

Restoration, Mission and You

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Date: 30 June 2019

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[0:00] Thank you. Tonight, I'm a missionary, so tonight you're going to hear a sermon on missions.

I want to say that might sound weird, but missionaries and weirdness kind of go together, so you'll just have to put up with this. When we think about world missions, and that doesn't exclude local missions, and when I think world, I'm thinking starting at home, but then going around.

What's the motive? Why do we do that? Is this something we do as Christians or something we're supposed to think about and do, and it's a little tick box we have to think about, and maybe somebody else will go and do that for us?

Why do we engage in missions? And as you begin to think about that, and we'll think more about that as we look through this passage, what's the goal of missions?

If God were to give success for all of our missionary endeavor, and pour out His grace upon us, at the end, what would it look like?

[1:16] What's the goal toward which we're striving when we think about missions? Now I would like us to think about these two areas, the motive and the goal of missions, and then allow the amazing truths of Ezekiel 36, 16 to 27, to challenge our thinking, and to give us at least an Old Testament perspective on missions.

John Angus and I always fence back and forth about Old Testament versus New Testament. It's the Word of God, both old and new. And so an Old Testament perspective is a biblical perspective.

I don't want to set those over against each other. But first of all, some background on the prophets. They come during times of uncertainty, and God gives a message through them to His people.

It's a message of either judgment, because they've violated the covenant and turned their backs on Him, or of restoration. So the prophets aren't always doom and gloom.

You know, the end is coming, and you have to repent. There are pictures of restoration that just take your breath away at what God is planning. And here we begin to see that missions is not something we do.

[2:42] It's something God has been engaged in doing. And He will bring about His desired end in missions. The functions of the prophets were to call God's people back to faithfulness of the covenant.

And the book of Ezekiel was written by a prophet who was already in exile. He had already experienced the judgment of God that removed some of God's people to exile.

It was before the time of Jeremiah when the final destruction of Jerusalem took place, where Jeremiah was in Jerusalem and saw the fall. Ezekiel was already in exile. And it's very interesting that in the book of Ezekiel, his wife dies on the time when Jerusalem fell.

And God says to him, you're not allowed to mourn, because it was an expression of God's loss of His people and their sin that He had to send them off into exile.

The overall purpose of the book of Ezekiel is to warn those still remaining in Judah and Jerusalem to turn from their sin before further destruction would come, but then also to warn those who were in exile to turn back to the Lord.

[3:57] And we'll see that as we look at this passage. You would think they were in the land and God had to remove them because of their sin. You'd think when they got there they'd go, okay, we've got to repent. But they were in danger of falling back into idolatry again in the land.

After our passage here in Ezekiel 36, as I've already said, this passage about the resurrection of the dead, of dry bones, scattered bones.

And then there's a picture of this temple that's being rebuilt. And there's a river that starts from the temple and flows into the Dead Sea so that the Dead Sea becomes a living place where fishermen

cast their nets.

I've swam in the Dead Sea. It's so salty you cannot sink in it. Even with my body, you can't sink in it. Okay? So the thought of that being a place where fish would dwell is a picture of this resurrection. And restoration that God is bringing about. So as we look at this passage, I want us to look at, first of all, the problem. Because if we're going to understand the motive behind missions and the goal of missions, we have to understand the problem that God is addressing in mission.

[5 : 14] And then we'll look at the motive, what it's not and what it is, and then the goal. Ezekiel gives us a four-fold process or description of what God is going to do in mission.

So first of all, the problem. Bluntly, it's sin. If you look at Ezekiel 36, 16-19, we see this.

The Son of Man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. It was the sinful acts of God's people. It wasn't theological uncertainty or error. It was what they were doing. Their heart had conceived sin and it showed in the way they lived.

By their ways, their deeds. And this reference here, this metaphor of a woman in her uncleanness, that excluded a woman from worshiping God. So their sin had excluded them from the worship of God.

[6 : 17] So it's sin. It's not their lack of education and they just need to be taught a little bit more.

It's not that they're hungry and they need to be fed. Missions has to start with the sin of people. Their active, willful rebellion against God.

And mission is directed toward that. We have to understand that and have that as a foundation. So what's God do? Well, now be nice. He says to His people, right?

That's what it says in your Bible. I want you to look. In verse 18, So I poured out My wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land and for the idols with which they had defiled it. God sends judgment on sin. He's a holy God. We'll see more about that in this passage. So He has to judge their sin. They had shed blood. They were persecuting or oppressing their own people to the point of killing them.

