Exponential - Part One

# Exceedingly Abundantly

## (Philippians 1:3-6)

Welcome everybody, it’s great to have you at church today, as well as those of you watching online, because we’re launching into a brand-new message series called Exponential. I believe that God is going to speak into each of our lives today as we come boldly into his presence, walking by faith and not by sight, and we’re going to be encouraged and strengthened in his presence. I believe this message is going to speak to you in an immensely powerful way, laying the foundation for things to come, because nothing is impossible with God. In fact, he is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than you imagine because Jesus said, “Everything is possible for (him or her) who believes” (Mark 9:23).

And so, I want to encourage those of you today who have lowered your expectations of what God might do in your life, because you prayed about something, and he didn’t answer your prayer the way you asked. And I know that each one of you has your own version of this story, maybe you had a financial goal. You know, “God help me to pay off my credit card,” but now summer is here, and you’ve got more debt than you did before. Or others of you, maybe you’ve been praying for your dad to be saved, and years have gone by and he seems to be farther from God than ever before. Or maybe you’re hoping to get married or at lease to be dating and you’ve been praying about it, but months have gone by and you haven’t even been near anyone of the opposite sex that is remotely attracted to you. And so, now your prayer is mixed with thoughts of “God where are you, did you forget about me? Why aren’t you doing what I thought you were going to do?”

And this certainly isn’t a new question for God, because there are so many examples in the Scriptures. I’m reminded of Abraham, Manoah, or Zechariah who wrestled with God in prayer waiting for children. Or Israel who cried out to God in Egypt to be delivered from slavery, only to find themselves wandering for 40 years in the wilderness because of their unbelief. And so often, when it comes to faith and life, and certainly when it comes to God’s blessings, we tend to think in terms of addition. We think I need to add this to my life, we think addition, we think plus, but I want you to know today that God thinks in terms of multiplication.

I don’t know who has been praying for something, believing that God would do something, that God would change something, and you’ve been praying, and you’ve been believing, but nothing has happened. Well, I want to assure you that just because you don’t see anything, doesn’t mean that God isn’t doing something. In fact, just imagine for a moment, being in the apostle Paul’s shoes as a prisoner in Rome. He had wanted to go there to share the gospel, but finds himself in chains awaiting his trial, and as he’s waiting his mind goes back to the believers in Philippi and so he writes them a letter.

In Philippians chapter 1, in his introduction he says,

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:3-6).

In spite of the difficult circumstances that Paul finds himself in he is able to rejoice because he understands that God was working and if God always met your expectations, he would never have the chance to exceed them. You see, nothing can be more encouraging than to know that despite life’s uncertainties and difficulties, no matter how many times we stumble and fall along the way, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

This was the confidence of Paul, not a confidence in himself, not in the church, but an absolute confidence that comes from knowing that the completion of God’s purpose and God’s promises are just as certain as if they were already accomplished. And so, Paul knew that what God begins, what God starts, that he will also see it through to its completion. You see, Paul not only had great faith, but he knew the history of Israel, and he knew the faithfulness of God.

The apostle had a strong foundation of faith, and we too can see this cornerstone of faith illustrated in the history of Israel. That’s why it’s important to know the Word of God. The Scriptures tell us that God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt in what is celebrated as the Passover, miraculously took them through the Red Sea as if on dry ground, and then for 40 years he supernaturally fed them with bread from heaven. And so, God who began a good work in them, led Israel for 40 years through the wilderness, and he carried it on all the way through to completion.

The Bible says that when Israel entered the promised land, when they had partaken of the good things that God had prepared for them,

“The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan” (Joshua 5:12).

In other words, we need to understand that there are things in our lives that help us to get here, but not there because they were only intended to help us get here. And so, what the apostle Paul understood and what we’ve got to learn is to hold things loosely and let go of things in our lives that are not intended to take us into the future God has planned for us.

You see, when Israel entered into the promised land God no longer gave them manna, in fact he removed it from the menu, it wasn’t available any longer. In the same way, Moses who brought them out of Egypt, Moses who took his rod and split the Red Sea, Moses who brought water from a rock and did all these great things, Moses did not make it to the promised land. He died, he was no longer available, and so for Israel something had shifted. It wasn’t because God was punishing them, it was because they had matured, they had come into a new season, and they’re now eating from the produce of the land.

