

A Nation is in Danger

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For our Scripture reading, we're turning to the Old Testament Scriptures to the prophecy of Ezekiel, chapter 22. Ezekiel 22, reading the entire chapter together. Let us hear the word of the Lord.

1 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Now, thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? yea, thou shalt shew her all her abominations. 3 Then say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD, The city sheddeth blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and maketh idols against herself to defile herself. 4 Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed; and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made; and thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come even unto thy years: therefore have I made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries. 5 Those that be near, and those that be far from thee, shall mock thee, which art infamous and much vexed. 6 Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in thee to their power to shed blood. 7 In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. 8 Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. 9 In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. 10 In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. 11 And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. 12 In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD.

13 Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee. 14 Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it. 15 And I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries, and

will consume thy filthiness out of thee. 16 And thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself in the sight of the heathen, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. 17 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 18 Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. 19 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. 21 Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. 22 As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you.

23 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 24 Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. 25 There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. 26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. 28 And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. 29 The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. 30 And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. 31 Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.

Thus ends the reading of God's holy and inspired word. May he bless it as a means of grace for his own name's sake. Our meditation this evening from the 22nd chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy that we have read together.

Every job has its ups and its down. Every job to some degree has elements that are essential but unpleasant to perform and certainly the ministry of the Gospel has its highlights. There are few things, indeed anything that is more thrilling than to declare and to expound the message of the Gospel of the free and of saving grace, both to saints and to sinners, but yet there are times when the preacher like the Old Testament prophets,

must expose sin and warn of judgment to come. It's never an easy message. It's never a happy message, but it is part of the whole counsel of God that we have been commanded and ordained to preach and sometimes the prophetic word focused on the individual, other times that perfect word focused on the nation, but even the national warnings have individual application. My message tonight expresses my concerns for the nation in which God has placed us, both to live and to do his kingdom work.

As we have read this 22nd chapter of Ezekiel together, I don't know how we could read it without very easily substituting our own nation. Ezekiel was a patriot but he was not blind to the faults of his society, of his own country. He was preaching to a people that were already in the throes of national calamity and the end for them was in sight and God inspired this prophet to not just give a political commentary of what was taking place in the nation, but rather God called him and gave him a message that was to teach the people and to warn the people, to inform the people that what was happening to them was not because of Babylon's superiority. Remember, now they were in part in the Babylonian captivity and Babylon was certainly an army that was far stronger than the army of Judah, but the prophet is making it clear that they were not here in captivity, they were not in the throes of this national calamity because Babylon was stronger than they were, but on the contrary, because of their gross sin before God. It was the collapse of faith that undermined the foundation of morality. It's the loss of faith that always is accompanied by a decline in morality. That's true for the individual and it's true for the nation. It's true for ancient Israel and it's true for the United States.

The United States is not the prophetic counterpart to Israel. It's not, but God's law is a universal standard of righteousness for all and it's always true that an immoral and perverse society invites the judgment of God and a nation that is guilty of the crimes that are described in the chapter that we have read together is a nation that is in jeopardy. So the moments that we have around God's word this evening, I bring an unhappy message, a message that I would prefer not to preach, but one that has been upon my heart. A message that concerns the signs of national disaster. What are the signs of national disaster? And I want to consider that under this basic question: how far is too far? How far is too far?

Ezekiel preached this message, a message that is divided into 3 parts as sermons are typically divided into 3 parts, marked by that repetitive phrase, you see it in verse 1, "the word of the LORD came unto me, saying." You see that again in verse 17, "the word of the LORD came unto me, saying." You see it once more in verse 23, "the word of the LORD came unto me, saying." And those statements will mark the progression of Ezekiel's argument of Ezekiel's sermon and tonight I very simply want to preach Ezekiel's sermon with the 3 points that he makes concerning the signs of national disaster. When is a nation in trouble. There are 3 things that we are going to observe.

