

Knowing God: Through Judgment, in Hope

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Date: 12 November 2023

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to God's Word, and we are in Ezekiel, and we have plenty of visitor Bibles just at the side, at the back. Please do grab a Bible if you don't have one with you.

And we are looking at Ezekiel chapter 11 this morning. Ezekiel chapter 11, and I'm going to begin by reading a couple of verses from chapter 10.

So Ezekiel 10 and verse 18. Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim.

And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the Lord, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.

And now down to chapter 11, verse 1. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord, which faces east.

[1 : 28] And behold, at the entrance of the gateway there were twenty-five men. And I saw among them Jazaniah, the son of Azur, and Pelletiah, the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.

And he said to me, son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city, who say, the time is not near to build houses.

The city is the cauldron and we are the meat. Therefore prophesy against them. Prophesy, O son of man. And the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me and said to me, say, thus says the Lord, so you think, O house of Israel, for I know the things that come into your mind.

You have multiplied your slain in the city and have filled its streets with the slain. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, your slain, whom you have laid in the midst of the city, they are the meat.

And this city is the cauldron, but you shall be brought out in the midst of it. You have feared the sword and I will bring the sword upon you, declares the Lord God.

[2 : 48] And I will bring you out in the midst of it and give you into the hands of foreigners and execute judgments upon you. You shall fall by the sword.

I will judge you at the border of Israel and you shall know that I am the Lord. This city shall not be your cauldron, nor shall you be the meat in the midst of it.

I will judge you at the border of Israel and you shall know that I am the Lord. For you have not walked in my statutes, nor obeyed my rules, but have acted according to the rules of the nations that are around you.

And it came to pass. While I was prophesying that Pelletiah, the son of Benaiah, died. Then I fell down on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, Ah, Lord God, will you make full end of the remnant of Israel?

And the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, all of them are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Go far from the Lord.

[4 : 06] To us, this land is given for possession. Therefore, say, thus says the Lord God, though I remove them far off among the nations and though I scatter them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they've gone.

Therefore, say, thus says the Lord God, I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you've been scattered. And I will give you the land of Israel.

And when they come there, they will remove from it all the detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them.

I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.

And they shall be my people. And I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord God.

[5 : 24] Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.

And the spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the spirit of God into Chaldea to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me, and I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.

Amen. May God bless to us his words. Well, do please turn with me to the passage we read together, Ezekiel chapter 11.

Which is a chapter all about knowing God through judgment, but in hope. The overriding message of Ezekiel is that God's glory and his holiness will and must be vindicated in the eyes of the whole world.

Because that glory has been besmirched, blasphemed among the nations by his people Israel. The people at chapter 5 verse 5 says, The Lord has set up the very heart of the nations to display God's glory to them.

[6 : 56] But who had sunk to become even worse than the nations. Abandoning God's true ways, turning in arrogant pride to their own evil ways.

And that story, of course, is a microcosm of the story, not just of Israel, but the story of all mankind. The story of the whole Bible. Genesis 1 and 2 begins with humanity set at the center of God's world, in Eden.

In the place of God's sanctuary on earth. To image the glory of God in the world and to it. That is to live in true worship. To the praise of God's glory.

But of course, mankind rebelled and besmirched and blasphemed the glory of God, turning truth into lies. And instead of worshipping the creator, worshipping instead created things.

And that's the story of our world. And it still is today. It's the story of every man. It's your story. It's my story. What you were made for, who you are, by nature, you've rejected.

[8 : 09] And we've all sought to go our own way. We've defined our own identity. We've lived for ourselves. That's the story of humanity on planet earth.

But God will not be defeated by his creatures. His purpose for the whole cosmos and for his church and for every human being. The purpose for the whole cosmos is that, well, to use Ezekiel's repeated refrain all through this book, twice here in chapter 11 and verse 10 and verse 11.

His purpose is that all shall know that I am the Lord. I am the covenant Lord, the master of all I have created. This world will come to know that he is the God of justice and the God of power when he's mocked so often as though he were unjust and powerless against evil.

