

## Act III: Love lost (a tale of dark disgrace)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn back to Ezekiel chapter 16. In our church Bibles, that's page 703. Ezekiel 16. And this evening we're picking up the story of this chapter at Act 3.

That's verse 35. And we're not going to re-read the whole chapter this evening, but it would be helpful to remind ourselves where we are in the drama. So perhaps you would cast your eyes with me over a few extracts from the earlier part of the chapter before we get to our passage.

A Reader's Digest version. And we've witnessed already, at the beginning of Act 16, the rescue of an abandoned baby girl. A spectacular rescue of God's people.

And then incredibly, in verse 8, the Lord took this little unloved urchin to be his bride. Verse 8. When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you are at the age for love.

And I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God. And you became mine.

[ 1 : 13 ] God then showed extravagant love to his bride over the next few verses. In verse 15, came a shocking betrayal. But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby.

Your beauty became his. And then the scandalous idolatry of God's thankless people was exposed ruthlessly over the next few verses.

Until verse 22, the Lord diagnoses the root of the problem. The true cause of his people's adulterous behavior. Verse 22.

In all your abominations and your whorings, you did not remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.

You forgot my grace. And then finally, after the charges were brought against God's adulterous bride, the verdict was pronounced guilty. Guilty.

[ 2 : 23 ] Verse 30. How sick is your heart, declares the Lord God, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute.

So tonight we're going to take up the story in verse 35 as God's sentence is passed on his people. Verse 35. Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God, because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers and with all your abominable idols. And because of the blood of your children that you gave to them.

Therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and I will uncover your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness.

And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged. And I will bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into their hands and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places.

[ 3 : 43 ] They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a crowd against you and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords.

And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women. I will make you stop playing the whore and you shall give payment no more.

So will I satisfy my wrath on you and my jealousy shall depart from you. I will be calm and no more angry because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things.

Therefore, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head, declares the Lord God. Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations? Behold, everyone who uses proverbs

will use this proverb about you.

Like mother, like daughter. You are the daughter of your mother who loathed her husband and her children. And you are the sister of your sisters who loathed their husbands and their children.

[ 4 : 50 ] Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you.

And your younger sister who lived to the south of you is Sodom with her daughters. Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations, within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways.

As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom.

She had daughters and excess of pride, excess of food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me.

So I removed them when I saw it. Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they.

[ 5 : 55 ] And have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. Bear your disgrace. You also.

For you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they. They are more in the right than you.

So be ashamed. You also. And bear. For you have made your sisters appear righteous. This is the word of the Lord.

We'll turn back to that passage, if you would. Ezekiel 16. Page 703. In the church Bibles. And we'll pray just now.

Father, we thank you that your word is powerful. We thank you that it doesn't speak to us in half measures. And that it doesn't spare our pride. But we confess, Lord, that often we find it difficult.

[ 6 : 59 ] And that often our hearts are hard and slow to respond. So we pray now, Lord, that as we turn to your words, you would help us to hear your voice. Help us, Lord, to learn more of you.

And to heed the warnings of this passage. To make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, tonight we're in the third act of one of the most gripping dramas in the Old Testament. Ezekiel has been weaving the entire history of God's ancient church into an epic tragedy.

A story of unrequited love. And it's been a drama that has it all. It began with that abandoned baby girl. And we followed that unwanted child.

Representing God's Old Testament people. Through a dramatic rescue. A passionate romance. And her rise to queen. All that just in act one.

[ 8 : 05 ] A rags to riches story. Of love lavished by God. On his ancient people. But the drama was only just beginning. The romance was followed by callous betrayal.

Act two was a story of seduction. Adultery. And idolatry. The orphan had become queen. And now the queen.

Had turned prostitute. Love was lavished. And love was scorned. And now in act three. Love is lost. Altogether. This is a tale of dark. Disgrace. Of humiliating exposure. And the judgment. Which Ezekiel's readers.

Must have been crying out for. By this stage. In the drama. And along the way. There's another twist. In the plot. As in so many iconic stories.

[ 9 : 05 ] We'll find two. Ugly sisters. Lurking in the background. But when we meet. Jerusalem's ugly sisters. Tonight. Sodom.

And Samaria. We'll get another surprise. Because underneath. All the lies. And pretense. Underneath. All her layers of makeup. We'll find that.

Jerusalem. The Cinderella. Of our story. Is the ugliest. Of them all. Act three. Is an ugly. Story.

It's here. That Ezekiel. Really begins. To get the hooks. Under his listeners. Skins. Remember. He's writing this story. From exile. He's already been deported.

