

Ezekiel 36:16-38

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Date: 01 November 2020

Preacher: David Moser

[0:00] It's good to be with you all back at the Holiday Inn here and it's good to be with you all who are online with us as well.

I am excited to have my sermon notes not blow away on me anymore, but I am excited to open God's Word with you.

I invite you, as Mike said, we're continuing our sermon series in the book of Ezekiel. I invite you to turn to chapter 36. We'll pick up where we left off last week, starting in verse 16.

As you turn there, I'm going to pray again because this is a weighty passage and I need God's help. Lord, will you be glorified?

As we look to your Word, will you please help us to glory in Christ, to honor Him?

[1:09] And Lord, will you conform our hearts to your ways and your will for our good and for our delight and for your glory.

We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. I'll set the stage again. The Hebrew people have disobeyed the Lord and He has taken them from their land by means of Babylon.

They've been conquered. Their officials, their artisans, their prominent citizens have been taken into captivity. Ezekiel is among them.

He's a priest. The temple has been destroyed in Jerusalem. They're hundreds of miles away, serving the king of Babylon. And Ezekiel is giving to God's people a message from God.

Today's passage begins at a very low place and ends at a very high place. So we're going to begin with some challenging words. The Lord is going to bring comfort and hope.

[2:25] So let's begin in verse 16. The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, 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. So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it.

I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds, I judged them. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name.

And that people said of them, these are the people of the Lord. And yet they had to go out of his land. But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.

The prophet Ezekiel was a Hebrew exile among the Hebrew exiles, speaking to God's people in their exile.

[3:38] If you stood among them, taken from your land, living hundreds of miles away, serving the conqueror, the king who conquered you, how would you have heard this?

How would that have struck you? That's a hard word, right? It essentially boils down to the Lord saying something like, well, you're going to live like the pagans?

Then you're going to live with the pagans. You're in the exile because you have profaned my name, he says.

And how have they done that? God explains it, verse 18, right? Violence, bloodshed, idolatry.

That's just how the nations lived. All the nations around them were characterized by violence and idolatry. And if they pursued the world and its ways, then the Lord sent them out into the world to live by its ways.

[4:46] And that serves as a warning for Christ's people today, right? He does not want his name to be profaned among the nations by followers who

don't follow him, but follow the world and its ways.

Right? If following God doesn't change us, if following God doesn't change our way of life, if it doesn't, if following after God means we just follow the same pattern that the world follows, you know, the world's going to ask, well, does following God matter?

Does it make a difference? Is he even real? All right, so the question that this prompts us to today is how do we do the same? How do we profane the name of the Lord by following after the world and its ways, its ways of thinking, its ways of acting?

Right? Right? When we think like the world around us, well, there are as many ways to think, to follow the world's thinking as there are, you know, degrees on the compass.

Let's say in every human endeavor, in every human desire, there is the natural pagan way to do it, to go about it.

[6:07] And God is calling us away from that. Calling us away from seeing the American dream as our highest end.

Calling us away from the self-centeredness of the sexual revolution. Calling us away from, you know, the examples are endless. And I think there is one super relevant one this week.

The Lord calls us away from thinking like the world. In the realm of politics. Right? In two days, our nation is going to go to the polls to elect the next president.

There are a whole bunch of other things on the ballots, but that's the one everybody's talking about.

Right? Now, if you're familiar with Shoreline and our ministry, right, you came here expecting the word of God to be opened and read and sung and prayed and applied.

Right? Right? You didn't expect, you know, a stump speech. The line I like to use is, I do not endorse a candidate. I proclaim a king. Right?

[7:12] But elections matter. Right? Leaders matter. Right? That's what we're seeing here in verses 16 to 21. Like, God cares how societies and nations act.

Governance matters. And we see that the Lord cares that his people not think and live like the world around us.

We're so tempted to, right? The world around us. Here's the main, like, I think the main way that Christians right now are tempted to profane the name of the Lord by thinking the way that the world around us thinks.

The world around us. Is by treating politics as ultimate reality. The highest arena. Because the world around us, that's all they've got.

Is the governance of nations. That's the highest court in human experience. It's the ultimate reality. So whether on the left or the right, it's the highest end.

[8:21] For the people who don't have the hope of Christ. Who don't have the lawgiver who stands above every nation in the world. And we see this at work when we hear people, you know, treat a Supreme Court ruling as the final word on an issue.

We see that at work. I remember the last presidential election. I remember seeing images from the Clinton rally. That what they expected to be a, you know, a victory lap turned into a concession speech.