I want us to see, first of all, that a nation is in trouble, a nation is in danger, when God's law is despised. That's the theme of his first message, the longest before us, the first 16 verses. It's here that Ezekiel will highlight the spread of sin. It's here that he will describe for us the blight of sin and describe the righteous judgment that the Lord is going to bring

upon it. The indictment is powerful. The indictment is irrefutable. The evidence is going to be unanswerably clear as the sins and the crimes of these people are now set forth for their consideration.

The sins that are catalogued are violations of the holy law of God, that holy law of God that we read here Lord's day after Lord's day after Lord's day. Those commandments of God that are absolutely unchangeable; those commandments of God that are absolutely inflexible; those commandments of God that demand a total and a perfect obedience if God is to be pleased. That law of God, but yet we find the indictment to be violations of that entire law of God.

They rejected God's law, they despised God's law and whenever God's law is set aside, whenever God's law is changed for something else, the alternative is simply no law at all. No standard at all. Everyone doing that which is right in his own eyes. And even here, it doesn't take much awareness of what is going on in the world in which we live, in the nation in which we live, to see how the law of God has been so despised by those around us. It becomes politically incorrect even to display the commandments. We see in the news of lawsuits that are brought against this courtroom or this state building or wherever, where the Civil Liberties Union is demanding that the law of God be taken away even from public reading. It is despised. We live in a day where the law of God is absolutely despised by those around us. A day in which evil is regarded to be good. A day in which good is considered to be evil.

But the prophet sets forth the evidence. He gives the nature of sins, the nature of those violations against God's law that held them guilty and held them liable before the holy God and brought, as we are going to see, the just judgment of God upon them. Let's look at the very end of the indictment that we see in verse 12 for I think we have the heart of the issue here when the Lord says, "They have forgotten me." They have forgotten me. The forgetfulness of God. I start here because in many ways the forgetting of God is the root from which all the others are going to spring. It's the forgetting of God that brings us to the very heart issue of all of the transgressions that are going to be evidenced in ancient Judah. I say it's the heart essence of the transgressions that we see around us in the society in which we live, the forgetfulness of God, the height irreligion. It is the greatest commandment that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our might. That's the greatest commandment and certainly it follows if that be the greatest commandment that the greatest sin becomes a violation of that failure to love him completely. That idea of love is primarily a word of the will. It's a word of volition, a word for the inclinations of the entire heart and the entire being now are placed upon the Lord and in many ways I say that because in many ways forgetting God is the very opposite of what it is to love God and to think about God.

When you see this word "forget" in the Scripture, particularly in Old Testament Scripture, it's always a word of the will. Forgetting is not something that is involuntary. We tend to use it that way, I suppose. We forget things that would be to our advantage to remember, things that I ought to remember, things that I should remember, some big thing, some little things. I just find myself forgetting uncontrollably, involuntarily. There

are things that I remember that I would love to forget. They keep coming to my mind. I seem to have no control over what I remember and what I forget but what the Bible here is speaking of, forgetting something or remembering something, it's not talking about that involuntary act. On the contrary, it's that which is of the will. To forget God, to forget is to consciously and willfully on purpose refuse to think about, on purpose refuse to acknowledge. So when they forgot God, it wasn't that they just got so busy with the stuff of life that God just slipped their mind. No, no, no, it was a conscious and a willful determination on their part, a willful rejection on their part of the Lord. A willful. It's quite serious. That's why it's serious. Why it's the heart, I say, of irreligion. A conscious decision to think about God.

The Bible tells us, yes, that the wicked will be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God. Those nations that refuse to acknowledge God. Those nations that refuse to put the mind and the heart upon the Lord are in jeopardy of being turned into hell. Thus says the word of God. A serious matter. A serious matter for an individual for it is a fool that forgets God. A serious matter for the individual, a serious matter for the nation to live without reference to the holy God, but our nation has virtually turned the name of God, has turned the law of God, the one true and living God into a byword. Often even that which is to be cursed, in this day of political correctness, we dare not say anything. In this day of political correctness, we dare not say anything about Mohammed, but the name of Jesus, the name of Christ, is drug through the mud and the dirt at will with no thought. To live without reference to God. To live without reference to God, that's what it is to forget God. That's what it is to forget God. To live without reference to him is a danger sign. It's a warning sign. How far is too far?

