

Ezekiel 36:37

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[0 : 00] Ezekiel chapter 36, we read at verse 37. Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired 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. I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.

What is this that the Lord is referring to here when he says, I have yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel? What is it that they have to inquire if he's already telling them everything, which the previous foregoing chapter seems to be doing?

He's giving them all the detail of how they're punished in exile and then he'll bring them back and then he'll bless them and so on. So what's to ask? Well, I would suggest to you that what is to ask is that the Lord would now put it into practice.

Just as if you remember when David was told by Nathan the prophet when he had the desire to build the house of God. And when he, Nathan then went to him with the word of the Lord saying, well, God says you're not actually going to build this house.

[1 : 18] You're not going to build this temple, but your son will build it. And then there'll be a house of David established after this. So David went and sat before the Lord and he poured out his heart of the Lord and he was just amazed at God.

Yes, he hadn't allowed him to build, but he said, now you've spoken of my own house for generations to come. And now Lord, do the thing that you've said and bring it to pass. He's asking God to bless what he has promised already to do.

He's asking God to put into practice what he has said he is prepared, ready and willing to do.

There's that section in 1 John in chapter 5 where, you know, sometimes it used to perplex me a bit. It says that we know that if we ask anything according to his will, he hath us. 1 John chapter 5 verse 14. This is the confidence that we have in it.

That if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hath us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him.

[2 : 24] Well, how in the world do you know if you're asking according to his will? Well, one thing we can definitely know is that if God has said he's going to do something, and we're simply asking him to do what he has said he will do, then it must be according to his will.

So, why isn't Israel asking just for it right away? Why not just say, okay, Lord, do it now? Well, part of it may be because before you get to that stage, there's an awful lot to be got through yet.

There's an awful lot of the exile and the suffering and the chastisement that is there in the foregoing chapter before he brings them back and before he builds and plants and renews again.

And maybe that makes them think, oh, do we really want this just yet? Or on the other hand, it may be that Israel is not yet at the place of sufficient faith to ask.

If we believe and trust that God is ready and willing to do something, it's quite easy to ask. If you're back to when you're a young person again, if you're going out to a party or let's say a dance or something, it's quite easy to say yes to the boy who you know wants to dance with.

[3 : 38] It's quite easy for him to ask you if he's pretty sure you actually want to dance with him. It's easier to ask if you know a person is ready to do it.

And it is easier to have the faith to ask God to do something that we believe he's actually prepared to do. And if he has said that he will do it, if it is in writing that he will do it, then we can be confident that he intends to bring it to pass.

And I think, yeah, okay, fine, but, you know, this is all, you know, thousands of years ago. This is Ezekiel. This is ancient Israel. What does this actually have to do with me now?

Well, if you actually look at the passage that we read from verse 16 onwards, you'll see that what we have here is really a recurring pattern. You've got a wee clue here where you see in verse 35 it says, this land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden.

If you look at what we read from verse 16 onwards, it's not just Israel who had the good land and then they defiled it and then they got cast out of it. And then they were in exile and then they were at odds with the Lord and then he brought them back again and then he restored them and so on.

[4 : 54] It's not just Israel. This is a pattern of mankind from Eden itself. That little clue, this land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden.

What happened in the garden of Eden? What happened when our first parents were there in that state of perfection? They had the good land, the best in the entire world that the Lord had made for them.

But when they were in it, they defiled it. They defiled it with sin. And from almost the moment that they defiled it with sin, bloodshed and death entered in.

Because the Lord had to clothe them with the skins of animals. You can't just take the skins off living animals. You have to kill them first. So animals were killed. Their skins were used to clothe Adam and Eve and they were driven from the garden.

And within a generation, of course, one brother is killing another brother. And God says the very ground itself cries out with the blood that is soaking into it.

[5 : 58] And then, of course, Cain's descendants go up in one direction. And the descendants of Seth and Adam's covenant line are in a different direction. And the one become pretty much total pagans, heathens, men of violence and hatred.

And Eve and the covenant line isn't that great. Such that by the time you've got to this stage of Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam, he is testifying, as we read in the book of Jude, about how evil the world has become.