[7 : 22] And they were engaged in idolatry. Wasn't it that they had torn down the temple and stopped worshiping? No. They were doing that and worshiping idols.

So God says, I've got to judge this. I can't let this go on. And so God judges their sin. And He pours out His wrath on their bloodshed and their idolatry.

And then He scatters them amongst the nations in judgment. He had promised that. This was not something new. All the way back in Deuteronomy, God said, If you break My covenant, you're gone.

And that's happened now. God's people are in exile. They were well aware that that's because they had broken God's covenant. And so He sends them into exile.

He scatters them. He disperses them. And He judges them. And He judges them not because He's this mean God of the Old Testament, you know, who just likes to make life miserable for people.

[8 : 20] He judges them because of their ways and their deeds. Again, it's their sin. God has to deal with that sin issue. And so He judges them.

Then in verses 20 and 21, we see the sin of the people in exile. That they sinned while they were in the land has been made clear.

So they get into exile. You think about this. This is not a little, you know, ride up the sky. This was 1,800 miles walking as an exile to an uncertain future.

How would you be treated? What would you do? They're in exile now. They've had a lot of time to think about, oh, we sinned and God had to send us out of the land. So they get to exile.

And again, you'd think, okay, maybe we should shape up. Maybe we should change a few things about how we look at things and how we act with regard to God.

[9 : 23] But look what it says in verse 20. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name. No different.

The sin issue is still there. God's judged them. But they're still actively profaning God's name.

They're making it common. God's name was to be holy, set apart from everything else.

And they're saying it's no different. The God we serve, that's no different. He's no different. The location here is now in the land that the people are sinning just as they had when they were back in the land.

They're in exile. God's name is all that He is. And it's holy. Think of what Isaiah sees when he sees God high and lifted up.

And these creatures that surround the throne, all they can say is holy. That's who He is. But God's people were saying, nah, He's no different than anything else.

[10:31] They were profaning His name. And again, it's sin of God's people, which is the cause of God's mission. Then in verse 21, But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.

Even if the people had no concern for God's name, He did. He had concern for how they had violated His name.

And He could have said, I'm done. But that's not our God. Thanks be to God. Because none of us would be here if that's the way He acted. By sin, and God says, okay, we're done.

But He goes after them. He wants to save them. That's what His mission is. But He can't just kind of go, well, whatever. It's okay.

Don't worry about it. This is a holy God whose people are actively, willfully, rebelliously profaning His name.

[11:37] So what does He do? Well, first of all, we see what the motive for missions is not in verse 22. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, it is not for your sake.

I get around a lot of missions, circles, and missions is often about the needs of people. They need to be saved. They need to go to heaven. They need to have a happy life. A fulfilled life.

Or they're poor and they need somebody to take care of them. They're hungry and so we need to feed them. These are all kinds of motives for missions. But do you hear what God's Word says here?

It is not for your sake. That's not what God's acting. To make life enjoyable for people. To provide for the poor. He says it's not for your sake.

O house of Israel, that I'm about to act. But for the sake of my holy name. God is going to act. He's going to engage in mission because of who He is.

[12:40] He's the holy God. And He's going to act. The people have profaned His name among the nations. And this verse spells out the real point of the entire passage.

It is not merely that God feels sorry for His people and wants them to be happy or fulfilled. The first words right after and thus says the Lord God are not for your sake.

Missions is not about people. It's about God's name and making sure that it's holy. You have to just stop here and think. What would the world be like if God's name was made holy in the whole earth? Everything every person did was to lift up God's name as holy. Whew. I can't wait for that day when that happens.

But that's what mission's about. God makes quite clear that His people have profaned His name. Violation of the third commandment. They've been engaging in idolatry. Second commandment.

[13:48] They've murdered. Sixth commandment. So Ezekiel is going through the law of God and saying you've broken it, you've broken it, you've broken it. I've judged. The text says, adds the expression that I'm about to act.

The verb act here is the word that's used in creation narrative referring to God's creative activity. God's about to create something. It's a new creation here.

These people have sinned against Him so God's got to hit the reset button and bring about a new creation. It's another world that has to be brought about by God's grace.

That's what missions is about. Also we need to see the contrast here between what the people of God were doing while they were in exile and God's express purpose for them as a nation.

