeing the power of a God completely in control.

Would they wonder about the epic vision of destruction and how it would come

about? Yes. But they would dwell on a faithful Father, willing to fight and conquer evil on their behalf, and for their protection and provision.

Now, let me circle back to two questions I asked earlier. Does it really matter, and can we really know when? So you don't think that I'm saying Scripture doesn't matter, or that I'm saying ignore apocalyptic literature because it's hard, let me say this: If you have, or are going to, rely on Scripture, here or in other places, like Revelation, so you can get ready for Jesus' return, you have missed the point. That would fly in the face of things Jesus has already said.

We are to be people already prepared. He's given us all we need to look to when we see these crazy things of the end times, like dragons and beasts. He's given us triumph and, ultimately, eternal joy. He says, "Be prepared for the bridegroom, for that bridegroom could come back at any time."

What is that preparation? Love him and love people. That's what faithfulness

looks like. His love story to us, and our love story to others. This love story and final promise of restoration for his children and the heart -- is at the heart of apocalyptic literature. It was then for Ezekiel, and it is now for us.

Can it be a little confusing and sometimes a bit scary? Sure. Can we totally understand the words written here and other place, like Daniel and Revelation? If you said yes, please let me know. First, we could find you a \$1 million book deal. Secondly, we could probably get you a pretty good gig as God himself. We, however, look to these sections of Scripture for hope and to rest well, knowing the faithfulness of God for us.

There's so much more here but not enough time. Dig deeper on your own. See what God would like to reveal to you as you see divine execution. See his inspired hope in your life.

Here's a final thought, don't hold on to it. This is not something meant to keep to yourself. The power of God, the hope that he brings, and the fact that he wins should be

shared. There's a hurting population all around us, right now especially, that is looking for answers.

Like Scott shared last week about the rattling of bones, this story in Ezekiel, this history, this history to come in other places of Scripture, is good news. It's awesome news. Now, I say to people when I talk about end times, when they say, "Sean, what do you believe," I usually don't go so deep.

I say, "When Jesus comes back, I hope I'm not not cheap seats."

Guys, we have the opportunity to share this message so people are not in the cheap seats. Apocalyptic literature should motivate you toward love, for God and for others. Let me pray.

Father God, I am so thankful for portions of Scripture just like this. Sometimes we don't get it, and I think it's great that we don't have to. But what is very clear is that you love us. That you have made promises to those who would call on you as Lord. Whether that be the people of Israel, however that looks at the end, or that be for

us, those who have been grafted in.

Father, you will complete it. I'm thankful for the opportunity to share this, Lord. I pray folks would walk away today changed, hearing your words and your power. Jesus' name, Amen.

Have a great week.