I want you to notice that just because Moses dies or the manna stopped doesn’t mean that the promise of God’s provision and God’s protection in the promised land stops. God didn’t come to Joshua and say, “This is the best I could do, I brought you this close, now Moses is gone, the manna has stopped, and now you’re on your own.” No, he said,

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (Joshua 1:5-6).

God is faithful to carry it on to completion, it’s not just a moment, but it’s a movement, because there is so much more. And Israel makes a smooth transition going from the death of Moses to the leadership of Joshua, and even though Joshua is not as powerful as Moses, he doesn’t go up on the mountain and fast for 40 days, he doesn’t talk to God face-to-face like Moses, but the promise of possessing the land still remains.

In the same way, our hope for the future, our promise of God’s presence and provision still remains. And so, you and I are people of hope, no matter what stops or who leaves, our future is not attached to those people or things, our hope is in the living God. Just like Israel, we need to let go of attachments to people and things that helped us to get here but are incapable of bringing us of there. As we enter into each new season of our lives, we must understand that our source is the same. His name is the Lord, he is Jehovah Jireh, and so your job is not your source, it’s not your education, your degrees, or your connections, but God is your provider.

Right now, we are entering into a new season in this building, the town wants to sell it, and so we’re entering into a new season financially, but we still have the same God who was with us nine years ago when we signed the lease, and the same God who has led this church up to this point. This church isn’t attached to any other foundation than Jesus Christ, we are the church, its not a building, and he promised,

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

And so, Jesus is building this church, he is growing this church, and he’s the Lord of this church. He is our source, he is our provider, and I say that because even though we are growing, we are maturing, we may be finished with the manna, but God is not finished with us.

You see, when the manna stopped, God wasn’t done with Israel, they were just done with the manna. And so, no matter whether we buy this building or continue renting the building God is not done with us. And so, we must never see the stopping of manna or a new season as God saying that he is done with us. We shouldn’t even consider it because we know that,

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

In fact, I love the story in first Kings, where the Bible tells us that Elijah came through a season of drought to a brook where he had water to drink. What happens next is so amazing, it’s supernatural, and in chapter 17, verse six, the Bible says,

“The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook” (1 Kings 17:6).

However, sometime later the brook dried up because the drought continued and there had been no rain in the land. And so, the provision of God, the blessing of God dried up, but I want you to notice that Elijah didn’t go and pray for God to let the water flow. He didn’t pray for a miracle because he realized that the brook was dead, that season of provision was over, but the source, the river was not. And so, he turned his attention to God, he turned to his source and the Bible says,

“Then the word of the Lord came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food" (1 Kings 17:8-9).

Elijah waited on the Lord, as the psalmist said,

“The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:15-16).

And so, Elijah looked to God as his source of provision, he knew his source, his river was God and not the brook.

I believe there are some of you that need to have this imprinted deep inside of you, stamped on your heart, because when seasons shift in your life or in your finances, you feel like it’s over, you’re done with it, but God is not done with you. There are some of you today that are done with the brook, maybe the brook is a relationship, maybe the brook is your job, maybe the brook is your career, but you need to remember that your source is God and God is not done with you. That’s why the apostle Paul said to the Philippians,

“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

You see, your spiritual enemy will whisper in your ear and tell you that God is done with you. Because you failed, your best days are over, and you’re done. But the truth is we’re not unaware of the devil’s schemes, and so we can tell the devil, “I’m done with you, but God isn’t done with me. He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion until the last day.”

Whoever this is for, God is not finished with you, he’s not done with you. Jesus said,

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working” (John 5:17).

You see, God is working, Israel had stepped into a new season, but God was still the same. Moses wasn’t there, but God’s presence was still there. The manna wasn’t there, but God’s provision was still there. It was a new season in their spiritual journey and God was taking them deeper in their faith because they had yet to learn about sacrifice.

You see, Israel didn’t really sacrifice in Egypt, they didn’t really worship God in Egypt, because when things are taken from you by force it’s not a sacrifice. But one day God delivered them from slavery, they were told to sacrifice a lamb, and they came out of Egypt. The Bible says,

“The Israelites… asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people and they gave them what they asked for…” (Exodus 12:35–36).

