

GOD'S HOLY FLOCK

Ezekiel 36: 17-38

IN **Isaiah 64:4**, the Prophet makes this observation; *“For since the beginning of the world men (no man by nature) have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. (Looks to Christ) In 2:10, Paul the Apostle’s first letter to the church at Corinth qualifies this statement. “But God hath revealed them unto us (his elect) by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”* How God can be just and justify the ungodly is a truth beyond the imagination of natural man. Even Adam, the smartest of men evidenced this ignorance by his self righteous act of trying to cover his sin, but Abraham saw what Paul referenced. Noah saw it in the eyes of the Lord. To Adam also it was revealed in the shedding of animal blood.

Until the Holy Spirit’s power in the preaching of the gospel is unleashed on the sinner, his eye remains darkened, his ear closed and his *“heart is far from God.”* We are born at enmity with God. But In the day of God’s power, by appointment of the Father and execution by the Spirit, based on the Son’s redeeming sacrifice wrought for his people by his obedience, suffering and death, the wandering sinner who *“comes to himself”* as did the prodigal son in Luke 17, is made aware of his father’s love for him and his place in the Father’s house. (*“Train up a child in the way he should go.”*) He remembered his father’s love.

Though sin changed his state, his standing with his father was unchanged. Luke 15:24; *“For this my Son was dead and is alive again.”* Obviously he is speaking of spiritual life and death for the son was not dead physically. He rejected his position in his father’s family and wasted the portion his father had reserved for him. He wanted to be his own man. He became a man of want. Even the son’s request to make him a hired servant reveals his ignorance of his standing with the Father. Either we are or we are not sons of God. That is determined by God’s electing love alone. He was not a son because he came home; he came home because he was a son. The Spirit’s work is to reveal our standing.

In chapter 36 Ezekiel, himself a captive of Babylon, by visions from God, was instructed by God to tell Israel, then in captivity in Babylon that their bondage soon would end and they would be restored to their homeland. Through their nation God would fulfill his promise to provide a Savior, a Shepherd who would call out a flock of sheep and sanctify, and through them reveal a nation of ungodly sinners transformed into what God calls in **Ezekiel 36:37-38**, a **“Flock of Holy men”**.

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.”

In this prophesy from Ezekiel 36, we see a parallel between Israel; God’s chosen nation and “spiritual Israel,” God’s chosen people. Israel was chosen through whom the Messiah would come. Spiritual Israel was chosen through whom Christ would present to the Father a holy flock. This he did by liberating Israel from captivity in Babylon, keeping the nation intact through whom the Messiah would come and “fulfill all righteousness for his people. Ezekiel’s prophesy is that of every Old Testament prophet who warned Israel of her sin and God’s impending judgment for that sin.

Read Ezekiel 36:18. *“Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it:”*

Israel was guilty of much bloodshed: not the shedding of human blood in warfare but the myriad animal sacrifices made to their pagan idols. Sacrifices commanded by God were rejected of God because they were offered on pagan altars at Bethel and Dan by priests not ordained of God.

There is only one place to worship God: at the one true Throne of Grace, where Christ our High Priest is entered in. All those rivers of blood, shed by the priestø of Israel were polluted by the pagan altars on which they were offered. Israel worshipped God with the mouth, but their heart was far from God. They made the same mistake every sinner makes when he seeks to get right with God. They sought to be accepted before God based on their obedience to the Law.

They came to a throne of works. How do I know this to be so; personal experience and the Scriptures. (Romans 10:1-4, ögoing aboutö) To do so is a rejection of Christø work for his people. What I thought would please God was an abomination to Him. It dishonored every attribute of his redemptive character and cast shame and reproach upon His Son. I worshipped at an altar where the True God was not preached. My altar, in ignorance was öanother Jesus.ö (2 Corinthians 11:4)

Read Ezekiel 36:19. *“And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.* God judged Israel by their obedience to the law of God and that judgment was unto condemnation. Galatians 4:21 tells us why. *Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?”* And what does the law say? **Galatians 3:10,** *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”* That equals perfection.

God judged Israel “according to their doings,” with the one standard whereby all are judged, his righteousness imputed and their doings fell far short of his perfection. **Read 1John 3: 9-10.**

*“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In **this** the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness (Pleads Christø righteousness) *is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*” (Christ)*

Read Ezekiel 36:20. *“And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land.”* They “went forth from their God’s land.” They forsook the land God gave them and the God who gave them the land (conditionally). The God who promised to be their God gave them over to their own sinful lusts which opposed Christø person and works to redeem his people. Remember, it was through the nation Israel the Messiah was to come. They forsook Godø rest in Israel for bondage in Babylon. We reject rest in Christ to bondage to the law. Why would anyone reject Godø rest for bondage in Babylon? The answer: Ignorance or rejection of Christ as Lord over them.