Characterized by blood-guiltiness. How the city is first described. Verse 2, "wilt thou judge the bloody city?" Will you judge literally the city of bloods and in the Old Testament when the word "blood" occurs in the plural it's always talking about blood shedding, about blood-guiltiness and over and again you saw it in the reading of our text tonight how often this city was accused of shedding blood. A city of bloodshed. You see it in verse 2. You see it in verse 3. In verse 4. In verse 6. In verse 9. Verse 12. Shedding blood. A city that was shedding blood, guilty of bloodshed. Charges repeatedly and variously stated. Whether that was political or religious or civil, there was a violent disregard for life and God held them accountable and God was judging them in the midst of judging them for the blood that was shed. Again, it doesn't take much acumen to see the parallels to the day in which we live, a day of violence. A day of violence. We have violence in our streets. We have violence in our schools. We have violence in our churches. We have violence in our medical clinics. Bloodshed.

Again, the perverseness. Again, the absence of any absolute standard of what is right and what is wrong. We can be outraged, yeah? We hear the outrage over a dead animal, but what do we hear about the mutilation of the unborn in medical clinics right across this land? Oh, that's tolerable and we have even the president of our own country invoking the blessing of God, invoking the blessing of God upon organizations that are so involved in the killing of infants. But oh, how bad it is when an animal is dead. What a perverted

society. What a perverted thinking but that's the way man will think when the law of God is replaced and the law of God is despised. Bloodshed. Bloodshed.

Idolatry. Idolatry, you see that in verse 3. They made idols to defile herself. It's not a surprise when you reject the one true and living God to make a god of your own, devising a god of your own imagination and that's what they did. They erected that something in the place of God. Oh, we don't, I suppose in our day see the kind of idolatry that was involved with the creation of images but idolatry is rampant. We have the worship of sports. We have the worship of money. The worship of power. The worship of pleasure. All in the place of God.

Signs of danger when God is replaced and then we have the violations. We have the violations of the law list, multiplying. I remember vividly and you can remember as well, remember vividly after the great event that changed the course, I suppose of our modern history on 9/11. What a tragedy but I remember that all of the Congress, remember that, all of Congress, the Senate, the representatives there holding hands, embracing on the steps of the Capitol. God bless America! Oh, at first a bit of hope that maybe this was the beginning but how soon it was forgotten but what a violation of even the third commandment to invoke the name of God, a God that you reject, a God that you despise, a God that you ignore, but yet now at a time, to invoke that name, to manipulate him for your own purposes. God doesn't play that game and God will not be so used.

Judgment was to come because of the idolatry and there was immorality. There was immorality, you see that particularly in verses 10, 11, what lewdness, what fornication being committed of every sort. Unchasteness in the most revolting forms: there was incest, there was adultery, every conceivable, particularly when we put this in the context of how they were bringing in the worship of Baal and other things that involved fornication as part of the worship ceremony itself. Lewd immorality and God was going to judge it and God was in the process of judging them for that heinous immorality that was taking place in the land. Again, look at us. Look at our nation, a nation that is degenerate in so many ways, obsessed with issues of sex, mutual consent becomes the only standard of decency. A day in which we have a total breakdown of the laws of moral purity. I didn't think I would ever live long enough to live in a day where sodomy, homosexuality, became a thing of virtue. Now we talk about gay pride. We talk about gay pride and we have without the law of God elevated that which is most heinous and that which is so contrary to the purity and the sanctity and the clarity of God's law, we have elevated that into a virtue for celebration. It makes no sense. It makes no sense that we live in a day where God's law has been despised.