This is because man is parted from God. And when he departs from the Lord, when he defiles the good that he has given, it's not just that, oh, you worship different gods.

Well, that's your prerogative. You worship this one, I worship that one. When we depart from the living gods, we enter into partnership with the gods of death.

It's the living God or the killing gods. It's the false gods, the false prophets, that are exerting bloodshed, destruction, requiring human sacrifice, all the rest.

[6 : 59] We think, oh, nobody requires human sacrifice today. Why do you think there's so much killing in the name of false prophets? Why do you think the ground is soaked with blood in the Middle East and Syria and Iraq?

And how many Christians are being martyred there? Because false gods and false prophets require blood. When we part from the living God of mercy, it's not just that, oh, we exercise our right to have different spirituality and different gods, immorality, and bloodshed and death follows with God as night follows day.

And we see the evidence of that all around us in the world. So Adam and Eve depart from the Lord, and they defile the land, and they get expelled from the land, and then the Lord restores his relationship with them in the covenant of grace, chooses himself a people, and over the centuries, over the years, he brings them back to himself.

And we see what is the story of mankind repeated again with the story of Israel, because they are given their own land. And this is what we read, When Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way.

Wherefore I poured out my fury upon it, for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for the idols wherewith they had polluted it. Notice the two going together. And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries, according to their way, according to their doings, I judged them.

[8 : 33] And when they entered into the heathen, where they went, they profaned my holy name. When they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and have gone forth out of this land.

You see, it becomes a disgrace. It is the disgrace that these, the people of the living God, Jehovah, are now at such odds with him, that it makes people think, Well, these are the people of the living God, but it can't be much of a God.

Look, they can't even keep their own land. They can't even worship him. Like he tells them, Look, they're captives in our land. We are doing better than them. Our gods must be better than their God.

And it becomes a disgrace. It becomes a defilement of the name of the Lord. He has to punish them. He has to chastise them. They're going to fall out with the Lord. Then they're going to reap the whirlwind of that.

But it does bring disgrace on the name of the Lord. There's no question. Just as when Christians behave, as Christians ought not to behave, it brings disgrace on the name of the Lord.

[9 : 36] It brings disgrace in the cause of Christ. It gives people an excuse to speak ill of the Lord. or to justify their own unbelief or their own rebellion or whatever. So yes, it is a disgrace.

But verse 21, But I had pity for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them. And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

What is true of Adam and Eve is true of Israel and their land. It is true of us. We have been given so much by the Lord. We have been blessed in the land where he has put us.

But we have turned away, time and again. And the Lord, instead of casting us completely away from his sight, instead of washing his hands of us, as Pilate washed his hands of Jesus, instead, yes, we are chastised in a measure and for a time.

[10 : 52] But it is not in the Lord's interests to damn all his children for all eternity. For the sake of his great name, he glorifies his name how?

God is glorified, as I've said many times in the past, in the justification of sinners. God is glorified in the doing of that which is otherwise impossible to do.

It is one thing to destroy. It is far more difficult to build up. It is one thing to cast out. It is far more difficult to restore.

It is one thing to hate and to crush and to fall out with. It is far more difficult to forgive. God is glorified in doing that which is otherwise impossible.

doing that which it is not possible for false gods or for men to do. This is what he says. I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries.

[12 : 00] And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord God when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your filthiness and from all your idols when I cleanse you.

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 a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you shall keep my judgments and do them and you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers and you shall be my people and I will be your God and I will save you from all your uncleannesses.

It's something God does. They're not able to do. The heathen gods are not able to do but when he does it then, verse 36, the heathen that are left round about shall know that I, the Lord, build the ruined places and plant that which was desolate.

I, the Lord, have spoken it and I will do it. And, you know, it should be obvious enough as we see from verse 25 here, you know, this could come straight out like the Gospel of John or the New Testament here.

You've got the sprinkling of clean water, the symbolic cleansing which points us, of course, to baptism. Sprinkling water on anybody is not going to actually make them clean.

[13 : 21] It doesn't matter how, you know, how little something, you think of a dish at home or whatever, you know, if it needs a swirl, even if it's a teacup or something like that, if you just sprinkle water on it, that's not going to make it clean.

