

Ezekiel

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Preacher: Rowell, Peter

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..... so spiritually depraved, because that's what they were.

The message that God sent was one of most amazing and sovereign mercy. There was absolutely nothing in the life of these people that could have attracted God's attention except in judgment.

Absolutely nothing. There was nothing for God to approve of. There was everything for God to condemn. And yet he says, I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.

[13 : 21] You might say, well, surely Ezekiel is going to be sent to these people to tell them that God is going to have pity on them. That comes later in the chapter.

But what is first declared is that God has pity on his own holy name. It may sound like a rather strange expression, that God should have pity on his own holy name.

What it means is this, that God's heart was deeply stirred. It was deeply stirred because of the way in which the heathen were ridiculing his name.

Even though they were doing it because of the behavior of Israel, God's people. And God has a deep regard for his own honor and the honor of his own name.

He has a deep concern as to how people treat his name. It is intensely sad and every believer feels the sadness of it, that in our day people disregard God.

[14 : 38] I suppose those of you who work in factories and shops and offices and so on in your profession would more often than not hear the name of God spoken as a blasphemy.

That is the common way in which God's name is used in this country by the vast majority of people and the only way they know how to use God's name as a blasphemy.

But God has pity upon his holy name. He has a deep heartfelt regard for his own honor. Those of us who pray, we pray that God will come again mightily into the life of this country so that his name will be honored.

We can pray over verses like this. We can ask God to do in our day what he promised to do in Ezekiel's day, to have pity upon his own holy name.

And he goes on to say to these people, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake.

[15 : 54] That's exactly what I said a moment ago, that there was nothing in these people that could draw the attention of God in a gracious and loving way to the people.

There was no good in them. And so God tells them quite bluntly, I do not this for your sakes. The underlying reason why God acted in this most remarkable way toward these people was for his own honor.

That it was for the people's good ultimately is very true. But primarily it was for his own honor. He says, I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them.

And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord. If ever there was a need in our country today, that is the need.

That God will so act in our national history that the heathen will recognize, regard and reverence the holy name of God.

[17 : 16] They will know him to be the living God and will be compelled to bow and to recognize that he is God when God sanctifies.

That means he will set it apart, make it special. He will sanctify his great name. And our hearts surely yearn for that day to come when God's name will be regarded in that way.

I still remember a day when I was at school, a boy, at school in Rochdale in Lancashire. We were sitting in the classroom doing lessons one day and suddenly the sky took on a most peculiar colour.

Of course in those days there were lots of factories in Rochdale all pouring out smoke into the atmosphere. There was no smokeless zones in those days. And being a cotton town with a lot of manufacturing industry in the town, of course there was an enormous amount of industrial smoke.

Well, it was one of those days when a pall of smoke and fog seemed to settle over the whole town. And the sky took on a colour which I can still remember but I can't describe.

[18 : 43] It was a weird, greenish, reddy colour. And do you know, everybody in the class was afraid. You could tell that.

They were afraid. Why do you think they were afraid? Because something had happened which was very unusual, which they couldn't understand, which was quite beyond them.

And I rather think that deep down they wondered if something awful was about to happen. Was it going to be the end of the world?

Was God going to come in sudden judgement and deal with men as they deserve? That was the question in my mind and perhaps in other people's minds.

That's not quite so clearly in other people's minds but certainly in mine. And I began to understand what this means.

[19 : 49] I will sanctify my great name. I will make people feel that I am God. They will be afraid of me because I am God.

They will regard me because I am God. They will reverence me because I am God. They will no longer laugh at the thought of God.

They will no longer scorn these weird religious people who believe in God. They will no longer take the name of the Lord in vain. They will reverence the Lord God.

There's a day coming, you know. It's true whether we believe it or not. There's a day coming when before him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That is the honour that Christ has. And that day is fast coming when to him every knee shall bow. Some will be compelled to bow.

[20 : 52] Some will gladly bow. What a difference. What really is the reaction of your own heart to this tonight thing?

Do you gladly bow at the name of Jesus? Do you gladly recognise him as God and as Lord? Is it an inward joy and privilege that you have to bow before the living God?