Loss of home discipline. Look at verse 7. The breakdown of the home, "they have set light by father and mother." There is the direct opposite of the fifth commandment. In the fifth commandment, we are told to honor our parents, our father and mother, and the word "honor" literally has the idea of making heavy; regard as heavy your father and your mother to honor and here we have the very opposite. They are making light of, an expression for contempt. A breakdown of the home. A breakdown of the home. Here is the very heart again of God's law and there is little hope when the home structure falls.

How real is our religion? In many ways I suppose religion is no more real than it is in the home and we have homes right across this land that are falling apart, homes without fathers and homes that are now led by same-sex couples. Where's the hope?

There was selfishness. Selfishness, verse 7 again, "have vexed the fatherless and the widow, oppressing the stranger." Verse 12, doing thing for personal gain, "you have taken gifts," that is, you have taken bribes, "to shed blood." That sounds like Planned Parenthood, doesn't it? Taking bribes to shed blood. Selfishness. A disregard for those in genuine need. The second great commandment to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, but if you don't love God as you ought to love God, there's no way you're going to love your neighbor as you love yourself. You reject the law of God for a law of your own devising, then self becomes preeminent and predominate in all your behavior. A selfish generation we live in. Extortion. Greed. Corporate. Personal. It's all there. It's all there.

The profaning of the divine institutions, verse 8, "despised mine holy things, you have profaned," that is, you have made common, you have made ordinary, "my sabbaths." These days that God has set aside to be special days of rest and religious reflection, of thinking upon him, of worshiping him. No, they have set it aside. They have made it common, ordinary. Nothing is set aside for God. Desecration was of us that believe in keeping the Lord's day holy are viewed as strangely odd in this old world. Right across the board. A desecration of the Lord's sabbath.

Now, that's the indictment and I say it doesn't take much imagination, it doesn't take much thinking to see the parallels. How far is too far? How far in these sins is too far before the judgment of God? For Israel, it was far enough. For Judah, it was far enough. They were thoroughly guilty and the sentence now and judgment comes. Verse 14, "Can thine heart endure? Can you stick my judgment? I'm going to deal with you. I have spoken. I will do it." Nahum says, "Who can stand in the day of his indignation?" Psalm 1, "The the wicked cannot stand in the day of judgment." Who can stand? Who can stand? None can.

The sentence was clear, they became the object of scorn. Go back to verse 4, they became a mockery to other nations, reproach. God's displeasure. He was beating his fists together. What an imagery that is in verse 13, "Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain. I am beating my fist together," the Lord says of his anger, his wrath against their sins. God had brought them to the place of judgment and it is in this judgment that his name was going to be known. "You'll know when this happens. You'll know when the judgment comes. Then you will know, you will acknowledge that I am the Lord." They reached it. Judah had reached that place where the judgment had to come and did come. Have we? I don't know but the signs are there. The signs are there that we must awake and we must awake quickly else the judgment comes.

That's his first point. In verse 17, we come to the second point of Ezekiel's preaching, "the word of the LORD came to me, saying." And in this text, in this point of his sermon, he uses an illustration of the refining process, the refining of silver. It's an imagery that is very often used in the Scripture but many times in a very positive way of purifying. You

refine the silver, you eliminate the dross, you obscure it and it shows up that which is the pure. But Ezekiel brings the explicit problem here in a way that puts a twist on that particular image. Usually the refining of precious metals implies that there is some hope, some purifying, but that in this context there is nothing but hopelessness. There is no prospect for refinement. The smelting has left only the dross. It's that which is worthless. That which is scrap. That which is inferior. That which is good, therefore, only for discarding. Good only for judgment.