But the world will also come to know that he is the God of justice and the God of justice and the God of justice and the God of justice and the God of justice. His great mercy will triumph even over judgment.

Although never without judgment on evil, only through judgment on sin and wickedness. But triumph it will to the praise of his glorious grace throughout this entire universe.

[9 : 26] And that is his eternal purpose. Purposed indeed before the very foundation of the world, as the apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians chapter 1. Not just the whole earth, but the whole heavens will marvel at the manifold wisdom of God our Savior made known, manifest through his church, Paul says.

He will be transformed to be a holy temple, a true sanctuary, a dwelling place for the Spirit of God himself with his people. That is the eternal promise of God.

That's reiterated all through our Bibles, right from the beginning, right to the end. And we see it here in Ezekiel 11 verse 20. They shall be my people and I will be their God.

That is God's ultimate purpose for the world. And it's that purpose that God is steadily working out throughout history in every generation of his people. And in the lives of every individual person that he is calling to be part of his eternal purpose.

And so Ezekiel's message for his people is both prophetic of something far greater, something yet to be fulfilled for the whole world. But it's also a pattern for our lives today.

[10:46] It could not be more relevant to every human being on earth today. And not least, of course, to the nations of the Middle East today.

And Israel and Palestine and other states so very concerned with holy places and holy lands. Because the truth is that no land and no nation, indeed no church, nor any individual person, can become a sanctuary for God's holy presence without wholehearted separation from sin. The true story of how this world ends you find at the end of the Bible in Revelation 21 and 22. And it describes the only truly holy city.

And that is the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Whose gates are open to all nations. And who bring into that glorious city all the glory and the honor of every nation in worship to Jesus Christ.

But we're told nothing unclean or detestable or false shall ever enter it. Not that defileth shall enter in, as the old hymn puts it.

[11:58] But rather, all that defiles will be cut off forever. Cast into the eternal fire. Cut off from the tree of life. From the water of life.

From the very presence of God himself. Whom to know is life. And that is the unchanging gospel of God. It's the gospel of Jesus. It's the gospel of Ezekiel and all the prophets.

The Bible doesn't hide from us the truth. And the truth is that because our hearts are perverse and we do constantly turn truth into lies. Then it's only by facing the horror of God's judgment that actually we will embrace the hope of his mercy.

And come to know the true God. And the true home that he has for us in his presence. And that's what this chapter in Ezekiel shows us so very clearly.

The unchanging gospel of knowing God through judgment. But in hope. And as it is here, outlined to that generation of Israelites.

[13:03] We saw last time we looked at this in chapters 8 to 10. How God makes Ezekiel hammer home to them the sheer weight. The sheer woe of their sinfulness. And now you see what he is doing is hammering home the consequences of that.

Far from the exile being nearly over. And a light thing. And there being an imminent return to Jerusalem. Which is what they all hoped. Verses 1 to 13 here in chapter 11.

Describe instead a new scattering. A new scattering. These verses display for us, don't they? The grim horror of God's punishment for sin.

It's a devastating word in which all false hope. All nationalistic pride and superiority are utterly destroyed. And those attitudes are not unknown today, are they?

Verse 1, Luke brings Ezekiel to a new position in his vision at the east gate of the temple. Where he's shown the extraordinary irony of these pompous leading men plotting the future.

[14:08] But entirely unaware, it seems, of the calamity that is about to engulf them. And they're doing so in the very place where chapter 10 verse 19 showed us the glory of God departing from his city.

And what we see in verses 1 to 3 here is the deluded complacency of a society. And especially the elites of that society who believe their own propaganda. But who have totally lost touch with reality. And some people think that the Bible is irrelevant to the present day. Here's 25 princes, the leaders of the people. And they're making policy.

They're pushing out their narrative. But look at verse 2. God says they devise iniquity. They give wicked counsel. Now these are real people. Ezekiel recognizes two of them at least.