Or are you still scorning this God and disregarding his holy name? Do you remember that he says I will sanctify my great name and when we feel our smallness and our weakness our helplessness and our sinfulness his great name will fill us with a sense of awe.

It is the greatness the awesomeness of God which is lacking in many hearts today and in many so-called Christians today.

A sense of the awesome greatness of God. He is indescribably glorious. He is indescribably great.

[22 : 12] He has a great name but it's profaned among the heathens. And ye have profaned it in the midst of them. You who should know better. You whose life should be exemplary.

You whose testimony should be exceedingly clear in such a wicked situation. In such a wicked world. Such an evil and adulterous generation.

Yes, says God. Ye have profaned it in the midst of them. But the heathen shall know that I am the Lord when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

God is going to deal first with his people then. Because he has such a great regard for his own name he will deal with his own people.

And the way in which he begins to deal with them is this. I shall be sanctified in you. In other words these people are going to have a new and deeper regard for God.

[23 : 23] A regard for God such as they have never had before. And it will have such an effect on them that the heathen will know what has happened. And mistakably they will see something has happened.

I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. And what God is going to do is to produce a fundamental separation between these people.

Well you say there was a difference they were of a different nationality yes but they were taken by the heathen they were scattered amongst the heathen they had many of them settled down as though they belonged where they were.

There wasn't the distinctiveness that there had been when they were back in their own land. In the better days when they did regard God now there was no such distinctiveness.

And what the Lord is saying is that I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries and will bring you into your own land.

[24 : 39] God is going as it were to re-establish the distinction between Israel and everyone else. That of course did happen historically it happened in fulfillment of this prophecy but we look again at the spiritual principle in these words and what is it?

The spiritual principle surely is this the separateness and distinctiveness of the people of God. They are not to live amongst the heathen as though they were heathen.

They are not to be indistinguishable from the heathen. They are to be a separate people. They are to be separate principally because of their regard for God's greatness.

It is because their hearts will so deeply reverence this great God that it will affect their lives and everyone will see that they are a different a separate a distinct people.

How can that be when the people are so wicked? When they have become so mingled with the heathen. Well, from verse 25 we have a most wonderful description of the work of God amongst the people.

[26 : 05] He says, I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean. From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. One of the worst aspects of the worship of idols in those days was the vile immorality associated with those idols.

And I really only need to say that and surely you can make application to the present day situation. Is it not true that the idols which many of our young people are following are vile in their immorality, utterly unfaithful in their relationships, blatant in the evil of their life?

This is a terrifying and awful thing. And for those of us who are parents, and we had eight children so I know a little of what I'm talking about, for those of us who are parents, it is a fearsome thing to realize that the idols of the youth of today are vile, as vile as these idol worshippers were in their death.

And there's a desperate cry in my heart, for my own children and my own young people at home, and indeed tonight for you here, that God will work like this in your life, and he will cleanse you.

This is the meaning, surely, underlying these words, I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. There's a wonderful symbolism in this verse.

[27 : 45] We do need to be inwardly cleansed, we need to be washed. Do you ever pray like this? Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.

Wash you, and I shall be whiter than snow. You know, one of the distinctive marks of a real Christian believer is that he hates sin with a deep tremendous hatred in his heart.

And you may put your Christianity to the test tonight, friends, with one simple question. Do I want to be cleansed from all my sins?

From all my idols? For this is what Ezekiel is saying, ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you.

Do we really want that to happen? Do we really want God to come into our lives and so deal with us? That everything that is unclean, everything that is ungodly, all has to go out of our lives until our lives centre upon the one great object of faith, the living God.

[29 : 15] Well, we go on to read that the work of God is of this kind. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

You surely must have noticed how many times in the Bible we have declarations like this. God doesn't come to people and say, now my dear friends, do let me do something for you.

Do let me help you. He comes and he says, a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

This is a wonderful chapter to teach the absolute sovereign graciousness of God. God doesn't come to men begging them to let him do something.

He comes to God declaring what he is about to do, and what he will most surely accomplish. He doesn't wait for us to let him do things.

