

The Only Just Savior

From Ezekiel

By Dennis Prutow

Bible Text: Ezekiel 8:1-18

Preached on: Sunday, June 15, 2008

Westminster Evangelistic Ministries

Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

7418 Penn Avenue

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15208

Website: www.wordfortheweek.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rptsprof

I'm skipping a couple of chapters and moving ahead to a section of Prophet Ezekiel that encompasses chapters 8 through 11. These chapters are a vision God gives to Ezekiel. God is showing Ezekiel the reasons for the judgement of Jerusalem and the exile. Ezekiel will report the results of his Jerusalem visit to the elders in exile and God's reasons for judgment. We'll jump into chapter 8. I'd like to read just the beginning of the chapter. My intent, however, is to look at the entire chapter, the Lord willing.

It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain (Ezekiel 8:1-4).

Let's pray together:

Father we do ask that You would grant us Your grace as we look into Your word and Ezekiel chapter 8. Give us a good understanding of what You have for us in this chapter; we pray, in Jesus name. Amen.

If you lie or perhaps cheat on a test or an exam, you feel a little guilty. And don't you also then feel that you are due, if caught, punishment? And that it's just that you ought to be punished? Isn't this your sense of things? If you were to cheat on your spouse that would raise the degree of guilt quite a little bit, would it not? And if you were caught, would you not think, "I deserve punishment; I deserve to loose, perhaps, all that I have."

You remember that David was in this circumstance when he sinned against Bathseba, and Nathan the Prophet had to come along and prick his conscience through the word of God. David knew he was due the death penalty, that God's just judgment against him was the penalty of death. This was the penalty in the Old Testament, there was no sacrifice that could bring him out from under the curse of death. And so David, believing in the Savior who was to come, put his trust in the Savior who was to come. He pleaded the mercy of God, and so he was forgiven. That's what Psalm 51 is all about.

The people of Judah were not like David. They sinned and provoked God. And as we've just read in the beginning of Ezekiel chapter 8, this was the case. They provoked God. You see God is the just Judge. Jesus Christ is the just Judge. And since Jesus Christ is the just Judge, only Jesus Christ can remove the curse of death which he brings as a result of sin. And so as David placed faith in the Savior who was to come, you too need to place faith in the Savior who *has* come. And I think this is the point to which the text leads us this morning. You need to trust Christ and I need to trust Christ because Christ is the one who justly levels the curse, and He is the one who also justly removes the curse.

Let's look at our text again in Ezekiel.

It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal (Ezekiel 8:1-2).

This is once again the image of Christ. It is a pre-incarnate visitation of Jesus Christ to Ezekiel. He appears, glowing in fire, the fire of judgment, and in the brightness of holiness.

Reading on in the text, "He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem" (Ezekiel 8:3). The time frame is some fourteen months after the visitations that Ezekiel had earlier. And now Jesus Christ appears to him again in this vision. He grabs him, as it were, by his hair and lifts him up between earth and Heaven. He transports him in a vision to Jerusalem and to the Temple.

Verse 3 goes on, "[T]o the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain" (Ezekiel 8:3). You see, this is the same glory that Ezekiel had seen earlier; this is Jesus Christ. And now Christ transports him in the Spirit to Jerusalem. He's actually, physically, in his

house and the elders of Judah are sitting before him. But he's caught up, as it were, in a dream.

Let me give you a little example of this. When I was a boy I had a recurring dream. It was very vivid. I was in a park near my grandparents home in Detroit, Michigan. And in the dream, a serpent in the park would chase me and I would climb up a tree. And just before the serpent would grab me, boom, I'd awaken. I had that dream innumerable times. The interesting thing is that after I was converted I never had that dream again. I don't think the dream needs profound interpretation. But it's this kind of a vision, a dream as it were, in which Ezekiel, entering into another world, a spiritual world, receives a Gods-eye view of things. This is what's happening in our text.

Now what does Ezekiel see? Well the text tells us that he sees, the 'idol of jealousy,' which is at a gate of the Temple. Now this gate is not like a doorway, not like these doorways at the back of the auditorium. Actually the gate was a passageway. It was a 'sally port.' I know of at least one individual in this congregation who will know what this means. It was a passageway like a tunnel through which you drive. There's quite a few of these in Pittsburgh. And the reason that the gate was a tunnel was because the court of the Temple was surrounded by buildings, not just a wall, but by buildings. And you had to go underneath these buildings through a tunnel to get to the inner court of the Temple. Ezekiel was taken, transported, in the vision to the outside of this sally port, this tunnel. And outside of this sally port, this tunnel, was a vision of the idol of jealousy.

Reading on: "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain. Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north" (Ezekiel 8:4). You see, Ezekiel was taken down into the Temple, outside of this gateway, this tunnel, this sally port, and as he looks to the North just outside of this gateway, he sees this idol of jealousy. And the glory of God was there.