It's not entirely clear exactly what they're saying. Whether it's a question implying, oh soon it'll be time to build here again soon. Everything will be well. Or maybe it is a statement as here.

[15:14] Not to build homes now. In Babylon, that is countering the word of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29. Where he said to the exiles, you better settle down and build homes. Because it's going to be a long, long exile.

They didn't want that. But either way the point here is the same, isn't it? Here giving false hope. They're showing an arrogant complacency.

That because they are God's holy city, they'll be fine. The second half of verse 3 reinforces that arrogance. Look, this city is an impregnable cauldron.

Maybe they're glibly calling on the words of Psalm 46. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. But of course God was no longer in the midst, was he?

He just left. He won't be there, as the psalmist says, to help her when morning dawn. Because they're wrong. God's departed.

[16:15] It's like Samson, remember, when he had allowed his hair to be cut against God's command. But he was seduced by Delilah. And the Philistines came again for him. And he thought he'd have the mighty divine power to make mincemeat of them all over again.

But as the old authorized version says, he wist not that the Lord had departed from him. He didn't know.

He didn't realize. I always remember my father saying, there's no more terrible thought for a preacher than to speak God's word, unaware that in fact God has left you.

But that was Jerusalem and their leaders here. They thought themselves impregnable. Verse 3, they thought themselves the choice meat tenderly being braised at the center of God's attention. Not the off cuts, not the offal that were just cooked on the fire or just thrown away altogether. They are the creme de la creme, as we would say. And that's what they thought.

[17:15] Not privileged and impregnable Jerusalem. Not like those riffraff Ezekiel and her colleagues and all those people who had been sent off into exile. Those people probably who deserved it.

There's great irony here because those exiles look back to Jerusalem and the people back home and long to be with them and set all their store by them. But back home, these people have not just forgotten them, they're despising them.

Look down to verse 15. Look what they're saying about you, says the Lord. You were rightly sent away. And to us who are left, this land is a possession.

And you see, all their talk here in verse 3 is about building projects. And very likely what they were doing was seizing the land of the exiles, exploiting their power over the poor and the defenseless in the land.

Verse 6 says they were filling the streets with slain, with a callous disregard for life in search of profit.

[18:22] Well, that's so common, isn't it? It's what the prophet Micah had condemned about a century before of the wealthy exploiting the middle and the lower classes.

He says, because it's in the power of their hand, they covet fields and seize them and houses and take them away. They oppress a man and his house.

It's all there. Read it. Micah chapter 2. And it's so contemporary, isn't it? Chris Wright puts it this way. The powerful few and the class that they represent were taking full advantage of the national distress to lie in their own pockets.

A well-known phenomena in wartime. And they were going as far as to murder for their own greed. Well, wars and pandemics and so-called climate crises, they are very profitable indeed, aren't they? For the powerful few. I was reading Oxfam telling us that COVID doubled the wealth of the world's ten richest men. And telling us that it created a new billionaire in the world every 30 hours, nearly every single day.

[19:35] As economies were crashed, as ordinary people's futures been mired in debt for generations to come. They covet fields. They seize them and houses and take them away, says Micah.

From ordinary people. From little people. From those who are just awful, really. Not choice meat like us. Extraordinary arrogance and conceit.

But it's easy, isn't it, for any nation to grow proud. Especially if it has known God's blessing for a very long time.

It is easy to be deluded. It's easy to believe your own propaganda. Especially if all contrary voices are silenced and censored. But Ezekiel says such deluded complacency is very dangerous.

Unless we as Christians in the church think that we are somehow immune from such things, we need to remember, don't we, the New Testament warnings to us about the dangers of complacency in the church.

[20:40] We were reading recently Revelation chapter 2 and 3. And think about Christ's words to a church that thought it was alive. But in fact, Jesus says you're dead. And you need to wake up from your self-delusion.

Read James chapter 4. Which describes Christians doing exactly what these leaders of Israel were doing there. Planning all sorts of worldly business. All sorts of trade and profit for the future.