Along with the cream. Of the city's aristocracy. By the Babylonians. Who to all effect. Now control Jerusalem. But his fellow Judeans.

[ 10 : 00 ] Are still living. In complacent. Denial. They think. That if Jerusalem. Hasn't fallen. Then it never will. They think.

Their idolatry. And their unfaithfulness. The harlot. Like behavior. Of the woman. Of the story. Will go unpunished. Forever. And so.

To that smug. And falsely confident. Old Testament church. Ezekiel. Has a pretty sharp. Reality check. To deliver. He's already exposed.

The ugly face. Of their spiritual adultery. And now. In act three. Comes the ugly. Inevitability. Of judgment. But like the first half.

Of the story. We New Testament believers. Can't come away. From act three. Without being pierced. By a few. Pretty sharp. Splinters. As we read.

[10:57] About the way. Judgment comes. To God's. Old Testament church. There's a blistering. Warning. To us. His contemporary people. Jerusalem's disgrace.

Is an ugly. Story. A story. With three. Ugly lessons. For us. About sin. And. Judgment. And the first. Is this. Judgment. Exposes. An ugly. Truth. That's the message. Of the first paragraph. Verses. 35. To 43. Judgment.

Exposes. An ugly. Truth. Now. Although this little section. Is not the most enjoyable. To read. It really is. Where the genius. Of Ezekiel's storytelling.

Begins. To shine through. You see. By now. Ezekiel. Has his listeners. On the edge. Of their seats. They've been shocked. Already. Haven't they? Ezekiel's listeners.

[11:52] By the scandalous story. That we've heard. They've been shocked. At the extravagant. Grace. Shown to God's people. And enthralled. By the rags to riches story.

But this woman's actions. Must have seemed. Absolutely. Outrageous. To Ezekiel's listeners. They've watched. As this woman. Has grown cold. And callous.

And treated God's grace. With horrendous betrayal. They've sat there. Listening. In staggered disbelief. To Ezekiel's story. And they've wondered.

When judgment. Will come. By this point. In the story. They must be crying out. For the king. To avenge. His own. Scorned. Love. It's a sort of.

Ingratitude. Isn't it? Which on a simply. Human level. None of us. Can stomach. So by now. Ezekiel. Has his audience. Craning their necks.

[12:49] Waiting eagerly. For the sham. To be exposed. To be exposed. But. And here is the genius. At the same time. His audience.

Have an uncomfortable feeling. Welling up. In the backs. Of their minds. Because they know that. Above the level. Of the story. The woman.

Whose exposure. They're waiting for. Represents. Themselves. As Ezekiel's message. Has come. In the guise. Of a gripping story.

Yet. What's beginning. To click. Is that. The real sham. The real pretense. Is their own claim. To be God's special. Covenant people.

It's their own. Unfaithfulness. And ingratitude. To God. That this. Scandalous woman. Represents. So by sucking them in. To the story.

[13:43] Ezekiel. Has managed. To convince. His listeners. That God's judgment. On them. Is. Just. More than that.

It is long overdue. And it would be an outrage. A sham. If it were allowed. To continue. Unchecked. Well finally. In verse 35.

The sentence. Has been passed. But what's important here. Is that this is not. Simply. The hot headed. Fury. Of a jilted husband. The language.

Of this entire passage. Is the language. Of just. Judicial. Retribution. The charges. Of treason. And adultery. Have already been brought.

And the sentence. Now that it comes. Is perfectly. Proportional. Look at verse 42. So. Will I. Satisfy. My wrath.

[14:37] On you. And my jealousy. Shall depart. From you. I will be calm. And no more angry. In other words. Jerusalem's punishment. Is not. Capricious.

Or spiteful. But a fair. And exact. Match. For her crime. She will be judged. For exactly. What she really is. Verse 38.

I will judge you. As women. Who commit adultery. And shed blood. Are judged. And bring upon you. The wrath. Of blood. And jealousy. So like many.

Today. She may have called. Her idolatry. Something else. She may have called it. Multi-faith worship. But God calls it. Adultery. And when justice.

Catches up with us. A spade. Will be called. A spade. But when judgment comes. It is not what we might expect. Listen again. From verse 37.

[15:33] Therefore behold. I will gather. All your lovers. With whom you took pleasure. And verse 39. I will give you. Into their hands.

And they shall throw down. Your vaulted chambers. And break down. Your lofty places. They shall strip you. Of your clothes. And take your beautiful jewels. And leave you naked.