And I remember seeing images there. Full of complete hopelessness. Weeping.

Despondency. And I'm not commenting on their political affiliation so much as their, they were utterly tied to a politician.

And to a politician's priorities. And their platform. The political agenda. Right? Left or right. There are people in this world who find their ultimate rest on that.

[9:39] And if my candidate loses, I am undone. And today, there are voices. Right? The politicians themselves. From the media.

And even from prominent Christians. That are encouraging Christians to treat politics as ultimate reality. Right? With rhetoric that ties the fate of the church to a candidate.

As blasphemy. Who view the bride of Christ as a voting block. In the schemes of man.

Who ask you to vilify anyone who weighs the issues differently than you. The test of Christian morality and Christian love is less in how you vote than how you treat your brothers and sisters in Christ who voted differently than you.

That's what honors the Lord. If you vilify your brothers and sisters in Christ who voted differently than you, that's how we profane the name of the Lord.

[10:48] Because that's how the world thinks. And he is calling us to something so much more. Right? And so Christians, we care about the governance of this nation.

Right? But we are also citizens of a heavenly city. It matters how this country acts and how it legislates. But our hope is not in America and her prosperity.

But in the advance of an entirely different kingdom. Whose outcome does not depend on the results of an election.

Right? Now, am I saying that the two parties are, you know, equivalent? That both candidates are morally equal?

No. I am. Or am I even saying that the results of this election are immaterial? Like, no, don't hear this as dismissive. It matters.

[11:50] And in fact, Christians have a framework from the Bible to declare that, you know, the governance of nations matters in a deeper way than a secular society ever could. What I am saying is this.

Trump and Biden and their parties are dust. And to dust they will return.

And so if Christians give unwavering support to a candidate or to a party, that is worship. And our worship belongs to only one.

If we tear each other apart over politics, that is valuing something temporary over something eternal. And so that is how Christians are tempted right now.

To profane the name of God in this world, thinking the way that the world around us does. And so when we go to the polls on Tuesday, if you're going to the polls, I don't know if you're voting.

[13:05] I'd encourage you to consider it. Remember that no matter the outcome, God and his kingdom and his mission are first, are paramount, are primary.

And that's why, week by week, we preach Christ. And we preach his word. Because in the midst of a political firestorm, of national consequence, and international impact, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important message this moment.

And in the midst of a global pandemic, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important message this moment. And in the midst of all the crises and challenges and tragedies that mark our lives, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important message.

First, just in terms of absolute importance. It's more important for us to win people to Christ than to win them to our position on mask wearing or our position on politics or any other earthly matter.

But second, the gospel of Jesus Christ is also the most powerful political message that we can preach. And I'm not talking in just some abstract way.

[14:26] Right? When saying, you know, in the first century, saying Jesus is Lord was saying Caesar isn't. Right? But that's sort of an abstract political statement.

Preaching the gospel of Christ is actually the most powerful political message practically today. Do you want to change the way someone votes?

I have something far more powerful for you. than a lawn sign or a social media post or a campaign contribution for you.

You're free to do those things. The most powerful, practically powerful message we can give politically is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I'll give you an example. I know someone who came to faith as an adult. Prior to their conversion, this person was avidly pro-choice.

[15:32] And viewed pro-life activists as, you know, oppressive and backwards. As villains. You know, the pro-life ads and signs and messaging didn't do anything for this person.

And then this person heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as we'll see in a moment here, in verse 26, the Lord gave this person a new heart.

And in a heartbeat, they became pro-life. Because they had a new heart themselves. Not only is the gospel of Jesus Christ the most important message in the midst of an election year.

It turns out the gospel of Jesus Christ is also the most powerful message, too. We are not chiefly concerned in rallying voters.

We are chiefly aimed at making disciples and worshippers. And they're going to live different. Okay. [16:45] If politics isn't ultimate, we're not going to talk about it more now. Let's talk about what is ultimate. God's work in this world. And that's just what he talks about, starting in verse 24.

He says, And I will put my spirit within you.

And cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers. And you shall be my people.

And I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

[18:07] Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good. And you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God.

Let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. Here we see, well, you see this passage. We might come back and do a sermon series on just this passage. We see him alluding to the new covenant. We see him talking about true repentance. We see him talking about... This is, in summary, how God operates in redemptive history.

Verse 24, he gathers a people to himself. Verse 25, he cleanses them from sin. Verses 26 and verses 27, he regenerates them, gives them a new heart.

And he indwells them by his spirit. So that verse 27, they walk in his ways. Verse 28, that they commune with their God. God is the chief end of the gospel.