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north.' So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance" (Ezekiel 8:5). So here's this idol of jealousy, a representation I would submit to you, of the idolatry of Israel and of Judah. This was a massive violation of the Second Commandment. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:4-5). This is the Second Commandment. And this idol, this idolatry, was provoking the jealousy of God.

You see Israel and Judah were a bride. This is how the Bible reckons it. And the Bible reckons God as a husband. If a bride commits adultery and walks out on the husband, what's her husband going to think? Her husband is going to be a little jealous. Would you not say, a tad jealous? And so God is jealous. This is the idea in the text. And then

we read further, at the end of Ezekiel 8:6, “But yet you will see still greater abominations.”

You see in this vision, Christ is showing Ezekiel what is going on in Judah and in Jerusalem. And Ezekiel is to report back to the exiles, the elders of the exiles, the rationale for God’s judgment upon Jerusalem. This is what is taking place.

Let’s read on. “Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall” (Ezekiel 8:7). So as Ezekiel now begins to enter this gateway, this tunnel, this sally port. He looks. He’s on the inside. Now he looks. “Oh, there’s a hole in the wall. Oh, that’s interesting.” “He said to me, ‘Son of man, now dig through the wall.’ So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance” (Ezekiel 8:8). This is an indication this is a vision, you see. Ezekiel is caught up in the Spirit and he’s getting a God’s-eye view of things. You don’t normally dig through a rock wall with your bare hands. This is not normally what you do.

“‘Son of man, now dig through the wall.’ So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance” (Ezekiel 8:8). So Ezekiel digs through a little ways. “Oh, another doorway.”

And He said to me, “Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.” So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.

Ezekiel enters this chamber, this room which is very dark. There are all sorts of creeping things carved on the walls. There are lizards. When you lift up rocks, you know the things you find crawling and slithering under those rocks. They are the forms carved on the walls. Ezekiel sees spiders and beetles and all sorts of creepy things.

The text now says, “Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 8:11). Standing in front of all these creepy things inscribed on the wall, are standing seventy elders. This is a representation of the Sanhedrin, the leaders of Judah. Ezekiel 8:11 adds, “with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them.” The president of the Sanhedrin is standing there. There’s a mention of Shaphan, who earlier in the Bible is found to be a very godly man, but his son it turns out, is not very godly.

The vision in Ezekiel 8:11 now reveals “each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.” Ezekiel see the elders with their censers in their hands and the incense rising before them. And what does this incense represent? Prayer. Prayer. These elders of Judah are praying to the creeping things inscribed on the walls of this dark chamber. This the picture that is given to us.

Christ responds. “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images?’” (Ezekiel 8:12). Do you hear these words? “Each man in the room of his carved images?” This vision is a representation of what these elders have in their hearts, in the dark chambers of their hearts. Calvin called the heart and the mind idol factories. What are our our minds continually working on and doing? They are manufacturing idols to worship. And this is the picture in Ezekiel chapter 8.

The perspective of the elders is simple. “For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us’” (Ezekiel 8:12). In the vision, they are in a dark chamber. They are thinking to themselves in their sin, “God doesn’t see.” How often have you thought this very thing? But God is able to see into the heart. He doesn’t see like a man. He sees into the heart. He doesn’t judge on outward appearance. He judges the heart. And then Christ says to Ezekiel, “Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing” (Ezekiel 11:13). As if this wasn’t enough, you’re going to see greater things. And so it was.

“Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD’S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz” (Ezekiel 8:14). Ezekiel proceeds through this gateway, this entrance, this sally port, this tunnel. Now he comes to the inside. He’s standing at the entrance of the inner court of the Temple. And what does he see? There are a group of women gathered there. They are weeping. And the text says; “They are weeping for Tammuz.”

The commentators really have a lot of different opinions as to who this Tammuz is. But it could very well be that Tammuz is the Greek Adonis which comes into Israel and Judah by way of Phoenicia. The Adonis cult was connected with nature. In the Middle-East, in the Spring-time, the countryside was lush. But when the hot summer sun came everything wilted. And very often the land became like a desert. In the Adonis cult, the women would spend seven days weeping, weeping and wailing because Adonis had died. This was the idea. The connection was with nature. The women would sing eulogies. But at the end of the seven day period, they would cry out; ‘Adonis is risen, Adonis is alive.’ This was the cult represented in the temple. This was a direct affront to the Savior who was to come. This was a direct affront to Jesus Christ, who is the living God, who is the one who would die and rise again. Christ bemoans the situation. “He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these” (Ezekiel 8:15).

Yes, as if this wasn’t bad enough, you will see worse. Just go a little bit further into the Temple court. “Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar” (Ezekiel 8:16). Now, coming all the way through the gate, Ezekiel comes to a position between the porch and the altar. Imagine the picture. The Temple faces east. Beginning from the west, and you have the Most Holy Place. Moving east you have the

Holy Place. Then, in front of the Holy Place, there was a porch. Finally, in front of the Temple proper was the altar. This is the picture.

