

God – so what? Ezekiel 36v22-28

Good evening. Glad you could be here. For the benefit of those who were not here this morning, let me quickly recapitulate. We saw from Ezekiel first vision in Chapter 1 several things about God! We discovered that God is holy; that God is universal in presence, power and knowledge. We also saw that God is mission-minded and that He is personal!

The Context - Story of Ezekiel from Chapter 2 onwards...

a. Symbolic Actions (4v1-5v17)

- Lying down facing a map (4v1-8)
- Eating siege rations cooked on cow's dung (4v9-17)
- Cutting off hair and destroying it (5v1-17)

b. Vision of Jerusalem (8v1-11v25)

- Idolatry in Temple (8v1-18)
- Unfaithful in Jerusalem are killed (9v1-11)
- Actions of the cherubim (10v1-22)
- Exile and restoration announced (11v1-21)
- **Glory of God leaves Jerusalem (11v22-25)**

c. Symbolic Actions (12v1-20)

- Digging through wall of his house (12v1-16)
- Eating in fear (12v17-20)

d. Prophecy Concerning Israel (12v21-24v27)

- Judgment is very near (12v21-28)
- Against false prophets (13v1-23)
- Against idolatry (14v1-8)
- Against false prophets (14v9-11)
- **Israel's sin history (20v1-44)**
- **Death of Ezekiel's wife (24v15-27) and he isn't allowed to show any public mourning.**

e. Prophecy Concerning Foreign Nations (25v1-32v32)

f. Salvation for Israel (33v1-39v29)

- Ezekiel, the watchman (33v1-9)
- Call to repent (33v10-20)
- Jerusalem falls and God allows Ezekiel to speak (33v21-22)
- Trust only in God (33v23-33)
- Work of the Good Shepherd (34v1-31)
 - Prophecy against bad shepherds (34v1-10)
 - God will shepherd his flock (34v11-16)
 - God will judge sheep (34v17-22)
 - God will care for His flock (34v23-31)
- Prophecy against Mount Seir (35v1-15)
- Restoration of Israel (36v1-38)
- Vision of dry bones (37v1-14)

And that is the section we are in tonight. So please do turn in your bibles to the book of Ezekiel and chapter 36v22-28. The title I have given, is God – So what? We are going to continue to investigate briefly together 5 things about God, how relevant God is to us and how we are to react to Him?

1. A God who is holy (Ezekiel 36v22-23)

²² "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. ²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.

As we saw this morning, God is holy! God's holy name is set apart because of its uniqueness, distinctiveness and power! The nation of Israel was to be God's representative to the pagan nations and to the world! But, Israel had disobeyed and now God's name was a laughing stock amongst the nations! So God was going to act, so that all nations of the world would recognize his sovereign power because of what He would do in them and for them.

This illustrates how bad a job, Israel as a nation had done at being God's chosen representative. So God Himself would perform the function Himself by revealing Himself so that the world would know that He is the sovereign God over all. He would do this for the sake of His name. They, and we, deserved nothing. They had failed Him in every direction, and they had failed themselves. But far more important than them, and us, is that God should be known and revealed to the world. Without that there could be no salvation, no deliverance. Without that the saving purposes of God would fail. So by their own folly Israel had ceased to be important except as a means by which the world could see the glory and love of God, for they had forfeited their right to any privilege. That is why the concentration had now to be on redeeming the situation by using them as a means to reveal that love and glory.

2. A God who gathers (Ezekiel 36v24)

36v24 "For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you to your own land."