[19:19] Right? Heaven is not our reward. God is our reward. He happens to be in heaven. So that's where we'll be. And verses 31 and 32, we walk in true repentance.

Right? This is the gospel. This is the story of the whole scriptures condensed into 10 verses. This is what God does. This is his promise to his people.

He is the one who does it. Next week, chapter 37, is a deep dive. One of the most vivid pictures of God cleansing his people from sin and reviving them.

The regeneration of the gospel. And so I'm going to allow Pastor Mike next week to expound on that more fully.

Because this is just a foretaste of that. There are two things that are uniquely emphasized here in this passage. The first of them we see in verses 31 and 32, true repentance.

[20:25] Yesterday was the anniversary of Martin Luther hosting the 95 Theses. And kind of, it is remembered as the, you know, the, one of the instigating or perhaps the instigating feature of the Protestant Reformation.

The very first of the 95 Theses reads like this. Our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

When he said, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 4, 17. He willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

I think that's what we see in verses 31 and 32. We see that when God gives his people a new heart. And next week we're going to see it so vividly how he reanimates, revives when someone comes to Christ. He gives us new life. When that happens in a person.

[21:37] We are made to see the world and the Lord and ourselves differently. And this is different than shame.

But at the same time, verse 31, he says, you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. Friends, sin is an active thing. It's something that we do. It's not mistakes that we fall into.

We produce it. And so we can, you know, the pagan way of thinking is to distance ourselves from it, right?

I made a mistake. I was a victim of my circumstances, etc., etc., right? But when we come to faith in Christ, we realize that we are the problem.

And that he is the solution. Right? Again, this sets the stage. Again, I can't wait to hear chapter 37 next week.

[22:40] I hope you are excited about the glory of regeneration. The new life that God has given you if you are found in him. The other unique emphasis in this passage comes in verses 22 and 23 and then 33 and following.

These are unusual statements. They ought to catch our attention. What, as I read these, what catches your attention?

Verse 22. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, and through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Move down to verse 33. Thus says the Lord God, On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt, and land that was desolate should be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by.

[24:16] And they will say, This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden, and the waste and the desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.

Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the Lord. I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate.

I am the Lord. I have spoken. And I will do it. What stuck out for you in these verses?

The thing that kind of jarred me was the Lord's concern about his own reputation. I'm not doing this for you.

Wait, wait, Jesus, don't you love me? Aren't you doing this because you love me? And he's saying here, like, I'm doing this for me. For the fame of my name.

[25:17] It almost seems like an ego problem. Right? Verse 21, I had concern for my holy name. Verse 22, it's not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name.

Now, the first thing to say about this is God is not like us. If I prioritize my own reputation, right, that's vanity. And pride.

Because I'm not worthy of worship. I'm not worthy of your worship. But God is. And so it is right and good for him to vindicate his own honor in the ways that would be sinful for me.

But notice here why God emphasizes here that he's acting for his name. Verse 22. His concern, just listen here for where his concern is.

He says, verse 22, my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations. Verse 23. My great name, which has been profaned among the nations.

[26:30] And which you have profaned among the nations. Why does the Lord care about the reputation of his name? Why does the Lord care so much about his reputation among the nations?

Friends, it's because he loves them. And because there is only one name under heaven by which we must be saved.

It matters. It matters. What the world thinks about God. Because they will only come to him and find salvation if they think he is where it's found.

If the nations think that God is powerless, they won't think he's able to save. If the nations think God isn't holy, that his people are full of wickedness and idolatry, they won't think he's a good savior.

But if he shows himself powerful, bringing his people back to their land, prospering them, if he causes them to walk in righteousness, then the world will know.

[27:49] He is strong to save and that his salvation changes people. It is real. It is real. He is real.

And he is good. And we, you and I, are the result of this promise.

Because he has shown, I don't descend from Abraham. Probably most of you don't either. But he has shown the world by vindicating his great name.

That he truly is the savior of the world. That he is good. And salvation is found in his name. He is bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

Gathering for himself, verse 24, a people from every tongue and tribe and nation to himself. And pardoning their guilt, verse 25, giving them spiritual life, verse 26, 27, and coming to dwell with them.

[29:01] That's the gospel. This is the center and the heartbeat of Christian faith. From the very beginning, when he said be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with worshiping disciples, with his image bearers, he had a plan for the world.

From the outset of Israel, when he told Abraham, in you the families of the earth shall be blessed. The Lord designed to bless the whole world.