That leads to the outpouring of divine fury and, again, with that outpouring of divine wrath, the Lord says, "I am going to be known here. You're going to know. If it takes the judgment to know me, then the judgment will come," but doesn't it remind us of what Paul says, "The day will come when every tongue will confess, every knee will bow in the acknowledgment of the one true and living God. If it takes the judgment, the judgment will come sooner or later. You're going to know." And Judah had come to that point of national disaster. There seemed to be no hope but I say yet there is an implicit hope because it's still the imagery of silver. It implies that so long as there is silver, there is the prospect of some hope. There is always a preserving power. There is a preserving power in the remnant. A hundred years earlier, Isaiah describing and dealing with the sin of his generation, talking about the judgment of God that was imminent upon them, that was now 100 years later coming to pass, but Isaiah said, "Were it not for the remnant. Were it not for that representation of those in the nation that were still godly, that were still the silver, then I would make you like Sodom and Gomorrah, complete annihilation." There was something about the remnant that preserved the nation this long. I say that gives us hope.

Christ has left us. Why are we here? Why are we here in this society that is so dark and so perverse and so rotten and so corrupt? Why are we here? Christ has said he has left us here as salt and he has left us here as light. We are to be the salt of the earth. We are to be the light of the world. You think of what salt does, salt makes something more palatable or makes it taste better than it would otherwise. There is something about salt that preserves. There is something about salt that purifies, antiseptic. But in that process, there is something about salt that is very aggravating. You get salt in the wound and it hurts. It aggravates. There is something aggravating about salt and Christ says, "I have left you here to be salt in this world." Preserve it, yes. Purify it. But sometimes in that purifying process there is going to be an aggravation that takes place. How vocal are we? How vocal are we? How do we express our concern for the wickedness and the evil that is so around us and it is so easy, is it not, it is so easy because we have been in it so long that it's just part of life. It is what we are and we just hope that this guy or that guy who is more conservative than somebody may get elected, but hey, we're kind of used to it. Are we salt? Are we salt? We must be salt and there are times in our being salt that we must flat out be downright aggravating in this old world. Lifting our voices. Expressing our concern. I know tonight and I thought of this as I was thinking about preaching this message, in a sense, I am preaching to the choir. I am preaching to the choir. We're all on the same page here. I would love to get a natural audience for this, would you not? Let those that really need to hear this to hear it. But we are to be salt. We are to be salt.

We are to be light and what does the light do? The light in darkness and when the light comes on, you've been in an old room or an old barn and a light turns on and you see all the stuff that begins to scamper away. There is something about the light that will expose the stuff of darkness. We expose. But there's something about light also that is designed to show the way, to point the way. We are the lights of the world. Christ is the light of the world and as we bear light, we bear witness to that light which is the only hope. Christ the only hope ultimately for this old dark and sinful world. Why are we here? Why are we here? To be salt. To be light. To be the silver. To be the remnant. How far is too far?

We come to the third message. To his nation under judgment, Ezekiel made it clear that disaster comes when God's law is despised, when righteousness is indiscernible and he concludes this sobering message with this sign that a nation is in danger when corruption pervades society. Beginning in verse 23, he speaks to a land now that was not cleansed nor rained upon in the day of indignation, an emblem here of the land that was under the curse. A land that was under that covenant curse, barren of the blessing of God. And he concludes by making it absolutely unmistakably clear that the judgment that was to come was earned by the sins of society.

That's his closing word in verse 31, "their own way have I recompensed," or have I given, "upon their heads, saith the Lord." What a fearful thought. The prophet is telling his people that they were getting from God exactly what they deserved. They were getting from God exactly what they had earned. I would submit to you that there is hardly a more fearful thought, hardly a more fearful realization than to get from God what you deserve. To get from God what you earned. If the Bible is clear on anything, it is clear on this: that judgment is always earned. God is never capricious. God is never whimsical. No, he judges according to the absolute standard of his inflexible and unchangeable law. Not capricious. Judgment is always earned. That's, by the way, what magnifies for us the wonder and the beauty of grace. It is grace that gives to us what we don't deserve. It is grace that gives to us that which we are most undeserving of, that Christ has earned for us. Undeserved, but judgment always deserves. "Their way have I given, have I recompensed upon their heads."