But forgetting that your life is but a mist. When there are weighty matters of eternity to be thinking of. And he warns the church about the same kind of arrogant pride as Ezekiel expresses so sharply here against Israel.

And in the previous chapters we've seen. And James also gives a wide awarding, doesn't he, to a whole culture's complacency. When he says whoever knows what is right but doesn't do it, sins. For God's morality is known, but it's rejected and ignored. Human pride leads to God's scattering. [21 : 55] And that's a principle that goes right back to Babel. Right back to Eden. And it's still true, James says, God opposes the proud.

Proud people, proud churches, and proud nations, proud empires. What does Mary sing in Luke chapter 1 of the coming of the Lord and the Savior?

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones. And exalted those of humble estate. And that is what God will do ultimately and forever.

Be in no doubt about that. But he does so also, doesn't he, many times in history. And that's the way it is here in the face of Jerusalem's deluded complacency.

And verses 4 to 12 describes a coming devastating collapse for those who discover that their entire world view is actually upside down.

[23 : 00] You think so, says God in verse 5. But how wrong you are. God's not afraid, is he, to turn the tables totally on man with a resounding necessary negative.

Just like Jesus when he meets the smug Sadducees with their proud theological questions about the resurrection in Mark chapter 12. And he just says, you are quite wrong.

You are quite wrong. Well, that's what God's saying here in verse 7. You are quite wrong. It's those that you have exploited, he says, who are actually my choice meat.

And yes, this city is a cauldron for my people, but you will be cast out from it. You will be the awful. You feared the sword.

You made alliances with the world and its ways to preserve yourself and your influence. But that sword will come after you. And it will be at the hands, verse 9, of foreigners that you despise.

[24 : 05] And they're going to judge you, verse 10, right at the very edge of the land, right at the border of Israel, right beside the pagan nations that you so abhor. And only then, at last, in your judgment, will you acknowledge that I really am the covenant Lord.

And understand the truth that you don't really belong to my holy city and you never really were my true people. You were circumcised in the flesh, but not in your hearts.

Or as Jesus puts it, you were full of Lord, Lord, but none of the doing the will of your Father in heaven. And so he repeats, verse 11 again, I will judge you at the border of the land, and then you will know that I am the Lord in your judgment.

The terrible thing, isn't it? But it's often true that it's only in calamity, often only in self-made calamity, which brings judgment upon us, that we will open our eyes and open our ears to the truth of God.

And sometimes that needs to happen to us. Sometimes it needs to happen to a church. To each of us, that we should be humbled.

[25 : 28] C.S. Lewis speaks famously, doesn't he, of God's megaphone. Pain is God's megaphone through which he shouts to us to wake us up from our sin. And he does that, you see, because the truth is, we don't care about how our sin dishonors God.

We don't care about how it besmirches God's name, how it assaults God's heart. But we do care about ourselves and our pain. And so God sometimes shouts to us very painfully.

And when he does, he leaves us in no doubt as to why we are in the mess that we are in. Verse 12, the reason for Israel's horrific scattering is utterly plain.

It is her sin, her rebellion against God. You have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules. And Paul reminds the Christian church, doesn't he, God is not mocked.

Whatever one sows, one will also reap. And Judah here, just like Hosea said to Israel a century before, they have sown the wind of empty and worldly religion.

[26 : 40] And so they will reap the whirlwind of full exile at the hands of these world's powers that they've so chased after. And there is to be any doubt at all in verse 13.

God assures the word of coming devastation collapse is absolutely certain by giving a divine confirmation that the words that his prophet speaks are true.

As Ezekiel was prophesying, as he was relating this vision, he saw one of these two men that he recognized, Pelletiah, drop dead. And his hearers hear him say that.

And so, of course, in due time later on, when in real life, the news comes from Jerusalem to the exiles, yes, this man Pelletiah has actually died. Well, no one could deny then, could they, that everything that Ezekiel was speaking must be true.