Which is why verse 37 and 38, the two final verses of our passage today, are so interesting.

Thus says the Lord God, This also, I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them.

Did you catch that? This also, I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them, to increase their people like a flock.

[30:14] Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

That idea there in verse 38, increasing like flocks at the time of the sacrifice. At the feasts, that's when people came to Israel, came to Jerusalem to make sacrifices.

And so estimates are hundreds of thousands, like 200,000 sheep, like were brought to the city for all of the families of Israel to sacrifice.

That's why shepherding is such a huge metaphor among the Hebrew people. And so that's the image of the increase, of just the enormous overwhelming overflow, of the increase that the Lord intends to bring to his people.

And I think that we're seeing is the gospel goes forth to the nations, right? So he's summarizing verse 38, the increase that he's already promised that he will do.

[31:23] What's so interesting though, verse 37, he says, I will let you pray for that. And so what God has said leading up to this is, this is what I will do.

And now in verse 37, he says, pray for me to do that. That thing that I just told you, I will do it. Pray for it. Does that strike you as odd? I like how Matthew Henry put it.

He said, by asking for the mercy that was promised, we give glory to God who gives that mercy. And we express the value of the gift.

And we own up to our own dependence on him. And we honor in prayer, what God has put honor upon. And what's interesting here is that this is the first thing that we do besides profanity in the name of the Lord, right?

In this whole passage. Right? We've done nothing else in this passage. Right? He is the one who sent them into exile. And he does want us to be cleansed from our iniquities.

[32:36] But is that something for us to do? Is that something that we're able to do? No. We don't atone for ourselves. Verse 25, he says, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from your uncleanness.

And you know, he does want us to walk in holiness, right? But is that attributed to us and our great power and our strength of character? Verse 27, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

When God's people honor God by their obedience, it is a testimony to his grace, not our greatness. And he does want us to fellowship with him.

But who is that attributed to? Right? We don't cause that either. He says, verse 28, you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers and you shall be my people and I will be your God.

That song that we sang today. Oh, come on. Open up here. Did you notice that shift? The whole song goes after that pattern.

[33:49] Jesus said that if I fear I should come to him, no one else can be my shield. I should come to him. And then the final verse, something changes.

Jesus said, if I am lost, he will come to me. And he showed me on that cross.

He will come to me. The gospel is God coming on a rescue mission, not us vindicating ourselves in the courtroom of heaven.

Right? God has made all the promises in this passage. He is the effective power.

He is the one who recreates his people from the inside out. He is the one who gathers them together. He is the one who causes them to dwell in blessing and in honor and together as a people.

[34:53] The Bible is not a self-salvation project. It doesn't say, get your act together and then God will love you. The Bible doesn't say, maybe if you sacrifice enough, you'll be acceptable to God.

Or, you know, you can separate and distinguish yourself in God's sight by your excellence. Because, the Bible says, Jew and Gentile.

Every person on earth deserves the exile, right? That's where we started today. Live like the pagans, live with the pagans. And it is not by our strength that we can be returned and made right. But he loves. He loves his people. And he cares for the nations, which is why he cares about his reputation among the nations.

Which is why it's so important that his people not profane his name among the nations by thinking and living the way that the world around us does.

[36:01] And so he gathers the people to himself. And he makes us clean, not by our doing, but by atoning for their sins.

And Israel saw that, as was alluded, in the sacrifices. It was pointed to in the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Covenant. And then finally, Christ himself, the Lamb of God, made atonement for the world.

And he gives us a new heart. I'm itching for chapter 37. Can you tell? And he indwells us by his spirit and causes us to walk in his ways and live lives of fellowship with him and lives of true repentance.

And he calls us to do what? Pray. That's how this ends. Pray. I will let you pray.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Friends, we know what the Lord has promised for his church, for his people, and for this world, for the nations.

[37:22] And so let's go to him now in prayer and ask him to do just what he's promised. Oh, Lord, our God, how great is your name?

Lord, you have promised to redeem your people from every tongue and tribe and nation. We have seen that in our own lives.

Lord, we ask that you, and it's so cool that you said here, you know, through our lives that you will vindicate your name before the nations. So, Lord, will you do it?

Will you cause us to walk in holiness and in gospel boldness? And will you keep us from thinking and living like the world around us?

And will you be glorified in our hearts, in our lives, and among the nations? Let me ask that knowing that you will do what you have promised.

[38:42] And so we do it with a glad expectation as certain as Christ's grave is empty. In that confidence, we ask you, Lord, to glorify your name in all the earth.

Amen.