

Ezekiel 35:1 - 36:15

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[0:00] Well, good morning. If you will turn with me to Ezekiel 35.

! We're going to pick up where Pastor Matt left off last week.! And as we get here, and as we walk into this passage, this is one of the more abrupt transitions in the whole sweep of Scripture. From last week, where God says, I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak. That's what we read last week. From that, this last week to this week, in chapter 35, when he says, therefore, as I live, declares the Lord, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you. That's an abrupt transition. First of all, he's not speaking to the same audience. But secondly, it doesn't even sound like the same shepherd anymore. It sounds like a different person speaking. And if we have eyes to see, what first looks to us like a contradiction, what we're going to see is actually connected.

It's fluid. And we will appreciate and love and trust our Lord even more if we have the eyes to see. So let's pray for that. Let's pray that the Lord would show us his goodness, even in a difficult passage like this one. And then let's wade into it. Our Father in heaven, will you, by your great graciousness, and in the redemption of your Son, and by the power of your Spirit, who opens hearts, will you show us your glory and cause us to take refuge in you because of your word? We pray that in Christ's name. Amen.

I am going to try, before we wade into chapter 35, and actually, today's passage, we're going to do 35 and half of 16. They're actually one unit together. I'm going to try to put you, put us, in the mind of the Hebrew people who first heard this. From their vantage point, we will not only understand what the Lord said, but what it meant to his people to hear this message.

And then we'll be able to see better what it means for us, thousands of years later and thousands of miles away, how we can take comfort in these words and find a refuge in our God. So imagine with me that you grew up in Judah and southern Israel. Your people had a long history in the land, right? The Lord who made the heavens and the earth gave a promise to Abraham, your forefather, that this would be his land and that his descendants would dwell there. And then when his family was taken from the land and was enslaved in Egypt, the superpower of the day, the Lord embarrassed the gods of that land and brought your ancestors out in an awesome display of his power. And the Lord didn't stop there.

[4:15] He made good on his promise to Abraham. He went with your people, driving out the Canaanites and their wickedness from that land and made it your home. And he set up his temple there, his dwelling place among his people. The almighty was there with you.

And this great God, the God who made good on his promises, marked off his people from the rest of the world with a holy law. They would live as a nation of priests, a royal priesthood, almost as if heaven were here on earth. And because he didn't want his holiness to be blemished, denied by his people, he gave them this warning, right? That Matt referenced last week. When you have children and grandchildren have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord, your God, so as to provoke him to anger, you will soon utterly perish from the land and the Lord will scatter you among the peoples. And you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And what happened? Well, you guessed it, right? Your forefathers did act correctly, did make carved images, did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

And the Lord was still a God who made good on his promises. Now, by this time, the nation had split in two, Israel in the north, Judah in the south.

Israel had fallen already to Assyria in 722 BC. And that, I'm sure, was unsettling, threatening for you to see those who are essentially your countrymen, those who belong to the same promise of Abraham, those who live next door, carted away into exile, away from the promised land. You don't feel safe. You feel that danger is knocking on the door.

[6:32] And then, Babylon overtook Assyria and Egypt, became the new superpower, and on its way through, conquered Judah as well in 605.

Now, they left the peasant farmers in the land that are not very useful to a global empire, so to speak. But they took the educated, the wealthy, the craftsmen, the priests, the officials, the whole infrastructure that made Israel work, thousands upon thousands, into captivity, hundreds of miles away. And here you stand, living as a captive, in a far-off land, cut off from your ancestral home, and the temple of the living God.

How do you feel? And in that moment, how does that message last week, I will be the shepherd of my sheep, how does that strike you now?

And from that vantage point, the next thing the Lord says, is chapter 35 and into 36. Hear now the words of the shepherd.

The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it. And say to it, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste.

[8:23] I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the Lord, because you cherished perpetual enmity, and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment.

Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you, because you did not hate bloodshed. Therefore, blood shall pursue you. I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it all who come and go, and I will fill its mountains with the slain.

On your hills, and in your valleys, and in your ravines, those slain with the sword shall fall. I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited.

Then you will know that I am the Lord, because you said, these two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we shall take possession of them. Although the Lord was there, therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them.

And I will make myself known among them when I judge you, and you shall know that I am the Lord. I have heard all the revilings that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, they are laid desolate, they are given us to devour.

[9:56] And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against me. I heard it. Thus says the Lord God, while the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate.

As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you. You shall become desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it.

Then they will know that I am the Lord. My guess is that at first blush, that doesn't resonate with you.

First, that you might not understand what's being said. What's Mount Seir? What are we talking about here? And secondly, it's probably not something you're excited to share with your non-Christian friends and neighbors, right?

Well, okay, so first, right, just the facts, understanding what's happening here. What is the Lord saying? Mount Seir is basically a geographic marker for the land of Edom.

[11:07] Edom bordered Israel. It's southeastern corner. It's what's today pretty much, as the Lord said, a perpetual desolation. There's not much there. It's in southern Jordan.