And so Christ escorts Ezekiel between the porch and the altar. And what does Ezekiel see?

Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east (Ezekiel 8:16).

So these twenty-five men are facing away from the Temple. The porch, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place are now to their backs. They are looking to the east, to the rising sun. They are prostrating themselves to the rising sun. They are worshipping the sun.

Now I want you to think about the pictures of individuals in the news you have seen prostrating themselves in worship. They are kneeling. They are hunched over with their foreheads to the ground. This is the picture. This means these twenty-five men have their backsides pointed toward the Temple. Putting it in a more vulgar way, they point their posteriors into the face of God.

Christ's reaction is predictable. "He said to me, 'Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly?'" (Ezekiel 8:17). You can imagine the sense of revulsion in the heart of God when individuals prostrate themselves before His Temple, turning away from Him, and bowing to the rising sun and worshipping the rising sun.

The end of Ezekiel 8:17 is quite interesting. The New American Standard Version reads, "For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose." One of the commentators I read, said that you may translate this text, "They are ramming a stick up the nose of God." They are in essence saying to God, "Here, take this." We shudder at the thought of it.

Is God's judgment therefore justified? Ezekiel 8:18 concludes, "Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them." Because of the increasing abominations of the people in Judah and Jerusalem, Christ says judgment is indeed justified.

The words, "I will have no pity," ring of the curse of death. They ring of the words which were pronounced against Jericho, that all in Jericho should die, should face the judgment of God. Except you remember, in the case of Jericho, there was one family, one family that escaped the penalty of death. It was the family of Rahab. Rahab believed

in the God of Israel. It appears she believed in the Savior, the Savior who was to come. Rahab escaped the wrath the wrath of God. You see, Jesus Christ is the just Judge. He rightly, justly, levels the curse. And Jesus Christ is justly able to remove the curse. This is why you need to trust Him and I need to trust Him.

The President of the United States is able to issue pardons. Some are wondering if the former chief of staff of the vice-President is going to receive a pardon. Some folks believe that he was unjustly sentenced. And if the President of the United States gives this former chief of staff of the vice-President a pardon, some will applaud and some will be angry. The latter will consider that pardon unjust. There will be controversy. You know this is the case.

But Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ who levels the curse, is also able to justly remove the curse, justly I say. And how is this the case? He is the King of the universe. And not only so, Jesus Christ entered the world and lived a perfect life so that He would become a perfect sacrifice. He could then take to Himself the curse of death on behalf of His people. When Jesus Christ takes the curse of death upon Himself for His people, His people may be justly pardoned. The penalty of death has been exacted.

Now the question comes, how do you know if you are among God's people? How do you know if you are among those who freely receive the pardon? You must flee all idolatry. Our culture is filled with idolatry, is it not? It is *filled* with idolatry. Again, as a boy, I remember going to school and sitting in the classroom. Every day we began with reading the Bible, praying the Lord's Prayer, and saying the Pledge of Allegiance. Every morning we followed this procedure. This procedure was outlawed. Now there are schools, public schools, in this country today in which Islam is being taught and in which time is being set aside for Muslims to pray. Our country is full of idolatry. You need to flee idolatry.

You also need to trust Jesus Christ. That is, you must not simply believe Jesus Christ actually lived. You must not simply assent to the fact that Jesus Christ lived. You may also assent to this fact and say, "Oh yes He died on the cross." There are a lot of people like this running around in the world. You need to trust Jesus Christ with your life. Yes, you need to trust Jesus Christ. He is the One, the only One, who takes from you the curse of death because of your sin and idolatry. And when you trust Jesus Christ, the great God of Heaven says to you, "Pardoned, free, not guilty."

And so friends, this morning, in this text which bears down so heavily on this matter of idolatry in Judah and Jerusalem and their just punishment for sin, you need to remember and I need to remember to trust Jesus Christ. He justly levels the curse of death. He justly removes the curse of death. Trust Him, come to Him, believe in His work on your behalf. Bow not before the false god's of the world, but bow before the true God, Jesus

Christ. Trust Christ; He is the one who justly levels the curse and He is the one who justly removes the curse.

Let's pray together:

Father in Heaven, thank you for Your word. Grip our hearts we pray as we have quickly reviewed some of the things that You showed Ezekiel about the sin of the ancient people and the justice of the judgment which is to come. We realize, Father, except for You're grace, that we as a people are not far removed from this same wickedness. Father, I pray that You would so work in the hearts of each one of us here, in this place this morning, that we would trust Jesus Christ and that we would see that He is the one who has taken the judgment, taken the curse of death, from us. So work in us this faith and this trust. We as these things in the good Name of Jesus Christ, who is the Lord, Amen.