Itø no different today. I once rejected Godø rest in Christ, thereby rejecting the God who sent him. In ignorance of Godø righteousness I worked hard to establish my own righteousness, and in so doing rejected Godø righteousness. Every move I made, every breath I took opposed the one True God of whom I knew nothing. In **Roman’s 9:30**, Paulø description of Israel fits me too. *“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”*

God accepts no person based on that persons character and conduct. Like Israel, all I had to offer was my character and conduct. I had no righteousness satisfactory to his demands. In fact, I was totally ignorant of my need of His righteousness. I believed the more öblood I shedö in sacrifice

to God, the more pleased was God with me. **Romans 3:15**; *“Their feet are swift to shed blood.”* God only accepts the character and conduct of his dear Son as God Man in his obedience, suffering and death to satisfy the law’s demands against his elect. It’s easy to offer a sacrifice, it’s impossible to change the heart. By nature, we will not submit to God’s law. We will not look to the True Christ for all our salvation. **Refusal to be saved** by Christ alone, whether in ignorance of or in insubordination to his righteousness imputed alone is to profane His holy Name. It is the course of sinners by nature and casts shame and reproach upon the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It echoes what Paul wrote to the churches in **Galatians 2:21**, *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”*

Israel was driven from their homeland into captivity because they rejected the God who chose them for his special people in all the earth. Spiritual Israel, even God’s elect scattered among the nations were given over to her captors for the same reason. But their reproach would be shortly rolled away.

Is not your experience for being in bondage to sin that of the nation Israel? Did you not think your acceptance with God was based on your obedience to the law of God? Did you not shed rivers of blood to atone for your sins? Were you not ignorant of the law’s design to set you looking elsewhere for salvation? Were you not ignorant of God’s righteousness imputed as the sum and substance of your salvation? Did you not desire God to judge you *“according to your doings?”* No unconverted sinner will ever admit to that sin but every sinner God has visited with his power is made to see it and confess it.

If God would populate the waste cities in Israel with holy men, a miracle of grace must be wrought in the ungodly. If God would populate his church with holy men, they must be liberated from bondage to sin and revealed to be righteous and holy in his sight.

And that’s exactly what God has done. For his great name sake which Israel profaned, God would sanctify himself in the eyes of Israel. **Read Ezekiel 36:21-24**

21 *“But I had pity (High regard) for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. 22 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. 23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned (dishonored) in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified (hallowed) in you before their eyes.”*

Here God gives the reason for his mercy and grace toward Israel. He does everything for his glory. Isaiah 42:8, *“I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.”*

Read Ezekiel 36:23 again.

“And I will sanctify my great name in you before their eyes.” I will demonstrate my holiness in your redemption from Babylon. Instead of condemning you for your transgressions I will *“have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.”* My great name is The Lord our righteousness, a Just God and Savior. Those given me by my Father must be delivered from bondage, but He must be just when he justifies the ungodly. How can man live when God said; *“The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die.”* Because our God is like no other; he is a just God and Savior. He shows that character in **Ezekiel 36b** *“sanctifying himself in Israel before their eyes.”* God will reveal the mystery of godliness: how he can be just and justifier. He will vindicate his holiness and glory by

the salvation of a remnant of the nation Israel. He would demonstrate his power and faithfulness to save a people

Babylon is a type of false religion. In Adam, our federal head and representative we all have experienced the bondage of Babylon. Though banned from God's presence and fellowship we were never out of his sight, mind and affections. Though our thoughts of God were "Only evil continually," his thoughts were of our restoration to his fellowship.

God delivered Israel into captivity for a season. Even his elect experience this bondage. God delivered Israel in a temporal sense from bondage. He delivers his elect eternally from spiritual bondage. **How?**

Read Ezekiel 36:24-30. "For **I will take you** (mine elect) from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. (The church) 25 ¶ Then will I sprinkle clean water (The gospel) upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your **filthiness**, and from all your **idols**, will I cleanse you. (John 17: 17; "sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.") (Ephesians 5:26; "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, **and cause you** to walk in my statutes, and **ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.** 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen." (In Christ we have the Bread of Life.)

In these verses God lays out the order in which he deals with his elect.

V24; I will take you from **among the heathen**. "Come out from among them and be ye separate."

V24; I will bring you into the church of the redeemed of the Lord.

V25; I will cleanse you with pure water. (The gospel of righteousness.)

V26; I will give you a new heart to love righteousness and hate evil.

V27; I will keep you from falling away. Righteousness demands life.