It's near the Dead Sea. They had a long history, and we won't go into it today because it's cold out here, right? They had a long history of enmity with Israel.

It's another layer of tension, one that we didn't talk about at the outset today, and that Israel doesn't feel safe. There's another country that is set against them on their borders, and Syria wasn't the only threat.

Babylon wasn't the only threat also. So, too, was Edom. And as you might have heard, the Lord is saying here that, here in chapter 35, and he'll say again in chapter 36, that after Babylon took Israel captive, Edom moved into some of their territory and took for themselves some of what belonged to Israel.

And so, those are the facts. That's what's happening here in chapter 35. And the Lord, basically, here's the idea that I want to get across to you.

[12:27] A good shepherd, the good shepherd from verse 34, from chapter 34, he wields a sword against the wolves. That's what a good shepherd does.

And he wouldn't be a good shepherd unless he did that. Right? And that's the other part. Chapter 35 doesn't simply say these things, but it communicates his care and his concern for his people. Right? So, what might make us cringe at first, what we might find almost to be an embarrassing sort of passage in the scriptures, one that we might not want to share with other people, right?

What might make us in our American comfort feel, well, uncomfortable, would actually be a comfort to his people. And, friends, I think that that's actually not that unusual in this day and age.

As a nation around us cries out for justice, justice for racial minorities, justice for the unborn, justice for immigrants, and justice for so many.

[13:42] Here is a God who pursues it and promises it. Right? Because while the Lord is actually speaking through Ezekiel, and he's actually here addressing Edom, who is he speaking to, really?

Who hears the message? Right? Ezekiel stands not in Edom, not even in Jerusalem. He lives and preaches among the exiled Hebrew people in their captivity in Babylon.

God is speaking against Edom, but he's speaking this to his people, Israel. And how does that change this message?

Here's how. He's speaking to the victimized Israelites. He's speaking to those who have suffered abuse and displacement and trauma.

They've been violated. And they are to know. Well, I'm not naive enough to think that no one here has suffered abuse and victimization.

[15:03] And if you're that person, you know that part of restoration, in addition to replacing what is taken and healing what is wounded and fixing what is broken, is also removing the threat.

if your home is broken into, right, and burglarized, you don't just look to replace the stolen items, do you?

No, you don't. You don't feel safe anymore. You install a security system. You buy a dog, a big one. You add protection.

You remove the threat. The violation of a home invasion or of abuse or of assault.

The many traumas of this life, they don't only need physical healing and replacement. Trauma makes you feel unsafe.

[16:10] Unprotected. Fear and anxiety and a distressed feeling that we aren't safe.

Those are the natural results of victimization because we've been shown that we aren't safe. We used to live, now we realize that we used to live under the illusion of safety and now we know better.

And chapter 35 and 36 is the good shepherd telling his scattered, helpless, plundered, traumatized sheep, you don't feel safe and I know and I will make you safe.

Now, if that message doesn't resonate with you, praise God. Praise God because it means that you likely have been spared some of the worst things this world has to offer.

so praise him for his kindness in that. What a blessing that is in this dark and sinful world. So, hold on to this message in case you need it one day.

[17:43] No matter how strong and secure you think you are, you might not be. And second, hold on to this message in case you need to minister it to someone.

Chances are you already know someone, whether you know it or not, who feels just that way and needs to know and needs to hear that the Lord is a refuge and he is a good shepherd.

Not one who is simply cuddly and kind but one who is strong and firm. that he is a strong tower and that one day he will eradicate all evil, all suffering and every threat to his people.

And if this message, the message I will make you safe does resonate with you, I want you to know the good shepherd sees you.

The good shepherd knows you. That's what he's saying through this. And the good shepherd loves you and he will make you safe forever.

[19:06] First, presently, he forms a people who are an outpost of heaven. The Christian family, the Christian church are an embassy of heaven governed by heaven's rules.

Literally, this governs us, his rules for his people. And it is filled with people who ought to protect and comfort his people.

And so friends, if you need that resource, use that resource. Find comfort and safety in the people of God.

And what could be even more sorrowful is if someone has been abused within the church. That's an extra tragedy. And last week, the Lord already told us what he will do with false shepherds and those who pray upon the sheep from within.

And so friends, though danger still lurks in this world and in this life, he will make you safe.

[20:15] I know that because when we come to faith, what happens? What happens when we come to faith in Christ? God, the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ.

so that we are united to him and his resurrection. Ephesians 2 says, God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive with Christ.

by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him. We're tied to him, joined to him in his resurrection and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ.

friends, the same God who promised safety to the exiles in their return promises to us a true better final safety to his people.

We will be forever safe in him because our safety does not depend ultimately and finally on us. it depends on the one who conquered death already and we are joined to him safe forever.

[21:59] Our final safety is as certain as Christ's resurrection which is already finished.