This gathering of the people of Israel back to the land began as a relative trickle on the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1), and continued over a long period, with more and more people returning from all over the known world, until Israel was a

recognised nation again established in its own land with its own capital city, relatively free from idolatry and worshipping in its own way

3. A God who cleanses (Ezekiel 36v25) and operates (Ezekiel 36v26)

. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel would have had images of Leviticus in his mind at this point. So when the priestly Ezekiel spoke of 'clean water' he had in mind water that had been cleansed by sacrifice. And indeed this was the only kind of water that was ever sprinkled. In Leviticus the cleansing of a defiled house required sprinkling with a mixture of blood and 'living' water, the bird having been slain over the water (Leviticus 14.51), and in Numbers 8.7 and 19.2-22 the 'water of separation' (19.9, 20 - this was also called 'living water' - 9.17) is mentioned. It was water that had been sprinkled with the ashes of a red heifer (Numbers 19.2), and was kept aside for the purifying by sprinkling of those who had touched a dead body. Thus in both cases the water had been cleansed by sacrifice and the shedding of blood. The cleansing was to be through the blood of sacrifice, applied through the sprinkled water.

But this water was here to be sprinkled by God Himself acting as the high priest. Before anything else the people need to be cleansed, by the divine water of separation sprinkled on them by God, from their defilement brought on them by their sinful ways and their idolatry. There is no cleansing without the shedding of blood. This pointed forward to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13.1), and its efficacy depended on the One Who would be slain as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, Whose benefit reached backwards to 'sins done aforetime' (Romans 3.25).

Then they were to receive a new heart and a new spirit, indeed God's Spirit (verse 27). The heart included the mind, the will and the emotions, it was the whole of the inner man. The spirit was the life principle within, the inner impulse, and while it could include the activities of heart, mind and will, it was also that which was Godward (Ecclesiastes 3.21; 12.7), and was affected by God's Spirit. So the idea here is of the renewing of the whole inner man, and of awakening towards God.

Its effect is then described. 'And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.' Instead of hardness there would be tenderness, instead of obduracy there would be yielding, instead of coldness there would be warmth; instead of disobedience there would be obedience. The law would be put in their inward parts and in their hearts, and they would 'know Yahweh' individually through the new covenant.

This process of cleaning we know now as **Sanctification** or cleansing! We have been sanctified (Hebrews 10v10); washed clean (1 Corinthians 6v11) and have

perfect holiness (2 Corinthians 7v1) and are being transformed into the very image of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3v18) and conformed to His likeness (Romans 8v28-29). We are to be living sacrifices, transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12v1-2). This holiness is the pursuit of moral excellence, not just obeying the law, and is by necessity a high standard (1 Thessalonians 4v3)

This process of sanctification is where God the Holy Spirit transforms us into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 7-18). As we walk and live in the Spirit, led by the Spirit (Galatians. 5v16; Romans 8v13), the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control", is produced in the life of the Christian Disciple (Galatians. 5v22-23).

Our condition before God if we are His follower is now

- Set apart - separated from sin.
- The attainment of moral holiness.

In principal, we are saints, and God has already declared all Christian Disciples sanctified

- We have been made holy (Hebrews 10v10)
- We are washed and sanctified (1 Corinthians 6v11)

In practice, as growing Christians, we should be

- Perfecting holiness, freed from the contamination of sin (2 Corinthians 7v1)
- Process of becoming Christ-like (Romans 8v29; 2 Corinthians 3v18)
- Transforming of character by renewal of our minds (Romans 12v1-2)

The standard all Christian Disciples are to attain and maintain is "Be holy, as I am holy" (1 Peter 1v16; 1 Thessalonians 4v3). The Process by which this is achieved is by the Christian Disciple devoting them self to righteousness (Romans 6v19) with a desire and choosing to be holy, submitted and consecrated to God. Christian Disciples are to put off the old nature - crucify the passions and desires (Ephesians 4v22; Galatians 5v24) and put on the new nature created to be like God (Ephesians 4v24). This is done by a work of God (1 Thessalonians. 5v23, Philippians 2v13).

4. A God who indwells (v27)

²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

How can all this come about? It can only be through the work of God Himself. If it was by our own efforts, we would fail continually! No, it was to be through God's Spirit that this great work would come about. It is He who would cause His

people to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments in their hearts and in their lives.

The Holy Spirit is God, and a member of the Trinitarian Godhead. He is spoken of as God (Acts 5v3-4; 1 Corinthians 3v16). The attributes of God are ascribed to the Holy Spirit life (Romans 8v2), truth (John 16v13) and love (Romans 15v30). It was He who spoke through the Old Testament prophets and induced godliness (Ezekiel 36), and equipped God's leaders for service (Judges 13v25; Zechariah 4v6).