V28; I will give you a new identity. **Read 1 Peter 2:9-10** "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

V29; I will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice in all these transactions, Israel is passive. God is active. "I will and you shall." Salvation is of the Lord without contribution.

Notice now the reaction of Israel. **Read Ezekiel 36:31-32** "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations." Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

Shame and sorrow without fear of punishment which leads to true repentance is the certain outcome of Holy Spirit conviction. **Again, the prodigal son**) No justified sinner who sees the magnitude of his sins and the heavy cost borne by his Savior and the great mercy and grace of his God can but show some remorse for his ungodliness. How can a redeemed sinner not rejoice in "Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh?" How can a redeemed sinner not marvel at the love of God to give his own Son a ransom for my sins and give me his perfect robe of

righteousness to cover my nakedness, a ring for my finger, declaring me a son of God and sandals for my feet that once were swift to shed blood, now shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. How can I not love those whom God loves in supporting the ministry of the gospel? How can I not love those yet uncalled, unquickened, ungodly, yet loved of the Lord who must hear this gospel to be enlightened unto the truth of what God has done for them in Christ Jesus? Would I ðprofane the name of the Lordö by neglecting so great salvation?

If repentance is a radical change of mind concerning who God is and what he has done for his people, it is of necessity a radical change in the way I think of myself. I am ashamed of my former idolatry, but I am not ashamed to confess it. I was completely wrong in my experience of who I really am, nothing more than a **sinner** with nothing to offer the God who saved me by his grace. I was actively and openly opposed to the God who chose me and the Christ who saved me. So we see in the example of Israel what is God's charge against us: In a word, idolatry.

Secondly, for our transgressions God gave us what we wanted by nature, bondage to sin; specifically self righteousness, (our obedience as opposed to Christ's obedience). **Thirdly**, God will sanctify his great name in the salvation of that remnant for whom Christ died.

Jesus said in John 6:39; *"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."*

God never promised to save everyone but he did promise to save all for whom Christ died. He's a Just God. He cannot charge with sin the sinner for whom Christ died and satisfied law and justice. Christ's resurrection from the dead is God's testimony that he is satisfied with Christ's obedience unto death. His righteousness imputed to the account of every sinner he represents demands their eternal life. In the salvation of God's elect he is ðsanctifiedö, set apart as the only true and living God, a Just God and Savior.

Read Ezekiel 36: 33-35. *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. 34 And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. 35 And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited."*

Here God promises to revive the desolate, barren, unfruitful land, (spiritual Israel) left unkept by Israel's captivity in Babylon. God's elect are unfruitful until regeneration. **(Romans 6:17-18.)**

"But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness." How; he will bring the gospel to Israel, (the church, those he cleansed with his blood from all their iniquities.) *"I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* It will be better than the Garden of Eden, for it shall never be uninhabited for it is not maintained by conditions on the sinner but on the sinners Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 36:36. *"Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, (I will build my church) and plant that that was desolate: (I will cause it to grow) I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it, you will experience it, they will see it."*

Read Ezekiel 36: 37-38. *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. 38 As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD."*

The desire of every justified sinner is to enquire of God to call out his elect from Babylon and fill the church with holy men; men who are holy unto the Lord as the flock of Jerusalem. These animals were set apart, unblemished and consecrated to God for sacrifice on his Altar. Holy men

are those made so by Christ. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:30.** *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, (holiness) and redemption,”* not to sacrifice themselves on the altar but to *“Present your bodies a living sacrifice (of praise) unto God which is your reasonable service.”*

God will fill the waste cities (Albany Georgia being one) with flocks of holy men. He has a people from every kindred, tongue and nation, some of whom he has as yet not called.

Isaiah 64:4 identifies them. *“For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.”*

Corinthians 2:10, *“But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God.”*

Every sinner for whom Christ died shall know that **ŏI AM** the Lord.

John 17:3, *“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”* Jesus said of himself; *“I am the door of the sheep.”* (God’s holy flock)

John 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

Has your eye seen, has your ear heard? Have you found pasture? Has it entered into your heart what God has prepared for those who wait for him? Will you wait on the Lord? Will you *“be still and know that I am God?”* Will you quit your labor and enter into his rest?

God has a holy flock, set apart in electing love in eternity past. He has a Good Shepherd, appointed then the Substitute, Surety and Savior of his flock. It is this Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. By name and in his time he calls out his sheep. *My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man luck them out of my hand.”*

You and I will never witness a greater revelation of a greater mystery than that of a Just God saving an ungodly sinner. Thank God he does reveal it to his holy flock through the preaching of our Gospel.

May He be pleased to reveal it unto us today.

By Winston Pannell