[30 : 32] He says, this I will do, and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Of course, the immediate fulfillment of that was when these people were taken back to their own country, and the true worship of Jehovah was established again amongst them.

And those commandments that God had given to them in their national history were commandments that have meaning and significance to them again. And friend, isn't it like that with Christianity, so-called today?

Isn't this what God must do for present day Christianity? Cause you to walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments?

Oh, how thankful I am that you have here such a ministry, as will direct your mind and heart to the statutes, the commands of Jesus Christ, the holy law of Christ, those divine gracious principles, those holy sanctifying principles of truth, a ministry that demands this kind of change in our lives, a ministry that tells us that God, and God alone, accomplishes such a change, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes.

[32 : 09] Another test, another simple test of your Christianity tonight is just that. Do you deep down in your very heart submit to Jesus Christ?

Do you really want him to be king in your life, to rule over you, to have that absolute right, to tell you precisely what you shall do?

and does your heart respond to that? We have a sinful wicked nature, you know, that is in rebellion against God and must be subdued.

When it is subdued, the evidence will be this, that we agree with Jesus Christ, that we agree with God, that deep within our hearts there is that sense of agreement.

Though we feel how weak we are, though we feel often to fail in what we do, yet there's that inner agreement. We say in all sincerity then, thy will be done.

[33 : 24] And friends, I've lived through some things in my life which I never expected to see, which I couldn't possibly have imagined would be the will of God.

some of them have been intensely painful. It is no easy thing to say, thy will be done.

And yet, when the heart is really broken and really knowing this inner regard and reverence for the holy, the mighty name of the Lord, then your heart will say, Lord, thy will be done.

Thy will not mine, O Lord. Well, the Lord goes on to say, I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will call for the corn and will increase it and lay no famine upon you.

I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, and you shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. God is going to come and give a time of real blessing and real prosperity.

[34 : 47] Again, of course, we must interpret the language of the prophet by seeking these spiritual principles underlying them. people. When God has cleansed the people from their uncleanness, then there is spiritual prosperity.

But whilst they cling to their uncleanness, there is no spiritual prosperity. And another thing we notice in the Old Testament over and over again, that godly people were deeply distressed because the people of God were in such a sad plight.

And they thought that it was an awful thing for the heathen to be able to look at God's people and say, look at them. They say they're God's people and look what he's doing to them.

What a god to have when he does that sort of thing to them. There they are. They're all starving with famine. And in those who were superstitious, these idol worshippers who were so superstitious, it was the automatic reaction to say, wasn't it?

Well, their God isn't any good. He can't do anything for them. They're all starving with famine. And godly people felt that. They felt that was a very painful thing for the heathen to be saying things like that.

[36 : 16] Now, friends, when the church, is in a low place, when it is weak, diminished. And when it is sad, when it is suffering from a kind of spiritual famine, and is constantly starving for spiritual food, and is subsequently desperately weak, the heathen can say, what?

You say that that is the true church? If numbers prove anything today, well then, an organisation like the Roman Catholic Church should surely gain the victory.

Now, when the people say, that must be the church of God, because look at it, it's so big and so prosperous, and those who are weak and apparently helpless, they are saying, but we believe the true God.

We believe what the word of God declares. we are clinging to the truth. These have forsaken the word of God, they have added to the word of God.

We are trying to be faithful, and people point at the faithful ones and say, what? You're the faithful one, and God is treating you like this? It can't be like that.

[37 : 44] And wonderfully, Ezekiel comes with this message of God, and he says, it won't always be like that. It is not always going to be like that. I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon it.

I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field that ye shall receive no more reproach. God is going to vindicate his own cause, and his own church, and he will vindicate his faithful ones, and he will vindicate your faithful stand for the truth.

You say, well, we seem to wait a long time for that. Maybe there are other things that God is doing. Maybe we are at present entering upon, shall we say, the preparation.

Maybe God is dealing with us deeply. Maybe God is stripping us of our idols, ridding us of our uncleanness, cleansing us.

Maybe this is the time of preparation. Then, when this time of blessing comes, says Ezekiel, and God says it through him, then shall ye remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.