But the thing that strikes me in this final message of Ezekiel in this sermon is that corruption is contagious. You see the attention that is given to the prophets and the priests and the people and the princes, every segment of society. Every segment of society is here guilty of some transgression before the Lord. The priests, those that had the power to protect. The princes who were given the power to protect and to promote the peace and the welfare were abusing that. Verse 27, they "are like wolves, destroying souls, dishonest gain." Those leaders, those civil leaders. The politicians that saw their own welfare to be more important than those that they were to lead, leading for gain, saw the people not as sheep to protect but as just a flock to fleece, taking advantage.

The civil leaders failed. The religious leaders failed. The priests, verse 26, "Her priests have violated my law, they have profaned, they have made common my holy things, they made no difference between the holy and the profane and the common." Put no difference. The responsibility of the priest is to make the way of God clear. They were

the teachers of the law. The priests among other things were the teachers of the law and it was their responsibility to make it clear what God's way was and what the way of the world was but no, they confused. They just confused. No difference anymore between that which was holy and that which was profane. They made everything common. They brought God down. They brought the holy God down to the ordinary, to the common, to the mundane.

The prophets who had the duty to proclaim, "The saith the Lord," had succumbed to the pressure for a popular kind of message. They daubed them, the prophets have daubed them, they literally whitewashed them. The prophets were whitewashers covering over the sins, exposing the sins. A popular message tickling the ears, but no word from the Lord. No word from the Lord. Tragic examples here.

And the people, the people just couldn't point the finger and say, "Well, it's the preacher's fault or it's the leaders fault." No, the people themselves were guilty. As goes the leaders, go the people for sure. But they were all guilty. The corruption had permeated society. It's not that we can look at our nation and say, "Yeah, it's that class over there." No, it goes through our entire society. Our political leaders are there for themselves. We have those in the churches that are there for themselves, preaching a message of peace, peace, when there is no peace. No word from God and the perverseness, the corruption of all society. Nobody to blame but themselves.

But this judgment that was earned could have been averted. It's a judgment that could have been averted. What a remarkable statement we have in verse 30, the Lord says, "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge," that would build up a wall, erect a wall, protection, "and stand in the gap," that would block entrance into the breach. If I found a man, I should not have destroyed it, "but I found none." I looked for a man, the Lord said, I looked for a man that would take up the cause of righteousness. I looked for a man that would proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord." I looked for a man, if I can use the imagery of Christ, to be the salt and the light. But I found none.

Has the story been told? The story for Judah was told. Very similar to Abraham's prayer for Sodom. The Lord would have spared Sodom for 10. He couldn't find 10. "I would have spared Judah if there was but a man to stand here in the gap, but I found none." For Sodom and Gomorrah, the story has been told. For Judah, the story has been told. For us, is the story yet told? God uses men, godly men, godly women to stand in the breach of morality, of spirituality, to make a difference, to be a difference, to be an aggravating difference at times but to be a difference. Could it be? Could it be? Would it be? Would it be? That as God looks at our nation, he would find a man? He found Moses. God was ready to destroy the entire nation of Israel back in the wilderness but Moses said, "You can't do it without destroying me," and Moses interceded. Moses interceded and the nation was spared. You think of the days of medieval darkness, perversion, blindness, deadness, and there was Luther, a man, and what a transformation, what a Reformation took place.

These are dark days. These are dark days in which we live. Is there hope? How far is too far? I don't know. I don't know but I know that we are on the way to that place that is too far. Would God raise up a man. What God raise up a church. Would God raise up his people in this day. Would God raise up his people in this day not just to be satisfied with our little routines, but to take the burden of the wickedness, of the perverseness, of the corruption of our day, intercede, to pray. Are we praying? Are we seeking the face of God for our generation? For our nation? Are we praying? Oh, here and there. Is it the burden of our heart? Do we believe that God can work in our day? Do we believe that there can be Reformation and revival in our day? I'm not willing to give that hope up. God is powerful. "They have made void thy law." It's time, O Lord, to work. It's time, Lord, to work because they have made void thy law.