And bare. Just notice. Exactly what happens there. I think Ezekiel shows us. Two very interesting things. Firstly. In this passage.

God is simply taking back. What was his. The covenant gift. Which he had lovingly. Poured on his bride. In act one. And which she had abused.

So cruelly. His. What was his affection. His. Beautiful jewels. And his. Silk. And linen clothing. And in the end.

[16:27] The ugly truth. Was. All to see. She was left. Just as he'd found her. In the beginning. Verse 39.

Naked. And bare. And by verse 40. Just like. That unloved baby. At the start of the tragedy. She's wallowing. Once again. In her own blood.

We saw at the beginning. Of the story. That everything. God's people were. They were. As a sheer. Gift. Of his grace. And then we watched. Last week.

As she abused. Those good gifts. And turned them. Into idols. And now. God simply. Takes back. Those things. Which he never. Had any claim to.

And never showed. Any gratitude. For. And he reveals. To all the world. The ugly. And pathetic. Sight. Of his people.

[17:23] Apart. Apart. From. His grace. Despite. All her pretensions. Despite. All her pride. Judgment. Shows her up.

For what she really was. Not. The proud. Princess. But a naked. And degraded. Prostitute. Uncovered.

And exposed. For all to see. But secondly. There is. A bitter. Irony. To Judas. Downfall. In the end. It's her own. Lovers.

Who betray her. God simply. Gives her into the hands. Of her own. Foolish. Choices. The ones. Who expose her. And disgrace her.

And drag her down. Were the very lovers. She had. Desperately sought. Security. And protection. From. So it was. In Judas history.

[18:18] The foreign power. She had tried to strike. Deals with. Were the very ones. Who in the end. Broke down her walls. And carried her people off. Into slavery. And of course.

When it comes to. Defending her. Those make-believe. Gods. Which she had. Invested. So much. Trying to please. Are about. As useful.

As a riot. Policeman. Armed with a feather. Duster. The only one. Who really. Had any power. To save. The one.

Who'd rescued her. Already. Who'd clothed her. And fed her. And treasured her. Was the very one. Whose love. She had scorned. So finally. And of course.

It's the same story. Time and again. For every human being. And every church. Which turns its back. On the true God. To do. Its own thing. In the end.

[19:16] Our own idols. Will drag us down. And destroy us. Yes. They betray us. In this life. When as we saw last week. They fail to deliver. The satisfaction.

That we so desperately. Crave from them. But far more importantly. They betray us. In the end. When they are. Completely. Powerless.

To save us. In judgment. It all seems so obvious. Doesn't it? But the truth. Is that. Every one of us. Falls for the same.

Stupid. Lie. The things we idolize. The things we allow. To dominate. Our thoughts. And our hopes. Above the gospel of Christ. Do not come to us.

With a large. Government health warning. Attached to them. If every pay slip. We received. Came with a large warning. Shouting at us. I will let.

[20:11] You down. Then perhaps. We wouldn't be so taken in. But the reality is. The things we idolize. Seem to promise.

So much. And if we're honest. With ourselves. We want. To be taken in. Don't we? By the lies. We want to believe. That our own thing. No matter what it is.

Will deliver the goods. And so. As Paul puts it. In Romans 1. We exchange. The truth. About God. For that lie. To worship. And serve.

The gift. The creator. The gift. The gift. The gift. The gift. The gift. The gift. Rather than the giver. Just like the woman. In the story. We worship. And serve. The things we think.

Will deliver satisfaction. And of course. Just like Jerusalem. The things we serve. Begin to enslave us. Now you know.

[ 21 : 06 ] The usual things. That preachers lift off. Here. They're probably all true. For most of us. Fame. Finances. Family. Security. Security. Security. Success.

Sex. All of those. Good. Gifts of God. Which have the power. To trap. And enslave us. The second. We think of them. As ultimate goals.

Suddenly. They're no longer. A gift from the Lord. Which we can trust. But a thing. To be earned.

And sought. And driven by. A thing. A thing to serve. Frantically.

And a thing. Which ultimately. Will drag us down. And do us in. What else explains. Judah's frantic desperation. Sacrificing. Even her own children.

To try to. Win what she craved. From these dead idols. Talking this week. To a few other staff members. At the church. It seems like.

[ 22 : 06 ] For most of us. The things we fall for. Are just the same. As the woman in the story. Look back to verse 15. And you'll see the root. Of her idolatry. The gift.

Which she trusted in. Was her beauty. The beauty. Which God had given her. So ultimately. This woman's idol. Was herself. Everything she does.