God's saying to them, don't think this won't come true. As sure as you will see Pelletiah's death certificate, so surely all of this is going to come to pass.

[27 : 48] And it did come to pass. You can read about it in Jeremiah chapter 39, how the king and all the remaining princes, these very men, they were taken to the very border of the land of Israel and put to death by the sword.

And the end of that passage also tells us, by the way, that as the Babylonians left Jerusalem after the sack, the vineyards and the fields of those elites, they gave, quote, to the poor people, it was nothing.

Isn't that striking? Don't disbelieve this. It's going to happen, says the Lord. You see, a preacher who gives words of warning like that will never be popular.

Not then, not today. Because the itching ears that all of us in the Christian church want to hear is positive. That's what we want. We want to hear that revival is coming.

We want to hear that God's pouring out his blessings on his people. We certainly do not want to hear that exile is coming and persecution is coming and martyrdom is coming for God's people.

[28 : 52] Isn't that right? Warnings are never popular. But, as here, when those warnings prove true and faithful, then, however grudgingly, people may begin to pay heed and realize, as God said to Ezekiel back in chapter 2, verse 5, realize that a prophet has been among them.

But notice the end of verse 13. Ezekiel himself is not infallible. No preacher is ever infallible. Only God's word is infallible.

Ezekiel cries out here, Lord, surely now you are making a full end of even the remnant of Israel. That's the sense of what he's saying. He's repeating the cry that he cried out in chapter 9, verse 8, even more definitely.

Pelletiah's name, incidentally, means God delivers. Yahweh delivers. But God hasn't delivered him, has he? He's dead. And he won't deliver Jerusalem, he said.

So if the whole city is going to be defeated and destroyed, everyone is going to be cast out, surely that must be the end. Ezekiel had held on to God's promise about his faithful remnant that Isaiah and many of the other prophets have spoken about.

[30 : 12] But now, surely, even that must be a dead hope. The whole remnant is going to be destroyed, you're saying. But no. Ezekiel is absolutely right to have hoped in God's remnant, but he's wrong, just like the Jewish leaders were, about who that remnant truly are.

The remnant to be preserved were not those who are still in Jerusalem who thought they were in the face of God's favor. They were going to be cast out. But, from those who are already scattered in exile, those with Ezekiel in Babylon, the people that he had called Ezekiel to preach to, from among them, the people who these Jerusalemites despised and thought had been abandoned by God forever, from among them, God is going to bring about a great regathering into his kingdom. and a great repentance to bring them right back into his heart of love. And so you see, the focus moves in verses 14 to 25 from the horror of a new scattering to the hope for a new spirit for God's people.

A new spirit. Verses 14 to 20 display the glimmering hope of God's promise, even for sinners. There's no false hope in man, in humanity.

The psalmist says, put not your trust in princes and the son of man in whom there is no salvation, but there can be firm hope in God's merciful promise.

[31 : 52] That psalm goes on, blessed is he that is he whose hope is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord, his God. And the only hope for mankind and for our world, for every human being, is in the changed and transformed human heart at the hand of God.

But God does change human hearts. And he will change the heart and the spirit of his people radically. Verse 19, removing stony hardness.

And in its place, giving a sincere holiness, a sweet wholesomeness of true humanity restored as the image of God.

And that's God's inextinguishable promise for all his true people ultimately and forever. And it's what God has been doing all through human history.

Drawing scattered exiles back to the obedience of faith. Verse 20, so that it would walk no longer in darkness but in the light of life governed by God's gracious statutes and rules.

[33 : 04] Obeying the one whom to serve is perfect freedom. And knowing him so that they will be his people and he will be their God. And verses 14 to 20 you see are speaking about this great regathering and this great repentance.

14 to 17 relate the great regathering which happens utterly contrary notice to the world's expectations. It's a hopeless weak exiled people scattered among the nations verse 17 who are going to be gathered back to God.