After Yahweh had redeemed Israel out of Egypt, He told them that they were to be a holy nation. Why? He wanted to make life miserable for them? You have to be holy and not do these things and do these things and so forth.

[14:58] No. God's people were redeemed. Why? So that they could show the nations who He was. God is holy. How do the nations know that? They could look at God's people and go, Oh, that's what it's like.

So every aspect of life in the camp of Israel was to reflect God's holiness. That's why all the laws about cleanness and uncleanness and all the rest, it was so that the nations would know who God was.

Israel was to be, in a certain sense, a missionary nation calling God's people and the nations to worship God. Sadly, they failed at that purpose.

And so God has to here act. He's got to make sure that His name is made holy. They were to be a kingdom of priests who would declare God's holiness to the nations, calling them to join with God's people in worshipping Yahweh.

And yet here they are, intentionally profaning God's name, not doing what God had redeemed them to do. And it's because of that flagrant sin that Yahweh must act.

[16:06] He can't allow the situation to continue. He has to act for the sake of His holy name.

That's the motive of missions. It's not so that people can go to heaven and have their sins forgiven.

Those are part of it. But why are they important? It's because when they have their sins forgiven, they realize that God is holy and that they are sinners. And that He has to save them.

This passage, with its emphasis in Ezekiel 36, 22 and 32, on the fact that Yahweh is going to do something not for the sake of His people, but for His own namesake, draws attention to a fundamental difference, I think, in the way the Old Testament looks at salvation and restoration and mission and the way we often do today.

Many evangelicals in our time view description of salvation in terms of the benefits for people. But that's not what God's concerned about.

They are benefited, but His primary concern is about His own nation, His own name, and His own character. It's God-centered, not man-centered.

[17:18] God must save, He must redeem, He must transform. Or to use the language here in Ezekiel 36, He has to gather and cleanse and remove a heart of stone and give a new heart and put His Spirit and cause His people to walk in His statutes.

Primary focus is the holiness, the sanctification of God's name. God has to bring about restoration and salvation in order that He once again receives the glory due to His name.

God created us so that we would bring glory to Him. What's the chief end of man? It's to glorify God. That's why He created us. But do we do that?

Does the world know that God is a holy God and a glorious God because of who you are, how you live? Or are you profaning God's name? God is engaged in mission so that His name would be made holy in all the earth.

In Ezekiel 36 verses 20, the last part, and verse 21, we see what the motive is very clearly expressed. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them.

[18:37] And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes. This verse, these two verses, really just one verse, 23, it's staggering to me.

What God is going to do is He's going to vindicate the holiness of His name. Literally what that says is I'm going to make My holy name holy. Holy. That's what He's going to do.

That's what missions is. God acting to make His name holy. But look what it says. How is He going to do that? Some, you know, worldwide display of power and awe.

And so He appears in the clouds and everybody goes, wow, God's holy. What does it say there? He says, I'm going to do that through you.

God's holy. This is the Creator who spoke and all things came into being of all the ways for Him to choose to make His name holy. This is astounding.

[19:46] He does that through us, His people. How are your neighbors who don't know that God is holy ever going to know that? They're not going to just sit in their, you know, lounge and one evening go, oh, I think I'm going to read the Bible and I'm going to discover that God's holy.

Probably, probably, that's not going to happen. It's when they see your life, see how you interact with them, with your own family.

You start to show them what God is like and the way you react and how you live. Here God is saying that His people had profaned His name among the nations to which He had sent them in judgment.

How is that? They were doing it themselves actively. But it's also interesting that here we're told that the nations began to chat and say, wait a minute, these are God's people but they're out of the land. And so, that was a reflection on who God was. That they were out of the land. God had promised Abraham that He would give His people a land. Now they're not there.

[20:59] So the nations were going, what kind of God is that? They were profaning God's name because the people were there in exile. And so, God says, I've got to rectify that.

I've got to deal with that. I've got to make my name holy. I've got to vindicate the holiness of my great name. And so, how is He going to do that? He says He's going to do that through you. And it just staggers my mind. The holy God who spoke says, okay, your task is to make my name holy.

I can't do that. None of you know me. You'd be shocked if you did. How am I going to make people I come in contact with aware that God is holy?

When the sinfulness of my own heart just cries out the opposite of that. God's got to do something in my life.

[22:07] And this is where we get the goal of missions. It's not just that God's going to say, okay, I'm going to make my name holy and there it is. It's done. God's got to work in each of His people changing them, dealing with the core issue of sin.