Is driven. By a desire. To protect. And to please. Herself. Now most of us. Can be like that. Can't we? We cling on. We want to cling on.

To our time. To our health. To our fitness. To our looks. But the more we worry. About protecting ourselves. Protecting our time.

The more hopeless. The job seems. Our evenings. Seem to leak away. We can't reduce. The workload. We can't get. A moment. To ourselves. And the more.

[ 23 : 02 ] We try to cling on. To it. The more anxious. And enslaved. We become. Rather than trusting. The Lord. To protect. And to provide.

We become miserable. Enslaved. By the things. We really. Serve. And even if. We finally get. What we were looking for. That elusive. Evening to ourselves. Perhaps. It's never. Enough. We're left. Just as tired. Just as anxious.

And just. As unsatisfied. So rather than. Enjoy. The time. Which God has given us. And use it happily. To serve his people. We become.

Snared. By it. Our own idols. Drag us down. And in the end. Far. Far worse. They are. Powerless. To save us.

[ 23 : 57 ] We're left. Just like this woman. To face judgment. Exposed. For what we really are. And what we really trusted in. All because.

Once again. In verse 43. She didn't. Remember. The days of her youth. She did not remember. There was a God. Who could. Deliver. A God.

Who had already. Delivered her. In sheer grace. So once again. We get that. Repeated. Warning bell. Of this tragedy. The danger. We saw last week. Of forgetting.

Our rags. Forgetting. That we stand. By grace. And growing proud. So now. Her deeds. Are returned. Upon her head. Judgment.

Exposes. The ugly truth. Of who she truly is. And what. She truly serves. And then comes. Our second. Ugly lesson.

[ 24 : 52 ] In verses. 44. To 52. Judgment. Ridicules. And ugly. And ugly. And ugly. Pretense. And it's now that we come to these two ugly sisters.

And these new characters. Seem like a strange thing to throw into the plot. At this stage in the drama. Until we remember why Ezekiel's tragedy. Works so well.

You see what undergirds this story. Is the shock. That the harlot at the center of it. Is not some Gentile. But none other. Than the proud people of Judah.

And so this little section. Brings another. Uncomfortable home truth. To those of us. Who like to think of ourselves. As the true. Church. It was bad enough.

To remind Judah. Of her embarrassing. Pagan parents. In act one. And there was worse. Still to come. Wasn't there last week. In act two. When smug. Pious Jerusalem.

[ 25 : 55 ] Was compared to a brazen prostitute. But now. Her nose. Is rubbed in it. With a verse. A proverb. That would have made. A proud Jew.

Physically. Sick. A proverb. Which everyone who heard. Would use to ridicule. Her pretense. At superiority. Behold.

Everyone who uses proverbs. Will use this proverb. About you. Like mother. Like daughter. Well so far. That's going over old ground. Jerusalem's pagan parents.

From act one. But then comes. An even more. Uncomfortable comparison. Your elder sister. Is Samaria. Who lived to the north of you. And your younger sister. Who lived to the south of you. Is. Sodom. Not only. Did you walk in their ways. And do according. To their abominations. Within a very little time. You were more corrupt.

[ 26 : 50 ] Than they. You see. Jerusalem's pride. Her complacency. Is simply. An ugly. Pretense. Because for all her show.

God's people. Are no better. Than the pagans. All around her. In fact. The truth is. That this privileged princess. Is worse. Even than.

Sodom. And Samaria. Cities. Which are bywords. For immorality. And lewd behavior. Judah liked to think. That she was a cut above.

Her northern relative. A cut above Samaria. Unlike Samaria. She had the real temple. She had the real king. But the truth. Was that by now.

She was just. As idolatrous. As them. Today. We may say something like. Bad blood. Will out. You can try and keep.

[ 27 : 45 ] Your shameful past hidden. You can disguise. Your background. You can go to. Finishing school. You can call yourself. A pretentiously. Middle class name. Like. Rupert. Perhaps.

But in the end. The family traits. Will show themselves. And just as. Judgment. Caught up. With those. Proud cities. Of Sodom.

And Samaria. Judgment. Will catch up. With God's own people. It came to the northern kingdom. To Samaria. In just the same way. She was wiped.

Off the map. By her own. Foreign lovers. The Assyrians. But Jerusalem. Didn't. Listen. To the warning. And when judgment.

Comes to her. It will expose. The ugly pretense. Of God's church. That. Disgusting. Hypocrisy. Which pretends. To be better. Than the world around them.