And it's utterly contrary isn't it also to proud religionists. Verse 15 those still in Jerusalem full of pride in themselves who have scorn for those who are exiled who think oh they must have deserved it and been sent away by God.

But no. It's they who are going to be regathered says the Lord and reassembled as God's one true people and re-inheriting God's kingdom his land.

It's these the poor in spirit to whom he gives the kingdom. It's staggering isn't it? but strangely familiar. Staggering to the world and to worldly religion proud religion but what did our great God and Savior say to proud religionists like that when he came in the flesh to our world?

[34 : 32] I've come not to call the righteous but sinners to be my people forever. And here right here you see is that inextinguishable hope of God's promise to sinners glimmering still even in the midst of the clouds of this coming judgment.

Verses 19 and 20 here they foreshadow that much fuller exposition of ultimate hope that we'll come to eventually in chapter 36 and following where God promises an ultimate future a glorious new age dawning under the new David God's eternal ruler ushering in the age of the spirit the resurrection age the time of new life but even here before Ezekiel has to go back to giving more and more warning and judgment to his people even here God gives them the assurance that no he will never make a total end of the remnant of Israel kept for salvation but he also makes clear just as clear that that remnant of true Israel is not those who may appear outwardly to be Israelites God's remnant is not those who are left in Jerusalem in fact as Isaiah and some of the other prophets say very clearly in Isaiah chapter 11 for example

God's true seed of faith are going to be gathered from among all the nations which of course is what God had promised right at the very beginning wasn't it to Abraham that he be the spiritual father of a multitude of nations and the apostle Paul says doesn't he in Romans chapter 9 not all natural children of Abraham are his true offspring not all those merely descended from Israel belong to God's true Israel and that's what we're seeing here in Ezekiel it's so important isn't it because there's only ever been one gospel and to belong truly to God has never been about mere pedigree or position it's always been about the obedience of faith like Abraham himself that's Paul's whole point isn't it in Romans chapter 4 Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness not after but before he was circumcised and Paul says the purpose was to make him the father of all who believe whether the uncircumcised the Gentile believer or the circumcised who is not merely circumcised but also walks in the footsteps of the faith of

Abraham that he had before he was circumcised that's why Paul is saying when many Jews are seen to be rejecting the gospel it's not as though the word of God has failed he says it's never been just the children of the flesh those who think of themselves as Israel who are the true children of God the true children of promise it's never been about natural pedigree or privilege or position or anything merely natural it's always says Paul been according to God's call to faith it depends not on human will not on exertion but on God who has mercy God's great regathering is by his sovereign grace and mercy alone and that's why it staggers human beings but of course that sovereign call of God is always to the real obedience of faith it's a call to repentance there's only ever been one gospel that's what we're seeing here and that regathering will be through verses 18 to 20 a great repentance when they are gathered regathered verse 18 they will remove the detestable things and the abominations and God will remove from then verse 19 their stony hearts and give them renewed hearts expressed in lives of obedient faithfulness you see this wonderful new covenant hope that he sets before them holds forth the same covenant requirement real penitent obedient faith it is a gospel of God's sovereign grace but that sovereign grace demands surrender to God and there's no way back into fellowship with God there's no way to be his people to be with him as

your God without real repentance detestable things cannot remain where God will dwell verse 18 not that defileth shall enter in to God's eternal city remember Revelation 21 our Lord Jesus had to depart constantly didn't he all through his ministry from hostility from unbelief he could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief it's the same here there's only ever been one gospel and never without repentance I said in a previous study that Leviticus chapter 26 with all its promises of covenant curses and exile for disobedience it underlies much of Ezekiel's message Ezekiel is simply applying God's covenant to his own generation but amid those real warnings of judgment and of curse in that chapter in Leviticus Moses does hold out wonderful hope in Leviticus 26 verse 40 he says if even in exile they confess their iniquities if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled then