Not physically. You need to give it a good wash. So, likewise, sprinkling water on anything can only ever be a symbol of the cleansing that God himself is intending and going to do.

It is a symbolic seal of the spiritual cleansing that God will undertake. And if God is doing it all, then all that we need is just to talk about it.

It's just a symbol of it. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean. Not because the water makes you clean, but because of what I will do.

From all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart will I give you. A new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh. I'll give you the heart of flesh.

[14 : 22] I'll put my spirit within you. And what happens when God puts his spirit within us and the new heart? He causes us to walk in his commandments. You see, sometimes perhaps the Israelites, maybe, and maybe us too, we get it the wrong way around.

Maybe we get it the wrong way around in terms of saying, well, you've got to do this, do that, do the next thing, do that. And if you do that, well, you're some other way to being a good Christian. And you've got to try and you've got to do it and you've got to keep the roots.

And, you know, it's good to keep and obey the laws and commands of God, but if somewhere along the line we ever gave the impression, the church ever gave the impression that by doing this, that's it, that's okay, that's you with one foot up with the glory.

Then, that was a travesty of God's grace. We are really only enabled to keep God's laws and commands as he intends when we keep it from the heart.

Now, when we keep it from the heart, yes, there'll be times that we color over the edges as you used to do when you had a child at school. Maybe you don't keep within the lines and your coloring goes over the edges and maybe you make mistakes and maybe you fall.

[15 : 31] But when it's obeyed from the heart, then that is the kind of obedience the Lord desires. Notice it is obedience from the heart. It's not just, well, my heart wants to go and do something totally different.

My heart wants to just go and forget about the Lord's Day, forget about not committing adultery, forget about not being drunk and so on. My heart wants to go and do whatever I like and that's okay.

No, your heart, if it's a new heart, will want to do what God commands. A new heart will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you and I will take away the stony heart and I'll give you the heart of flesh. It's not just a new spirit, but my spirit, verse 27, will I put within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you shall keep my judgments and do them.

Now, this is the transformation that the Lord offers and intends for his children. They're already in relationship with him.

[16 : 28] They're already in covenant relationship with him, but they're not getting the fullness of that relationship. It's like, you know, we may have grown up with the church and the Lord and the Bible and so on, but it's just something we do.

It's external. It hasn't yet penetrated the heart. Maybe the heart is of stone, as it says here. Maybe the heart is comparatively cold. But if we are truly to be born again, to begin to live in the Lord, we need that new heart that will actually beat.

We need that new spirit. It's not my spirit. It's his spirit, the Holy Spirit. And that is the spirit that causes us to desire him above all else, to desire to keep his commandments and statutes and to walk in them and do that.

Verse 28, know this one. It says there, I will, 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. Now you can read different things in the back.

Say, well, that's talking about the Israelites, or that's talking about Adam and Eve and their descendants being restored and raised. Yes, that's all true. But I would also suggest to you that now, in this our present time, God's living word is saying that you can and you may go and be a missionary at the far ends of the earth.

[17 : 49] But most of the people whom the Lord converts and changes and calls, he wants to witness for them exactly where they are, in the lands that he gave to their fathers, in the lands where they are themselves native, brought up, where they are known, where the change in them is seen by all those around them, is seen by the people that they grew up with, the people they work with, where that change cannot be disguised.

No matter how quiet you try to be, or say a word to anyone, or try to just sort of keep it to yourself, they can tell there's a difference. They can see that something has changed.

You are transformed from within. God, I would suggest to you in tents the vast majority of those who he converts and changes to be witnesses where they are, in the land that he gave to their fathers, and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

He intends to transform not merely the land of Israel thousands of years ago, but the land of Scotland, the island of Scalping, the island of Harris and Lewis, and all the western isles, he intends to transform by the presence of such living witnesses in the midst of it.

This is not the story of Israel, Mary. This is not the story of Adam and Eve and the fall of mankind. This is the story of us. This is the story of our present day and our present lives.

[19 : 27] It is what God still calls us to do, that he will still seal that covenant grace with a sprinkled water of baptism. He will still give the new heart, the new Holy Spirit into our lives.

