

Ezekiel 20:1-44 - A Message of Judgmental Hope

I. Introduction

A. Summary Statement: Ezekiel calls us to remember we are exiles and as exiles to remember that God is near and is infinitely concerned for His own glory. Therefore Ezekiel calls us to refuse the temptation to place our hope in an imagined past or an alluring present but instead to repent and to wait for God's future salvation.

B. Outline:

1. God is Present in Exile Ezekiel 1-3
2. God is Present to Judge in Judah Ezekiel 4-24
3. God is Present to Judge the Nations Ezekiel 25-32
4. God is Present to Save His People Ezekiel 33-48

C. Detailed Outline:

1. God's Message: I am present Ezekiel 4-5
2. God hates idolatry Ezekiel 6-7
3. God will not dwell with idolaters Ezekiel 8-11
4. How did we get here? Ezekiel 12-14
5. Three Parables of Idolatry Ezekiel 15-17
6. Justice and Mercy: A Call to Repent Ezekiel 18
7. A Lament Ezekiel 19

D. Continuing:

1. After having pronounced spent the last 15 chapters proclaiming judgment on Judah, Ezekiel paused to make a lament, sorrowing over the corruption and destruction of Judah and her kings
2. As we move past Ezekiel's lament, the message is going to change ever so slightly and a message of hope will start to be proclaimed
3. But, as we'll here in Ezekiel 20, this message of hope is a message full of condemnation and judgment, a message that Judah has totally failed, but a message that God will still act to display His glory

E. Let's read Ezekiel 20 together

F. Proposition: As Ezekiel's nears the end of his proclamation of judgment on Judah, he holds out a message of hope - but not hope in their current situation or in immediate salvation or in Judah's righteousness, but hope that God will act for His own glory and God will save a people for His glory.

1. A foolish approach
2. A recount of Israel's history
3. A proclamation of God's sovereignty

II. A Foolish Approach

A. Our chapter opens with the elders of Israel coming and approaching Ezekiel and Ezekiel/God completely rejects them

1. Ezekiel 20:1-3 - *In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.*

B. So, my first question, as I approach this chapter is why? Wouldn't coming to God be the right thing?

1. They hadn't recognized and repented of their sins
 - a. Ezekiel 20:4-8 - *Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.*
 - b. Ezekiel 20:30:31 - *"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.*
2. They were still in love with the things of this world
 - a. Ezekiel 20:32 - *"What is in your mind shall never happen---the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'*

C. So, the first thing that we see in Ezekiel 20 is that coming to God hypocritically is foolish

1. To come to God, we must be ready to recognize and repent of our sins
 - a. Psalm 66:18 - *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*
2. To come to God, we must be ready to walk away from the things of this world
 - a. Matthew 19:16-22 - *And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

D. Application: Hypocrisy is easy and hypocrisy is extremely dangerous

1. To come to God, we must come with honest hearts - not hearts that are free from sin, because that would be impossible, but hearts that are ready to be honest about sin and are ready to part with sin
2. Mark 7:6 - *And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;*

III. A Recount of Israel's History

A. As Ezekiel/God responds to the elders of Israel, he recounts the rebellious history of Israel

1. And we've already seen one reason that God recounts the history of Israel: to expose the elder's hypocrisy
2. But, there must be more to this passage, because it goes on a long time, so I want to explore the things that God is saying here
3. And God is not only exposing hypocrisy, He is also preparing us to hear the message of hope in the next section - but to hear the message of hope correctly, we must understand who God is

B. God acts for His glory

1. God redeems a people for His glory
 - a. Ezekiel 20:5-6 - *Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands.*
2. God demands glory from His people
 - a. Ezekiel 20:7 - *And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.*
3. God judges for His glory
 - a. Ezekiel 20:8 - *But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.*
4. God saves for His glory
 - a. Ezekiel 20:9 - *But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.*
5. God sanctifies for His glory
 - a. Ezekiel 20:10-12 - *So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.*
6. And to make sure we understand, this cycle gets repeated four times in Ezekiel 20, showing over and over again that God has acted in these ways: God has repeatedly acted for His own glory

C. God purpose will not fail

1. Both God's kindness and wrath are meant to lead us to repentance
 - a. Ezekiel 20:13-20 - *But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness. "And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.*
2. God's judgment often temporally looks like giving us over to sin
 - a. Ezekiel 20:21-26 - *"Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols. Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD.*
3. God's purpose will never fail
 - a. Ezekiel 20:32 - *"What is in your mind shall never happen---the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'*

D. **Application: to see God's salvation, we must recognize God's sovereignty, God's kindness, and God's judgment and be moved to repentance and worship**

1. Romans 2:1-5 - *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man---you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself---that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

IV. A Proclamation of God's Sovereignty

A. Ezekiel 20:32 acts as a hinge for this passage, moving from a message of pure judgment to a message of "judgmental hope" - God's purpose will stand so through judgment there will be hope

1. As we go through the second movement of our passage this morning, one thing we should notice is that though there is a message of hope embedded in this passage, this passage isn't meant to be a message of hope
2. This passage is a declaration of sovereignty, a declaration that God will win, a declaration that God's purpose will be fulfilled in the face of Israel's continued rebellion.
3. And that declaration of sovereignty leads to hope - because God will not let His purpose fail there will be a people saved, because God will win, there will be a return to the land
4. So, God declares four truths about Himself that will be reflected in His people:

B. God will be the King of His people (and His people will obey Him)

1. Ezekiel 20:33-34 - *"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out.*

C. God will be the Judge of His people (and His people will be purged of rebellion)

1. Ezekiel 20:35-38 - *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord GOD. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*

D. God will be the Savior of His people (and His people will be made righteous)

1. Ezekiel 20:39-42 - *"As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols. "For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers.*

E. God will receive glory from His people (and His people will repent of self-righteousness)

1. Ezekiel 20:43-44 - *And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."*

F. So God's dedication to His glory becomes our hope

1. God's dedication to His own glory is so great that He will redeem a rebellious people, He will sanctify a sinful people, He will plant a wandering people, and He will receive worship from those who were blind and deaf
2. God doesn't save because we are worth saving, and that's glorious news because we never could be worth saving!
3. God saves because He wants the glory of saving us

G. Application: to be God's people, we must be ready to recognize who we truly are, to renounce ourselves, and to give God all of the glory

1. *Philippians 3:2-11 - Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh--- though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith--- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*