[40 : 28] I will remember my covenant and in the land even of their enemies I will not spurn them Moses says the same thing in Deuteronomy chapter 4 and Deuteronomy chapter 30 if they seek me with all their heart they will find me and when you turn to the Lord with all your heart and soul you will find that the Lord your God is a merciful God he will bring about a great regathering but never without a great repentance real sovereign grace demands real surrender to God and there's only ever been one gospel and that's it and the hope of God's promises he lies beyond judgment and through judgment but never without judgment notice that God's glory does depart here the movement out of the temple that we saw there in chapter 10 verse 22 it's completed here at the end of chapter 11 in verses 22 to 24 verse 23 the glory of the

Lord went up from the midst of the city out east onto the mountains and we're left hanging really aren't we asking will it ever return and if so how can it return what will that really mean and that leads us to the final thing here that this passage hints at and that is a new sanctuary because because these verses remind us that at the glorious heart of God's purpose for all his saints is that it's his wonderful personal commitment to be the dwelling place the sanctuary for his people until at last they become a worthy sanctuary and a dwelling place for him look at verse 16 in the midst of God's wrath and judgment God promises to be a sanctuary for these exiles you see a place where the presence of the

Lord himself sanctifies his people makes them holy so that they can be near him and his presence Ezekiel ends in its final chapters as you know with a vision of the return of God's glory to a vast new temple far bigger than any earthly temple could ever be in Jerusalem where God dwells forever amidst the renewed people giving life to the whole world where outsiders gain an inheritance with all the tribes of Israel but already you see even here isn't it striking that it's actually through the judgment of exile and the forceful stripping away of all the apparatus of earthly religion it's through that that his people begin to understand and come to really learn what Moses was teaching in Psalm 90 that we read at the beginning of the service that it's the Lord himself who is his people's true dwelling place not temples made with hands and that any place on earth however hostile can be a meeting place with the living

God for his people God's judgment was real his removal of his glory and the power of his presence was real it was terrible for Israel as a nation God God God revealed himself in terrible judgment to that generation but amid that judgment he also drew near to them to be a sanctuary for a while or the footnote in small measure until that is at last all his covenant promises for fulfillment in the glory of the vision would be seen in a sanctuary in large measure that is in the eternal city at the end of his vision that will be called the Lord is there forever that's the same city isn't it that John saw in his vision in revelation where the Lord is there in the midst of his saints forever and ever not just living with his people but his saints reigning with him Ezekiel's words here of course are speaking about a return in history of a remnant of the faithful it foreshadows that great ultimate hope the end of his vision clearly surpasses anything earthly anything national something that's cosmic something that's eternal and as

Palmer Robertson points out in his excellent book it's surely not a coincidence that in Matthew chapter 24 it's to the same mountain isn't it the Mount of Olives on the east of the temple the east of Jerusalem that Jesus departs from the temple and speaks about its imminent destruction not by Babylon's armies but by Rome's armies and all through the gospel accounts of his ministry we read don't we about Jesus departing he has to depart from his own synagogue he has to depart from his own hometown he has to depart from his own people from his own temple from his own city he departs revealing himself in judgment and in a judgment that did fall on the earthly temple and the city forever destroying that last shadowy image of God's sanctuary on earth and yet in that

judgment he also revealed forever didn't he the true and the lasting sanctuary the eternal temple not made with hands in his own person in whom and through whom all who know and love him may draw near to the presence of God to the throne of grace to find grace and help in our time of need and remember how in the upper room in John chapter 14

[46 : 34] Jesus spoke to his disciples about his departure his going away to leave his disciples and yet he said I'm not going away to leave you forever I'm going to return I will come again to take you to be with me in the sanctuary in the father's house which is the abundant refuge for every exile gathered from every part of this broken world Jesus must depart from his house from his city in judgment indeed he must bear in himself the judgment of God he became cut off didn't he from the glory of God like Adam sent out east of the garden of Eden to be a wanderer far from the sanctuary of God and Paul says he being in the very form of God made himself nothing he left behind the glory of heaven and humbled himself to death even to death on a cross he was crucified utterly devoid of the glory of