[ 28 : 41 ] When in truth. It's often difficult. To tell them apart. Don Carson. A very good commentator. Puts it like this.

Evangelical. Jerusalem. Evangelical. Jerusalem. Has sunk. So low. That she makes. Liberal. Samaria. And pagan. Sodom.

Look good. By comparison. That is a damning. Indictment. Of God's people. Isn't it? Well. Let's not make. The same mistake.

We modern. Evangelicals. Can become. Just as conceited. Can't we? If we allow. Grace. To fade. Into distant memory. If we forget.

Those brutal. Gospel truths. About our true natures. Then we can easily. Begin to kid ourselves. That we have something. Attractive to offer. Something which sets us.

[ 29 : 36 ] A cut above the rest. But when judgment. Exposes us. Any claim. To superiority. Will look. Absolutely. Ludicrous.

And there is nothing. More unattractive. Than a church. Which has lost. Sight. Of grace. You do sometimes see.

Graceless churches. Don't you? Apparently. Evangelical churches. And yet. Characterized. By. Pride. Just like Jerusalem. Characterized.

By pride. In their doctrine. Or their heritage. Or something else. But underneath it all. They are dead. They have lost. Their evangelistic edge. Sometimes.

You'll meet Christians. Campaigning. On all the right issues. Perhaps. Issues of public morality. Or sexuality. But it seems like. They're doing it. For all the wrong.

[ 30 : 34 ] Reasons. And what comes across. Is not a gracious. Concern for truth. But an unattractive. Pride. Pride. Pride in their own.

Moral scruples. It's so easy. To grow up. In a church. Like ours. Within a strong. Christian culture. And instinctively.

React. Against all the right. Things. And yet. Be totally. Graceless. But a proud. Church. Reeks. Of hypocrisy. It's a sham. Which no amount. Of pretty clothes. Or self-delusion. Could cover up. And it's a sham.

Which would be. Exposed. Perhaps. You remember. Those words. Barack Obama. Used. Of his opponents. When he was first. Campaigning. For the White House. This is what Obama said.

[ 31 : 26 ] You can put lipstick. On a pig. But it's still a pig. You can wrap up. An old fish. In a piece of paper. And call it change. But it's still going to stink.

After eight years. We've had enough. While God's. Idolatrous church. Stank. Of hypocrisy. And he'd had. Enough.

And so you see how. In act three. Of this drama. He has. Systematically. Undermined. Every. False hope. That Judah. Clung to.

Jerusalem. Had clung. To her history. She'd clung. To the proud. Davidic. Traditions of Zion. She was smug. And felt. That she couldn't. Be brought down. In judgment. Because of who she was. Because of her proud. Background. But deep down. And aside from God's grace. She's nothing more than the unloved child. Of pagan parents.

[ 32 : 28 ] She'd clung. Her status. As God's chosen. Invulnerable people. But now when all the pretense is stripped away. She is no better than the disgraced.

Sodomites. And Samaritans. And like them. God would soon end the sham. She'd clung. To her military might. To the impressive power.

Of her foreign allies. But when the day of judgment comes. It's the very nations. She had paid. For security. Who dragged her away.

Into exile. And she had clung. To her beauty. But by the end of act three. The beautiful queen. Is nothing more.

Than a broken. Old. Prostitute. And as we saw. None of this. None of it. Was the spiteful actions. Of a jilted husband. But the exact.

[ 33 : 23 ] Proportional justice. Of a God. Who would not allow. His grace. To be treated. As a plaything. A God. Who is justly. And rightly. Jealous.

For the love. Which belongs to him. So act three. Of Ezekiel's tragedy. Cries out. To God's. To God's. Complacent church. To drop. The pretense.

And get real. About sin. And about its consequences. Their ugly idolatry. Is about to meet. Its ugly. Consequence. Firstly. Judgment. Will expose. The ugly truth. About those. Who claim. To be God's people. And secondly. Judgment.

Will ridicule. Their ugly pretense. At superiority. But there's a third observation. Which I think. Act three. As a whole. Forces us to make.

[ 34 : 20 ] One last. Ugly truth. Which today's church. Can learn from. Judah's. Sorry story. It's something. Which. I hope you agree. I'm not. Bolting on to the text.

But something. That stalks. A passage. Like this. As it deals. So directly. With God's. Just. And deserved. Wrath. And that is.

That judgment. Cries out. For an ugly. Solution. So far. In this series. We've been drawing.