He will cause us to desire his laws and commands and judgments and to dwell in the land that he gave to our fathers. And ye shall be my people, will be his people in it, and I will be your God.

And they think, oh well, our government's so rotten and so bad and the nation and the laws, well, how can anybody be a Christian in the midst of that? You be a Christian first.

And as the Lord's people are used of him to witness and to transform gradually, little by little, the lives of those around them, if there is one thing politicians become terrified of, it is of upsetting people that might vote them out.

And as the numbers increase, so the politicians cannot help but take note. And even if the Lord doesn't come back in the immediate future, even if the Lord doesn't come back next week or next year, even if the Lord takes years or centuries yet because there are still souls to be gathered in, yet we will be enabled to be used of the Lord to make such a witness person by person and soul by soul as to gradually change our land and our society.

[21 : 03] Not by never saying a word, not by doing nothing, but simply by living out the change in our lives by Christ. And in as much as we are able to do that, what do we then see?

We think, well, I'm not sure I could do that, my life would change, my priorities have to change, and what would I do about job and provision and everything? I'll save you from your uncleanness. I'll multiply the fruit of the tree, the increase of the field.

You shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen, verse 30. Then shall you remember your own evil ways, your own doings that were not good. Shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations?

Not for your sakes do I this. Say it to the Lord, God, be it known unto you. Be ashamed and confounded by your own ways. In the day that I shall cleanse you from all your iniquities, I'll cause you to dwell in the cities and the waste shall be builded, the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it may desolate in the sight of all that pass by.

This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden. God will transform the lives, the land of his people. I'll save you from your uncleanness.

[22 : 15] You'll dwell in the land. I'll multiply the fruit of the tree. Remember what Jesus said, people were concerned about if they served the Lord, what would they eat, what would they drink? In the Sermon on the Mount he says this, Therefore take no thought, say, what shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed?

For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things, but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Lord will never fail to provide for his people when they put him first. Now notice that in the bit we read it said, oh be ashamed and loathed for your sins.

Now some people, I know, they get this conviction of sin first, and then they get converted, and then they're full of rejoicing, and so on. I know that for myself, and perhaps for many others, it appears to be also for Saul of Tarsus and so on, they think they're good up until the point when they're converted.

They think they're doing pretty well, and you know, God really owes them a bit of blessing, rather than the other way around, and then when they're converted, they see the light of the Lord shines into their hearts and shows them what was there.

[23 : 35] It's not pretty, and it's only after we receive God's grace, sometimes we see just how bad we were, just how dark were our hearts, just how much evil and sin was there, and may still be there.

And in the day when I cleanse you from all iniquities, says the Lord, you'll loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and fear of abominations. That's not just to make us wallow in it and say, oh how bad we are, oh how terrible.

It's to emphasize the glory of the Lord. Look how bad things were. You didn't see how bad they were. You didn't really recognize what a sinner you were until I shone my grace into your heart, into your light, and I turned on the light, and you could see all the dirt that was in the room. You could see all the filth that had accumulated in the corners. You could see that what you thought was okay was in fact filthy. And that's what my heart is like until the Lord changes. And that's what the heart of every sinner is like until the Lord changes it. But we don't often see it until such time as he begins to do his work.

[24 : 48] This is our story. It's not that of ancient Israel. This is our lives. This is the Lord's desire to work in our land and to turn it again by means of the work he gives us to do.

You know, it says, this land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of those that passed by, verse 34. In other words, although God is going to bless the land, these lights will still have to work it.

And although God will provide everything that you need for your life as a Christian or whatever that lies before you, you still have to work. You still have to put your shoulder to the burden.

You still have to rip your teeth and do your duty. You'll still have to work, but your work will be blessed. And God will bring forth fruitfulness out of it.

This is our story. This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden. God can restore. God is able to restore the years that the locusts are eating.

[25 : 50] He is able to restore our individual lives. And he is able to restore also our land and our nation. He is able to do us good and he is desiring to do us good.

Now, you might think, oh, that's fine. That's great. Okay, bring it on. That's wonderful. But remember the first that we took is our text. It says, thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.