The Holy Spirit is also a Person. Some people refer to the Holy Spirit as "It", but they are clearly wrong and in error! The Holy Spirit is always referred to as 'He' in the New Testament (John 16v14). He relates to us as a person for He is comforter, guide and teacher (John 14). He can be blasphemed against and be grieved (Ephesians 4v30), and wherever the Holy Spirit is, the Father and Son are also present because they are one. (John 14v18-23).

God lives inside each Christian through the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, a person cannot be a Christian Disciple (Romans 8v9; Gal 2v20; Colossians 1v25-27). The Holy Spirit indwelling the Christian Disciple is assured proof of being God's possession (2 Corinthians 1v22; Ephesians 1v3). The Holy Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing our future redemption, salvation and inheritance (Ephesians 1v13; 2 Corinthians 1v22). This indwelling Holy Spirit, seeks control or domination of our lives. This is being filled with the Spirit, and it is a continuous thing, not a one off process. It also signifies how much the Holy Spirit has of the life of a Christian! As Christian Disciples, we are to be continually filled (Ephesians 5v18), and this is meant to be our normal state

Being indwelt by God the Holy Spirit from the moment of conversions, Christian Disciples are also to 'walk in the spirit' ((Galatians 5v16).

This is done by:

- Desiring holiness, feed the new nature with God's Word in order to renew our mind.
 - Communicating with God. Talk to Him!! By doing this sin will be starved.
- Confess known sin immediately, consciously allowing Christ total control in all circumstances

All this will give a desire to live totally for God!

5. A God to live for (v28)

²⁸ You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

This confirms that this work of the Spirit was to begin when the exiles returned in faith to the land of their inheritance. The words were spoken to the true Israel, the Israel within Israel, as Paul explains (Romans 9-11). Those whose hearts were true would be truly His and He would be their God.

It also has application to all Christians in that they have become citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3.20), residents in a better land, God's greater land, being His people and knowing Him as their God, something beyond the conception of Ezekiel and therefore having to be prophesied pictorially in the form of an idea (see on 37.26-28). He could not know then that the land of God's inheritance would become a heavenly land. That would be revealed in the future, and the final words are specifically applied in Revelation 21.3 to the new Heaven and the new earth

Conclusion - What about you?

What about you? If you are already a Christian here tonight, then it is not because of anything you have done. It is because of the events at Easter that you are a Christian, when God took the necessary steps so that all people could have the choice to either follow Him or not. We are primarily Christians, not because we come to church services or just happened to have been born in a supposedly Christian country. We are primarily Christians, because God first chased and harried us into His arms. We are Christians, if you are one, because God first loved you. And as a tremendous lover, He beckons and calls people all the time to respond to His call, and back to Him.

When I was younger, in my more smug moments I used to congratulate myself for being a Christian. How proud I was that I, Dave Roberts, was a Christian and that God was a jolly lucky God that I had decided to follow Him. It was during one of my less self-deluded moments, that I examined myself and I found God pricking my conscience and correcting me, and I read the New Testament "For the Son of Man came, not to serve but to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk10v45). So... If you are a Christian here tonight, go show and tell the transformation that the all-powerful living God has performed in you. If like me, you are a Christian today, our sins were forgiven through Jesus' death on the Cross. That is when we had our "bath" as it were. That is the point when we were justified before God and we are declared His child. Having been justified already, we don't need a bath anymore! But we do need the equivalent of a foot-washing daily and or every time we take Holy Communion and a cleansing of our sin when we confess it before our God and repent.

And if you are not a Christian here today, then God is actively pursuing you. I, of course, don't know the circumstances in which He is, but I do know that He is. He wants all people to be followers of Him. That is why He is gathering, cleansing, and indwelling His people. If you would like to know more about the Christian faith, then please don't leave here tonight without talking to somebody about it.

Thank you.