A pretty straight line. From Judah. To God's. New Testament. Church. Almost everything. We've seen. In them. We can apply. Equally. To ourselves. Like them.

Love has been. Lavished upon us. In sheer grace. Like them. We have often. Scorned that love. Bitterly. Like them.

[ 35 : 15 ] We have a tendency. To forget. Our rags. The rags. We began with. And we have a tendency. To abuse. The riches. God has given us. By turning them. Into idols.

And our God. Is just the same. He will not. Allow. Himself. To be made. A cuckold. Or a jilted lover. He will not.

Endure. Us. Mocking. His justice. And scorning. His love. So just like Judah. Just like the woman. In our story. Our ugly idolatry.

Must be met. With ugly. Judgment. And exposure. That is what it takes. Verse 42. For God. To satisfy.

His wrath. Nothing more. And nothing less. Than the exact punishment. Our loveless cruelty. Deserves. But.

[ 36 : 11 ] There is one important difference. Between today's church. And God's ancient people. One thing. We would be insane. Not tickling onto. When in his mercy.

God gives us. A warning like this. You see. We have. An opportunity. To look back. In history. Back. To a punishment.

Ugly enough. To satisfy. The judgment. That our sin. Demands. God's. Old Testament. People. Were exposed.

And judged. In exile. But we have a choice. Our abuse. Of his love. Must. Be punished. We can either. Bear the disgrace.

Ourselves. Or it can be born. For us. Upon the cross. And if you've made. The sensible decision. If you have trusted Christ.

[ 37 : 05 ] To bear your penalty. Then act three. Of Ezekiel's tragedy. Is here to remind you. What a horrendously. Weighty. Decision. That was.

It's here. So that. Unlike Judah. You can never forget it. The ugliness. Of our sin. Demands. An ugly. Solution. And that.

Is what. The cross. Provides. I know. Many of us. Want to think of the cross. As a beautiful thing. We turn it. Into artwork. And jewelry.

And wall decorations. And if that is what you want to do. That is fine. But you cannot be allowed to leave. After being confronted. By a passage like this. Without.

Also thinking. About what it truly represents. You see. Firstly. The cross. Is a place. Of ugly. Judgment. A place. Of execution.

[ 38 : 01 ] Where Christ. Suffered. All the bitter. Disgrace. That we've just been reading about. So if you're willing. To wear a crucifix. Around your neck. Then you have to think of it.

In the same light. As a gallows. Or an electric chair. It's a place. Of ugly. Judgment. But secondly. It's a place. Of substitution. A place. Of a great. Exchange. You see. Each one of us. Could wear. A very different chain. Around our necks.

Bearing an image. Not of a man. On a cross. But of the woman. In this story. A woman. Who represents. Us. His church. But instead.

Of the beautiful crown. She was given. In act one. She stripped. Naked. Shivering. Humiliated. And gaunt. She's a broken woman.

[ 38 : 59 ] Exposed. For what she really is. And with streaks. Of mascara. Still trickling. Down her cheek. That is what the cross.

Should represent. The man who stood. In the place. Of that woman. The innocent man. Whose judgment. Exposed. Exposed. The ugly truth.

About his church. And the man. Whose judgment. Ridicules. Her ugly. Pretends. At superiority. Her ugly. Pretends. At righteousness.

That is the ugly solution. Which act three. Demands. For our adultery. Now if we grasp that.

Then the message. Of Ezekiel's tragedy. Is that God's people. Must. Drop the pretense. And get real. About sin. Get real. About its consequences.

[ 39 : 55 ] And get real. About the cross. Any other hope. Or any. Complacent. Self-delusion. Will leave us.

Exposed. And ridiculed. Just like. The naked emperor. Strutting about. In his new clothes. But if we grasp that.

Then as we'll see. Next week. The cross. Should not simply. Leave us feeling. Relieved. But also. Deeply. Ashamed. The cross.

Is an ugly solution. To the adultery. Of God's people. But praise God. He had a solution. Ugly enough. To do.

The job. Till on that cross. As Jesus died. The wrath. Of God. Was satisfied. Let's pray.

[ 40 : 52 ] Amen. Some words from Psalm 130. Oh Israel.

Trust in the Lord. For with the Lord. There is steadfast love. And with him. Is plenteous redemption. Merciful God.

Help us. Heed the warning. Of your word. Help us Lord. To be courageous. In recognizing pride. And rooting out. Idolatry. And help us Lord. Increasingly.

To stake. All our trust. In the death. And resurrection. Of your son. For we ask it Lord. In his strong. And merciful name. Amen.