It's not just, I'll let it slide. God has to remake each one of us. Changing us. Conforming us to His Son so that we can reflect His glory, His holiness to the nations.

He's going to take them from the peoples because the people were saying, oh, this God is powerless. He can't even get His own people back into their land.

So He's got to restore them not as an end in itself. It's not get back to Israel and then everything's good. Then their hearts weren't changed.

They'd go back into sin again and again just like they've done over the years. You read through the Old Testament. It's just that pattern. God redeems His people, they sin. God redeems His people, they sin.

[23:16] God redeems His people and they sin. So He gets them back out of exile. Great! They're no longer in exile. He's faithful to the covenant promise. But they're back there and their hearts aren't changed.

So they can sin again. So it's not just a matter of gathering His people from the nations. But He's got to cleanse them. Now it's interesting.

Most of the time in the Old Testament cleansing is done with blood. Atonement has to be made.

There has to be a sacrifice. A substitute has to die to pay for sin.

But that's not what it says here. What's God going to do? He's going to cleanse His people not by the shedding of blood but with water. Verse 25, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness plural and all your idols plural I will cleanse you.

Idolatry is a matter of the heart not just external action. Uncleanness is something that prohibits us from coming into God's presence. And God says I'm going to sprinkle you clean.

[24:30] I'm going to clean you up. He's going to do it with water. Odd. The only other place I'm aware that water is used for cleansing like this is when the priests were about to go into the temple or the tabernacle.

They would go past the altar where the sacrifices were made. The next object in the tabernacle was the laver where they would wash. They would cleanse themselves in order to go in and worship the Lord on behalf of His people.

That's what's pictured here. God says I'm going to cleanse you so that you can come into my presence and be this holy nation a kingdom of priests and worship me again and call the nations. But God's got to cleanse us. This is not something we can do. I want you to go home tonight and I want you to cleanse yourself of all your sin. Good luck. It doesn't work.

God has got to do that. God's got to cleanse His people if they're ever going to come before Him and worship. But then we see the next step in this process of restoration and recreation in verse 26.

[25:48] It says, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

You see, this is a heart issue. Our hearts are in active rebellion against God. Try it.

Just say, I'm going to stop sinning. You might for a few seconds and then you'll be puffed up with pride and go, oh, look, I got a couple seconds there where I didn't sin.

And then boom. We need a new heart. God, our hearts are hearts of stone when it comes to loving God. So God has got to act here.

He's got to give a new heart and a new spirit He'll put within you. And He's going to remove the heart of stone from your flesh.

[26:46] And this is to annihilate it. This isn't God saying, I'm going to just tweak up your heart a wee bit. So you'll be a little bit better than you were before. And I'll just give you that little bit of help to put you over the edge and then you can do it on your own.

No. This is full heart transplant spiritually where God removes the heart of stone and puts a heart of flesh. This is not flesh in the Pauline sense of sinful nature.

This is one that's compliant, pliable, that loves the Lord. God's got to do that. We can't change our hearts. God's got to do that. But He's promising just that here.

He says, I'm going to do this. I'm going to give you a new heart and a new spirit. And He's going to remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. The word that's used there for remove is not just adjust.

It's to completely remove it, annihilate it, destroy it. That heart that's always struggling against God in sin. God says, I've got to deal with that.

[27:51] I've got to remove that. That's what salvation is all about. That's what mission is all about. Some people think, oh, we can do missions. Let's get out there and just do it.

Roll up our sleeves and go do it. This is what mission is. It's changing people's hearts. We can't do that. Only God can do that.

That's His mission, though. It's not just to make people happy and take care of the poor. It's to recreate them. To change them from the inside out.

Giving them a new heart. A heart that loves Him. A heart of flesh. That would have been amazing enough as we go on through this passage in verse 27.

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules. this side of Pentecost. We go, yeah, that's right.

[28:55] The Holy Spirit's come. We have the Holy Spirit now. Great. For an Old Testament believer, this was almost inconceivable. Think about all of the Old Testament.

Everything screams separation. This is a Holy God. You cannot approach Him. God's presence. So you have a tabernacle in the midst of the camp. Only the priests there go in there.

Then only with sacrifices. Now high priests can only go in the Holy of Holies one time a year. That after sacrificing for Himself and then the people. Everything says, this is a Holy God.

You can't go there. Only the high priests once a year could go into God's presence. But God's saying, here, I'm going to put my Spirit within you.