God's presence and the sanctuary of his succor he was cut off desolate forsaken outside the city so that his people all the true Israel of God could be regathered and brought home to find their true home with the Lord their God to know the joy of his sanctuary not just for a little while in small measure but forever and ever do you see there's only ever been one gospel and it's always been about the inextinguishable glimmering hope of God's promise for sinners and his glorious heart of his purpose for all his people that they will be his people and he will be their God dwelling with them among them all their days throughout their lives as a sanctuary for them for a while through all the days of their earthly pilgrimage and the exile in this world under the curse of sin until at last in the full flourishing of that sanctuary in large measure through the great and global gathering of his saints from all the nations we will see won't we a multitude that no one can number from every nation and every tribe and every people and language before the throne of the Lamb singing salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb and that's the forever sanctuary in the place called the Lord is there and you see that is the real question that Ezekiel's chapter here leaves his heroes with and leaves us with because he's speaking to the exiles and saying to them will you be there will you be found to belong to the true remnant of God who are his people will he be on that day your God and will you be his people will you be those who have a new heart and a new spirit and a new life forever because God does change hearts on a grand scale and one day the world will see that joyous multitude of the Lord's people around his throne but you see the whole story of history all the way through the real story of history is God gathering from every age from every generation from every person all through the Bible that's what we see coming true isn't it and especially being gathered in from the least expected places from those who've been forgotten by the world who've been despised often by the religious so that genealogy that opens Matthew's gospel is just so wonderful even among the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ we have this sprinkling of the outsiders Tamar the incestuous mother Rahab the prostitute Ruth the pagan Moabite Bathsheba the adulteress and it goes right on doesn't it all through the gospels who is Jesus gathering tax collectors sinners the sick the sad the bad the outcast the exile those who are separated by sin who are excluded who are on the outside and the Lord Jesus Christ has been doing that ever since by his Holy Spirit all over the world he's been doing it in this place right among us every one of us here has been gathered by his grace and given a place again in his kingdom and assembled as part of his family and granted a place in the part of that ongoing gathering of others that the Lord Jesus is bringing back to his true home to find sanctuary to find a refuge a home a place to belong in him but the question is still there isn't it will you be among that number when the saints are fully gathered in the Lord

Jesus wants you me all of us to be part of that gathering and you can be a part of that gathering the door is wide open but you can't be a part of that regathering without also joining in the great repentance I can't hide that truth from you see Ezekiel didn't hide it from his readers either did he look at verse 25 he told them all all that God had revealed to him the whole gospel that is look at verses 19 to 21 he put before them the great joy of verses 19 and 20 and the alternative in verse 21 the horror of judgment many of those that Ezekiel was speaking to you see were previous leaders of Jerusalem they'd been involved in so much of what

[52 : 44] Ezekiel in his vision had exposed to be the truth about their lives and that's a terrible threatening thing isn't it to have your sin exposed to public gaze and to know even worse that your sin is exposed to the gaze of almighty God but it's a defining moment isn't it a defining moment in

terms of your whole future and indeed in terms of the whole of eternity because there are only two choices and it's the two choices Ezekiel puts here in 19 to 21 before everybody either either our heart goes out to God seeking from him a changed heart create in me a clean heart oh God renew my spirit within me hide your face from my sins either our heart goes out to

God like that or verse 21 our heart goes out from God and a renewed commitment to things that are detestable to him to confirm our hearts as stony hearts as hard hearts as hearts that are closed to his message I have been a sanctuary to them for a while says the Lord and they shall be my people and I will be their God and Ezekiel says to his people and to us today make sure that you know that you belong in that number while you still can today if you hear his voice harden not your heart amen let's pray Lord Jesus Christ we come to you we need your mercy now blot out our sin our hearts renew in penitence we bow your judgment seat we all must face our inmost state you know we are dependent on your grace to wash us white as snow hear us and grant us we pray that you remove our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh that we may walk in your ways and so knew you as our

God forever through Jesus Christ our Lord amen