And what will that safety look like? Well, this good shepherd doesn't only fight off the wolves.

He takes his flock to green pasture and that's what chapter 36 is about. And you son of man, he says, prophesy to the mountains, not now the mountains of Seir but mountains of Israel and say, oh, mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God, because the enemy said of you, aha, and the ancient heights have become our possession, therefore, prophesy and say, thus says the Lord God, precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations and became the talk and evil gossip of the people.

Therefore, oh, mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God. Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations all around.

[23:26] Therefore, says the Lord God, surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom and who gave my land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt that they might make its pasture lands a prey.

Therefore, prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, thus says the Lord God, behold, I have spoken in my jealous wrath because you have suffered the reproach of the nations.

therefore, thus says the Lord God, I swear that the nations all around you shall themselves suffer reproach, but you, O mountains of Israel, shoot forth from your branches and yield your fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home, for behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown, and I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it, the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places rebuilt, and I will multiply on you, man and beast, and

they shall multiply and be fruitful, and I will cause you to be inhabited, as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before, then you will know that I am the Lord, I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel, and they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no longer bereave them of children, thus says the Lord

God, because they say to you, you devour people, and bereave nation of children, therefore, you shall no longer devour people, and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the Lord God, and I will not let you hear anymore the reproach of the nations, and no longer bear the disgrace of the peoples, and no longer cause your nation to stumble, declares the Lord God.

Again, put yourself, as we did at the outset, in the place of the exiles, what would that have said to you? I think there are two main things to draw out of that.

[25:59] First, what is God's attitude? What is his affect towards his people? What does he say? He says that he sees their desolation, their derision, that they were crushed, and how did that make God feel?

He speaks of his hot jealousy, his jealous wrath. One of the worst things, when you are wrong, when you are hurt, when you're victimized, is for other people to shrug their shoulders, to not get appropriately upset, as if to say, what happened to you doesn't matter, you don't matter.

Well, not this shepherd. Evil towards his people ignites in our God a beautiful fury.

Why? Because he says, I am for you. That's his affect, his heart towards his people.

evil. And so, he says, I am going to rebuild you and do more good to you. This is the good shepherd making his flock lie down in green pastures, is it not?

[27:32] That's the picture that he's painting here. but we aren't standing in Babylon 2,600 years ago.

We're not there right now. What does this have to do with us? We aren't looking for the immediate fulfillment of this promise, are we? Well, the Lord did bring back those exiles.

You can read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and see this happening. But the land, that always pointed forward to something more, didn't it?

Hey, maybe you caught something that we hadn't yet drawn out in this passage. 35, the repeated refrain with the Lord said, then you will know that I am the Lord.

And he didn't just say that. He said it three times to Edom, the enemy. As I'm judging you, as I'm warding off the wolves, you will know that I am the Lord. But he also turns in chapter 36, verse 11, and he says it to his own people.

[28:48] I will do more good to you than ever before. Then you will know that I am the Lord. God. The promised land wasn't special because the geography was so great.

The promised land was special because God was there. And that's what we are looking forward to today. Scattered across the world, his church is looking forward to being with the Lord forever.

God brought the exiles back. He made good on this promise. Chapters 35 and 36, he made good on the promise, brought them back, and rebuilt the temple, God among them.

But then he has continued that trend, and we are the beneficiaries. We are walking along that same path. God the Son took to himself a human nature, Emmanuel, God not just among them, but God with us.

And dwelt among us bodily. And in his ministry, he bought for us a life with him that is no longer veiled by temple, and its thick clouds of incense, and its curtain.

[30:07] He bought for us a guarantee the Holy Spirit, God in us. And what is that guarantee good for? Well, the new covenant, the new covenant that he made for us, the covenant in Christ in which we live, and the covenant that the prophets like Ezekiel looked forward to, well, in that new covenant, there is another promise, another chapter that looks very much like chapter 36 here.

The promise to which the good shepherd of Ezekiel 36, the covenant of the new covenant points, this is what he holds out to his people, our unshakable safety, and face-to-face knowing of our Lord, and it's Revelation chapter 21.

We don't have chapter 36 as the new covenant people of God. We have something better, and it is this. this is the promise the good shepherd has for his people today.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

[32:03] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning or crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

Friends, that's where our good shepherd is taking us. He has proven himself, he proved himself true to his word. Ezekiel chapters 35 and 36 came to pass just as he said, so too will this promise, when the shepherd makes his people safe and secure, and we will know that he is the Lord forever. Let's go to him in prayer. Oh, Lord, our God, on this cold day, thank you that we are able to gather together and anticipate that you, our good shepherd, will one day bring us to fully home, where we are safe and secure forever, knowing and being known, seeing, Lord, with unveiled face, you are king of glory.

Lord, I pray that you would comfort those who need it and know that you are the good shepherd. Lord, in all of our hearts, that you would stoke a great joy and glad expectation that we will be with you, our great shepherd, knowing that you are the Lord forever and ever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.