I will increase that with men like a flock. You've got to bring it about to make it happen. I will yet for this be inquired of. They're going to ask.

They're going to desire. They're going to pray the Lord. I'll inquire. Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. This is what Jesus says in Luke 11. Everyone that asketh receiveth.

He that seeketh find. To him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son asks bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? And if he asks a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

[26 : 55] Or if he shall ask and eggily offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

To them that ask him, he will give the Holy Spirit. I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel. I will be asked for it.

You'll ask and I'll give it. Why do we not ask it? Maybe we do not yet have a faith to ask. Maybe we're afraid that if we ask, we will actually get.

And maybe we're not quite ready for it. There may be a lot to go through. There may be a lot to go through first or there may be a lot to go through afterwards. But Jesus says, ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you shall find including the gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.

[27 : 59] I will increase them with men like a flock because the holy flock is the flock of God. Now one last thing we need to remember here. We are not going to ask or able to ask God's blessing just so that we can get rich and fat and just so that we can bask in the spirit of the Lord and that's great.

If we increased with men like a flock, why would they increase the flock of Jerusalem? What was happening to the flocks and the herds that were gathering at Jerusalem when Jesus cleansed the temple?

Why were there all those beasts and doves and lambs there bleeding and filling up the place with noise? Because they were each and every one intended as a sacrifice.

And if we are to obtain the blessing of God and the changing of God in our lives, the changing by his power, by his spirit in our lives, if we are to become his children, it is not merely so that we can bask in the sunshine of his love.

It is that our lives should become a living sacrifice for him. a sacrifice is something which is offered up ultimately to death.

[29 : 16] now, whensoever it is that the Lord may change your heart and cause you to become a born again believing Christian, then that will be your portion through until death.

You may convert on your deathbed with only five minutes to live, but you'll be a believer until you're dead. You may convert when you've got 60, 70 years ahead of you, but you'll be a true believer until your death.

Unless you never were. Unless you fall away and deny the Lord and just turn your back down and despise him. But those who are truly born again, truly converted, will be saved and saved to the uttermost.

That's what he says in his word in Hebrews 7 there. So if we are to be given to the Lord, we are to be given all the way through to death. Paul says in Philippians, we're looking at Philippians in the evenings, remember, we're to be to live as Christ and to die as good.

And that our lives are to be lived as a sacrifice for him. And that when those lives come to their end, they are laid down as a sacrifice for him. If we are to become increased like a flock, it is so that every lamb of that flock is a potential sacrifice of grace given up to the Lord, whether by our life or by our death, that however we may serve the Lord, we are completely in his hands.

[30 : 43] Romans 8 36 says, as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughtered. Quoting Psalm 44 there.

And this is what we are called to be. Not only so we can all be slaughtered, but it's rather so that being changed, transformed, to be turned apart from goats in his left hand to sheep in his right, to become the lambs of his flock, to be increased like a flock, because we have asked for it, because we have inquired of the Lord for it, that he would do it.

That as we grow in grace and knowledge and love, our lives will testify to the transformation he has brought, to bring us from death to life, to bring us from goats to sheep, and to change us.

But at the last, those lives must be laid down. At the last, those lives must be given up. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain, said Paul.

And whatsoever it is that causes us at the last to lay down our lives, be it seemingly outward illness, or be it some seeming apparent accident, or some kind of apparent tragedy, or whether it be marked in itself, it is the Lord's time and providence.

[32 : 07] It is the Lord who comes to claim his sacrifice. And not to abandon his children, but to gather them to himself. This is what he desires most of all.

This is what he has prepared, and he is ready for us to ask. It is like a chef who has prepared the most delicious meal you could possibly want.

And he wants people to come up to the menu, and choose, and partake, and receive. Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.

Ask, and it shall be given. already Smaroni. And I will just become...

And there's just, it goes above it. We are disp Jessica LovelyAMs movie. That's how we can eyes spell up in my moment, or save away from playing the yards and the Trampe movie. And here is where we are going down to strengthen us. And we'll just declare this. That's the hay.

[33 : 14] Come on. Let me share with us.