

OPENER: FROM WALKING TO WAITING

Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at a “**Faith That Walks**” in the church. We began with God’s promises, remembered His mercy, and learned that discipleship is not driven by guilt but fueled by gratitude.

We read in **Psalm 103** who God is: the God who forgives, heals, redeems, and crowns us with steadfast love. We read in **Isaiah 58** what that love does, loosening chains and feeding the hungry. We watched Jesus in **Luke 13** straighten a bent-over woman on the Sabbath and show us what real mercy looks like. And in **Hebrews 12**, we see the posture that carries us forward: gratitude that leads to priest-like service and holy awe before the consuming fire of God’s love.

This has been more than a mini-series; it has been practice. You’ve written promises in journals, bought grocery bags, and released possessions. You have not only heard the Word, but you have also walked it out in your homes and neighborhoods. **That’s important because gratitude is not an idea; it’s a life lived.**

But now we pivot.

God’s story is bigger than a few weeks of practice. Today, we stand at a hinge point between two series. What we’ve just learned about gratitude, service, and awe will carry us into our next journey.

Because before Jesus came, there was a period that seemed silent. Four hundred years of it. No prophet’s voice, no fresh word from the Lord, and yet, not emptiness. Those centuries were filled with movement—empires rising and falling, cultures colliding, languages shifting, and God’s people waiting. The land was stirring—roads, rivers, and hillsides bore the weight of armies, migrations, and new rulers.¹ And yet beneath the silence, God was preparing the way for Christ.

That’s where we’re going next: a new series called *400 Years of Silence: Preparing the Way of the Lord*.

We’ll walk from Malachi to Matthew, from the last prophet to John the Baptist, listening and watching how God set the stage for the unshakable kingdom.

So, today’s sermon is both a conclusion and an introduction. It concludes our preparation in gratitude, service, and awe... And it introduces us to the long silence where God is **still faithful, still preparing, still moving** His story forward.

¹ Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land: Historical Geography Student Guide* (Camas, WA: BiblicalTraining.org, 2021).

INTRODUCTION: REMEMBER

Last week, we looked at the Logic of the Passage (Hebrews 12:18–29)

Gift → Gratitude → Service → Awe

1. **Gift.** We are receiving an unshakable kingdom (vv. 18–24). God is not giving us fear, but a home: a place of belonging. Cyndi Parker calls this “the drama of place”² where geography itself testifies to God’s covenant love.
2. **Gratitude.** “Let us be thankful” (v. 28). Gratitude, not guilt, is the engine of discipleship. N. T. Wright calls thanksgiving “the central act of true worship.”³ Gratitude turns duty into delight.
3. **Service as Worship.** Worship is not confined to songs; it is embodied obedience. The Greek word *latreuō* means priestly service. John MacArthur puts it plainly: “The only acceptable worship is service rendered in the way God prescribes.”⁴
4. **Awe Before Holy Love.** “Our God is a consuming fire” (v. 29). This is not destructive fury but holy love burning away what corrodes love. Paul Anderson calls this “the relational truth of the Spirit”⁵ purifying communities so they embody mercy. Awe keeps gratitude from becoming sentimentality and service from turning into self-congratulation.

Diagnostic Checks (This is huge! Does it ever cross your mind?)

- **Gratitude Check:** Is my week fueled by thanks or by ought-to?
- **Service Check:** Where will my worship be visible to a neighbor?
- **Awe Check:** What anxious pattern will I release to God’s refining fire?

CONCLUDING REVIEW: DELIGHT & RELEASE

- **Delight.** We celebrate God’s goodness with tangible acts—food bags and completed visits.
- **Release.** Last week, We asked you to release one thing you thought you had to keep: an item, a comfort, or a block of time, to satisfy the afflicted (Isa 58).
- Example: give away a tool you “might need someday” to someone who needs it now; redirect a streaming subscription into a grocery card; set aside two unhurried hours for a visit or delivery.
- Write down what you will release and for whom on the response card; drop it in the offering plate.
- Add a *Sabbath of Mercy*: one rest practice (screen-fast, unhurried meal, walk) + one neighbor-care act (visit/call/deliver).

² Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land: Historical Geography Student Guide* (Camas, WA: BiblicalTraining.org, 2021).

³ N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁴ John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).

⁵ Paul N. Anderson, *Following the Spirit: New Testament Perspectives on Discipleship and Community* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020).

- Pray this refrain through the week: “Restore us, O God; let your face shine” (Ps 80:3).

Monthly Practices (4-Week Action Plan)

- **Week 1:** Start a Promise Journal, write 3 promises, share one with a friend.
- **Week 2:** Embrace justice, sign up for hands-on action, pick up a grocery list, and bag.
- **Week 3:** Readiness & Delight, give away one possession you thought you had to keep.

CLOSING: INTO THE SILENCE

So, church, remember the movement we have been practicing:

- Psalm 103 shows who God is—merciful and just.
- Isaiah 58 shows what love does—breaking yokes and satisfying the afflicted.
- Luke 13 shows how Jesus embodies it—standing people upright on the Sabbath.
- And Hebrews 12 shows us how to keep at it—with grateful, reverent worship in an unshakable kingdom.

This has been our training ground: *gratitude, service, and awe*. We’ve learned to delight in God’s gifts and to release mercy into our neighborhoods. That’s what discipleship looks like when it walks...

But the story doesn’t end here. Just as Israel’s story didn’t end with the last words of Malachi, ours doesn’t end with a completed mini-series. Between Malachi and Matthew stretched 400 years of silence: no prophet’s voice, no new word. And yet, God was not absent. The silence was filled with preparation—roads built, languages spread, empires shaken—so that when Christ came, the world was ready.

That is where we turn next. Over the coming weeks, we’ll journey into that silence together. We will walk the roads of history, geography, and longing, and we’ll see how every stone was being set for the Cornerstone. We’ll discover that God’s silence was never God’s absence. It was the groundwork for the kingdom we now receive with gratitude and awe.

So, take this with you today: the God who gave Israel hope in silence is the same God who gives you an unshakable kingdom in Christ. He is still faithful. He is still preparing. And He is still calling His people to walk in gratitude, service, and holy awe. Amen.

New Living Translation (NLT) Hebrews 12:18-29

Heb 12:18, “You have not come to a physical mountain [Greek, to something that can be touched], to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai.”

Heb 12:19, “For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking.”

Heb 12:20, “They staggered back under God’s command: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” [Exod 19:13.]

Heb 12:21, “Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, “I am terrified and trembling.” [Deut 9:19]

Heb 12:22, “No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering.”

Heb 12:23, “You have come to the assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect.”

Heb 12:24, “You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.”

Heb 12:25, “Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven!

Heb 12:26, “When God spoke from Mount Sinai, his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: ‘Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.’” [Hag. 2:6]

Heb 12:27, “This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.”

Heb 12:28, “Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.”

Heb 12:29, “For our God is a devouring fire.” [Word picture of the burning bush]