The Spirit of this Holy God dwelling within us. Why do we call Him the Holy Spirit? It's so that He makes us holy. That's why He's dwelling in us.

[29:53] Not just that we have good feelings, but so that we would be conformed to God, reflect His holiness. So that God's name would be lifted up as holy in all the earth through us.

this is amazing. What happens when God puts His Holy Spirit in His people here?

They break out in utterances and have wonderful experiences and whatever, right? The revelations that they have. What does it say there in verse 27? It says, and He's going to cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

It's a very similar to Jeremiah's picture of the New Covenant where God writes His law on the heart of His people. Here He puts His Spirit in our hearts. What happens? We begin to do what He says.

We obey His law. We reflect God's character because God's law is not just a list of do's and don'ts. It's a reflection, a revelation of who He is. God has to put His own Spirit within us.

[30:59] The Spirit is brooding over the waters at creation. To create in us a new heart that loves the Lord. That's what missions is.

And again, I dare you. Try that. Try to put God's Spirit into somebody else. We can't do this. That doesn't mean, oh, we've got to sit back and just kind of wait for God to do it, and that's it.

Mission starts with us. God recreating each one of you and me. It's only when then I begin to reflect God's holiness by the way I live.

That doesn't mean, you know, I'm better than you, and I do things and you don't. I go to church on Sundays and you stay home and watch TV or whatever. No. It's reflecting the fullness of God's glory in the way I live, what I say.

That doesn't mean we live perfect lives. what it means is when we fall, and we will, we draw on the grace of God. We ask for forgiveness.

[32:05] So that when your neighbors, your colleagues at work, see how you interact with them, they hear you asking for forgiveness for something. They see husbands and wives relating to each

other on that level, parents and children.

The world then begins to see what it means for God to be holy in the way we live our lives. That's how we do that. That will open up doors and opportunities for communication and conversations with people that you won't have enough time in the day to deal with.

Too often we think, I'm just going to read my Bible at home and I'm going to go to church on Sunday and nobody will know. No. The point is, God's got to transform us. He's got to cleanse us.

He's got to give us a new heart. He's got to put his spirit within us. That's not just so we feel good, but it's so that we then reflect his holiness, that his name is lifted up.

Do your neighbors, to your colleagues, to your friends, look at you and go, God's holy. I can see that in the way they live, the way they interact, the way they stumble but then go back and seek forgiveness and seek his grace to live lives.

[33:27] That's what this is all about. That's what missions is all about. We review back over this passage. The problem is sin. Our sin of profaning God's holy name.

We live our lives as though God did not exist. Too often. Think back over this last week. How much did God enter into your life?

What you said, what you did, your decisions, your priorities? Or were you profaning God's name by the fact that he was absent from your life?

God's name. God's name. God's name. God's name. And the motive for missions is making Yahweh's name holy in all the earth. Again, can you just imagine what that would be like? That's the way God created the earth initially.

He said it's good. He was holy. And everybody knew that and responded accordingly.

[34:31] And the goal of missions is a people who reflect God's nature as holy. And again, think back over this past week.

What, if anything, made you aware that God was holy that you experienced over this past week? BBC News? No.

Your neighbors? Shopping at Tesco's? What, if anything, said God's holy?

You see, that's God's concern. He wants to be known as the holy God. That's got to start with us.

The point here is that the nations would know that he is the Lord, that he keeps covenant, that he's the holy one.

God is a missionary God. He wants the nations to know that. That's why he's chosen you. That's why he's redeemed you. That's why he's poured out his spirit upon you.

[35:35] To make you holy. To transform your life that you cannot do yourself. So that his name would be lifted up and made holy in all the earth. May that be your mission.

Individually and as a congregation. Let's pray. Lord, so much of our life and life of society around us is completely missing your presence.

we pray, Lord, that you would transform our lives. Help us to be testimonies of your saving grace and the way we live, how we interact with each other here in this congregation, in our families, and in the workplace.

We make us, Lord. We can't do that. With thanks be to your name, you've given us your spirit to do just that.

Lift up your name. Make it holy. Hallow your name in all the earth. In the name of Jesus, our faithful High Priest, we ask it.

[36:55] Amen. Let's close our worship by singing from Psalm 85. Excuse me.

Is that right? Yes. Psalm 85. In times past, Lord, you showed favor to your own beloved land.

The prosperity of Jacob you restored by your strong hand. Let's stand together and praise God for this song.