Let us be concerned but let us not be discouraged for God is on his throne. We started the service this evening singing from Psalm 2 that even though the nations are riled up and conspiring against God and his anointed, yet he sits upon his throne and he laughs at their foolishness and their folly and he has set his King upon his holy hill of Zion. Christ rules. Is the nation in which we live in trouble? Yes, it is. Are there signs of national disaster? Yes, there are. Is the church in jeopardy? The church, the true church of Jesus Christ, is it in jeopardy of failing? No, it is not for Christ has promised that he would build his church and that church would advance and not even the gates of hell would prevail, could stand against the advancing of the church of Jesus Christ.

The church is not in trouble. Our place in it, where we are, I don't know. I'm not a seer, but I'm not a doomsday prophet either for there's hope. There is hope. There is hope in the Gospel of transforming grace. There are those here tonight that have been translated from darkness to light. There are those here tonight that have been translated from death into life. There is a power. There is a power in the Gospel to save sinners, individuals. Let the Gospel spread. There's our hope.

As we bear witness to the light, as we bear witness to the light and the light shines, pointing the way, is there hope? How far is too far? I don't know. I don't know, but I know that unless the Lord intervenes, our nation is approaching that line of no return. Amos describes the judgment upon the nations and you have that little expression that occurs over and over again, "For three transgressions and for four, I will punish." An idiom that is simply saying that they have passed the line. They have passed the line. They have passed the opportunity and judgment now becomes inevitable. He says, "For three transgressions and for four, against Damascus and against Tyre and against Israel and against Judah." Is it yet, "For three transgressions and for four" against us?

How far is too far? I don't know, but God and the Gospel is the power to reform. It is the power to revive. O God come. O God, would you visit us? This vine? O God, come and visit this our nation, Lord. Come and be our prayer as we sincerely and fervently seek the face of God for Reformation, for revival. Amen.

O Lord, we have considered thy word, nothing but thy word. It is clear, direct, exposing the problem but revealing the way. Lord, we confess that we don't know where we are in

the whole scheme of thy redemptive purpose and thy redemptive plan but, Lord, we know that thy law has been despised. Lord, it is time. It is time, O Lord, for thee to work. Let us not find our hope in what we might think to be the most conservative candidate in the next election. We desire that, sure enough but, Lord, we long and desperately need for thou to rend the heavens, to come down so that this world would know that thou art the Lord. Do it for thy sake, not to make things more comfortable for us but, O Lord, do it for thy sake, for thy glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

SUNDAY EVENING

Dr. Michael Barrett

Votum and Salutation

Psalter 3

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 22

Reading of the Athanasian

Creed, part 1

Prayer

Psalter 303

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 22

A Nation is in Danger

1. *When God's law is despised (1-16)*

2. *When righteousness is indiscernible (17-22)*

3. *When corruption pervades society (23-31)*

Psalter 21 (standing)

Sermon Conclusion

Closing Prayer

Psalter 253: 1, 2, 5, 10

Doxology (Psalter 196)

Benediction

SUNDAY EVENING

1. *What statement introduces the 3 points of Ezekiel's sermon?*
2. *What is the alternative when God's law is rejected?*
3. *Israel's violations of God's law can be summarized as follows. Think of parallels in modern society.*
 - a. *Forgetfulness of God*
 - b. *Bloodguiltiness*
 - c. *Idolatry*
 - d. *Family disintegration*
 - e. *Selfishness*
 - f. *Sabbath desecrations*
4. *What image does Ezekiel employ in his 2nd point? What is unusual about his application of the image?*
5. *What does this image imply about the Christians's duty in the world?*
6. *What statement in Ezekiel's 3rd point indicates that judgment is always deserved?*
7. *What hope does God's seeking for a man hold out for us?*
8. *How far is too far?*