[39 : 15] I think if there was ever an expression that would be anathema to a nominal and superficial Christianity, it's that word loathe.

Ye shall loathe yourselves. you don't say things like that today, do you? You mustn't say things like that with all the modern advances in psychology and all the rest of it.

You can't encourage people to say that they loathe themselves. They've got to have self-respect. This is the argument. Friend, you'll never have real self-respect until there's something to respect.

And the only thing that's worthy of respect is God's word. So far as we are concerned, when we're left to ourselves, there's nothing to respect, is there?

The heart knows its own bitterness. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately weak. Who can know it? This is how God speaks about man's heart.

[40 : 27] And one of the things that God is going to do, as it were, in the very beginnings of blessing and revival, is to bring his people to loathe themselves.

I don't know whether it's in your hymn book, but there's a verse in our hymn book that goes something like this, I hate the sins that made thee mourn and drove thee from my breath.

And it's when believing people, feeling their souls, this intense hatred of sin because of what it has done and brought a separation between them and God, it is then that I believe God is truly blessing a people.

I heard a quaint story years ago of a prayer meeting in one of the churches in the Midlands. And at the end of the prayer meeting there was always a place on the back row where there was a wet patch on the floor.

Why? Because there was a person there they used to call Mr. Wet Eyes. Mr. Wet Eyes. He was always crying.

[41 : 46] at the prayer meeting he wept. Why? Because he loathed himself. He hated his sin. His confession was real.

His repentance was from the heart and he wept before his God. Friends, when this floor is wet at your prayer meeting, God is blessing you.

May that day come. Here and at home ye shall remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abomination.

Isn't it a dreadful and evil thing that anything should have taken God's place in our hearts and the place of Jesus in our lives?

not for your sakes do I this, says the Lord. Be it known unto you, be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

[42 : 55] Thus saith the Lord God, in the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will also cause you to dwell in the cities and the wastes shall be built.

you know, one of the saddest things we find in Coventry, we have a chapel building right in the centre of the city, it's only a few hundred yards from the new cathedral.

Opposite us is a bingo hall, just a few yards down the road, it is the most low and pornographic cinema in the town.

Within a stone's throw there are two very disreputable public houses. Not so very long ago I went into our upstairs room after I came back from a summer holiday and you'd hardly believe it but in our upstairs room there was a table, on the table was a chair, in the chair was a man sitting with a pair of binoculars and beside him was a walkie-talkie set.

I couldn't believe my eyes and I stood there flabbergasted. Oh he said, I'm sorry, we're police officers, who are you? I said, I'm the pastor here.

[44 : 09] Oh he said, well we got permission from your deacon to come here. I said, what are you doing? He said, we're observing that shop along the street. Oh, I said, why? Well he said, we're the drug squad.

I stood with them for a little while and he said, you see that couple walking along here? He said, it's the man on the outside we're after. well it wasn't very long after that that they got it.

You see, that's the situation that we are living in. This is where we are in Coventry. And what I was going to say was this, what makes us so sad is that people come into the chapel, there we are in the centre, they hear the word of God.

They never come again, they just wander in and wander out. Some of them, some of them wander out long before I've finished, some of them wander out before I've started. They've no interest at all.

You wonder whenever there is going to be any building up. Well, God says, when I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be built.

[45 : 33] I have never lived in this area, so I don't really know much about the history of this area, but I'm told that at one stage this chapel was closed not all that many years ago.

It had come really to not. Now, using the language of Ezekiel's prophecy, this place had become waste, empty, useless.

There was no living spiritual soul. And God says, I will also cause you to dwell in the city.

Your pastor told us of how the church was formed. God's God's blessing. Now, that is a modern way of understanding what Ezekiel is saying here.

I will cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be built. Churches will grow. The desolate land shall be tilled. There will be a work of God going on in an area which is absolutely desolate, empty of all spiritual life.

[46 : 45] And this is God's blessing. And this is the wonderful prospect that is held before us in this chapter. God is going to work so mightily that the land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden.

I don't suppose any of us who are pastors here tonight can quite say that. Thank you.