And so, God blessed the Israelites by opening the hearts of the Egyptians, getting what had been withheld from them in their years of slavery. And so, God paid them back and they walked out of Egypt with great riches, but they still didn’t really know how to sacrifice. In fact, the Bible says they took the silver and gold they got from Egypt and instead of giving it to God,

“They made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made” (Acts 7:41).

And so, you can see that they didn’t know how to handle the blessings of God properly, they didn’t know how to worship, and they wasted it.

You see, a lot of people become slaves in their mind about finances and worship money instead of worshiping with their money. The Bible says that Israel worshiped it, but later on in the promised land they learned how to worship with it. We know that because when they entered the promised land, God told them that when they conquered the first city he says,

“The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord…” (Joshua 6.17).

And so, God tells Joshua when you enter Jericho, I want you to take all of the plunder, all of the good stuff out of the city and give it to me.

“Otherwise, you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury" (Joshua 6:18-19).

Now, just imagine that you are an Israelite, you’ve been traveling, living in tents for 40 years, and you’re finally realizing your dream. This is the promise of God to live in…

“…a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant” (Deuteronomy 6:10-11).

And now you’re finally seeing it with your eyes, this is the promise that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, you’re excited to possess your promise and then God says give the best things from the city to me and burn the rest of it. And so, you would think that they would be like, you’ve got to be kidding, what about me? Who’s going to take care of me? But look at what the Bible says,

“Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord's house (Joshua 6:24).

I want you to notice that none of the Israelites objected, none of them questioned why, because now after 40 years in the wilderness they understood the meaning of sacrifice, not that God was taking something from them, but it was their opportunity to put him first in their lives. And so, that’s exactly what Israel did, God gave them the promised land, and the first city they conquered, they gave it to God as the Scripture said,

“You must present as the Lord's portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you” (Numbers 18:29).

You see, when you tithe, when you give God the first, what you are doing is you are acknowledging that you know who the source of your blessing is. In other words, it’s an acknowledgment of where your blessings come from. And so, it’s worship, it’s acknowledging that your blessings come from God, they don’t come from your strength, they don’t come from your wisdom, they don’t come from your connections, but they come from God.

When you put God first in your finances, you are not trying to manipulate God’s blessings, but you are acknowledging that he is the source of your blessings. And that is why we,

“Honor the Lord with our wealth, with the firstfruits of all our crops” (Proverbs 3:9).

Israel came to understand sacrifice in this new season, because they recognized that their victories didn’t come from their own strength, but they came from God. That’s why Israel sang this song,

“You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes” (Psalm 44:4-5).

And so, as we put God first we are saying, “Lord you don’t need to remind me that my victories come from you, I know that, and I am praising you for my victory.” Moses said it this way,

“For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory" (Deuteronomy 20:4).

And so, it’s not because of my strength or my cleverness, it’s not because of my education, it’s not even the fact that I completed all the Dave Ramsey courses. None of that stuff is the source, all of that is the channel, God is my source, all of my blessings come from God.

And so, God blessed the Israelites because they honored him. The Bible says that he gave them the spoils of their victory.

“Land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant” (Joshua 24:13).

When you are putting God first, not only are you acknowledging that God is your source, but you are demonstrating faith that one touch of God’s favor can do more than years of your labor. And everything you are concerned about, everything you worry about, you can’t take it with you anyway unless you send it ahead of you by investing in the kingdom of God. That’s why Jesus said,

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

And so, we always want to put God first, not because he needs anything, but because he wants to be first so that our eternity is spent in his blessings.

It may take weeks or months or years for that gift, that seed, to take root and produce fruit for the kingdom of God; but one gift given in faith can initiate an explosive growth of spiritual fruit which God can multiply back into your life. It may not happen immediately, but I am confident of this, our God is working and “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1: 6). And so, I just want to encourage those of you who have lowered your expectations of God, because you have no idea what God can do through your faithfulness. He may not do exactly what you want him to do in the moment, but our God is working in all things to bring about good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose.

Our God is the God of breakthroughs, the God of miracles, and if you have started to lower your expectations of God, I want you to understand that God’s promises are true, his word is alive, and his presence is with us here today. We serve a God “who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20, NKJV). And so, it’s not just addition, but multiplication, exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. In other words, you have no idea how many lives can be touched, how many lives can be changed, and how much glory can be brought to our Father in Heaven through one life devoted to him.

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