

Our All for Jesus

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Date: 05 November 2017

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[0 : 0 0] Amen.

The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and their own doing. I poured my fury upon them for the blood they had shed.

I scattered them among the heathen. They were dispersed throughout the countries. When they entered into the heathen, when they went, they profaned my holy name when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord and are gone forth out of his land.

This is, in poetic terms, a description of our own condition. Our own lostness. Man's condition by nature is to be lost, to be dead in trespasses and sins.

Despite how beautiful little children are in their infancy, they are not innocent in the sense of sinless before God. We are all born and conceived in sin.

[1 : 1 9] That is the state in which we come into the world. And it is a state from which we have need to be redeemed. We don't begin with a clean slate or with a clean spotless start and then gradually, bit by bit, we add sins to it.

We do add our own sins to it. But our initial condition is that of sin, that of lostness. This is the case in which Ezekiel's prophecy, the section which we read, finds Israel.

They are in a lost condition. They are, in a sense, dead in their trespassing sins. They have been cast out into exile. As we have been cast out, as it were, in our first fields, were cast out from the presence of the Lord.

They began, they began sinless. But they willfully chose sin. And so all their descendants, right down to the present day, are tainted with that reality, with that condition into which mankind has entered us, is the starting point.

Even for infants, how much more for all of the rest of us. We do not begin neutral. We do not begin with a clean start and a clean slate.

[2 : 3 1] We begin. We are found in a lost condition. Our need of a saviour is from day one. Not simply from when we first become conscious of sin.

But it is as it is in such a condition that we are found. It is to such a condition that the Lord's word speaks. Notice that throughout scripture, we do not have a God who says, well, that's you.

Tough. You've gone and sinned your little life away. You're in a lost condition. I don't want anything to do with you. I'm going to start a fresh new world, a fresh new universe, somewhere else where the likes of you don't have to be.

I'm not going to bother with you anymore. He could have done that. He could have been justified in doing that. But such is God's love for lost sinners that he did not leave them in that condition.

Such is the Lord's love for the likes of you and me that whilst he could have walked away, and we might think, oh, well, God has walked away. We are left. He's not here amongst us.

- [3 : 36] Yes, but he is. He is in work amongst his people. He is present with them by his spirit. He did come amongst us in human flesh. He made himself known as a human being.
- He became human. He walked amongst men. He lived the perfect life they could not live. And he died the atoning death that their sins might be forgiven.
- Why does God do this? Why would he bother? Well, we could say on the one hand, because he loved us so much. Yes, he did. Yes, he did. And yes, he does.
- But that is, if you like, almost an outworking of the primary reason why the Lord determines to help his lost children. We read in verses 21 to 24.
- I have pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, when they then went. Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, that saith the Lord, but I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen.
- [4 : 42] 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.
- For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Gather you out of all countries. When the Lord reaches down with his mercy, he no longer confines it simply to one nation.
- Yes, the Jews, the Israelites were his people of old, and he had a unique relationship with them. A unique relationship, which to some extent, in a certain way, still continues today.
- They are only saved by the Messiah, Jesus Christ, just as we are. But there is still that unique relationship with the people of Israel. But just as he was gathering them out of all the countries of their exile, so the Lord desires to gather to himself children out of every nation under heaven.
- Every country of this world will have its witnesses in glory before the Lord's throne of grace. That is his desire, to be glorified amongst the heathen, to show his power in redeeming souls.
- [5 : 58] You see, in one sense, yes, although, the Lord is filled with wrath against sin. His wrath against sin is absolute. His anger against sin is total.
- He cannot abide to have it in his presence. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The only place for sin in an eternal context is hell, as far removed from the Lord's comfortable presence as it is possible to be.
- But God's mercy is such that he desires to pluck his children out of that lost state and to glorify his name in doing that which is otherwise impossible.
- You see, it is one thing to be wrathful. Any false god can claim to be wrathful. Anybody can destroy, in a sense. But to restore is infinitely harder than to destroy.
- You see, anybody in Jesus' day, any tyrant could order somebody's death. Any soldier with a sword could put somebody to death. Any mob could stone somebody to death.
- [7 : 04] To kill was comparatively easy. To raise people to life. That is something only God can do through his chosen vessels. Jesus did it in the Old Testament.
- Elijah and Elisha both did it. Chosen vessels of God but only by the power of God. There was nothing in them. Anyone can kill. Only God can bring a life.
- Only God can restore. To restore is infinitely harder than to destroy. Even if you think in terms of, you know, a building, we all see around us in our islands as, you know, perhaps the ruined remains of an old crop house.

And maybe nearby there might be a spanking new bundle that's beside it or whatever. Or there might be in some cases an old building that has been lovingly put back together or whatever.

Now, if you've got an old rotting building from an ancient time and it's got certain features that are, yes, pleasing and perhaps, you know, nice and traditional and you wish that could be put back together, yeah, you've got two possibilities.

[8 : 11] You can demolish it and just start from the fridge. Or you could pour in the time or the money or the expertise to do it all up. You might think, well, that's all very well if you've got all the time in the world and all the money in the world but that's the point.

In one sense, without disparaging in any way that side of the construction industry, it is more straightforward to work a crane with a wrecking ball on it and just demolish something.

To destroy is comparatively straightforward but to restore takes infinitely more time, more expense.

It is more time consuming, it is more expensive, it requires infinitely more patience and investment and commitment because there would be times in any restoration project when you would think, oh, for goodness sake, this is a waste of time, this is a waste of money, I can't be doing with this anymore, I'm just sculling with the whole thing, I'm just giving it up.

If you're going to follow through to completion on any restoration project, it's going to take time, it's going to take huge amounts of resources and expertise and particular skills and so on.

[9 : 25] To restore is infinitely harder than to destroy. To bring back to life takes so much more power and ability than simply to end a life.

In one sense, without wishing to give on due license, in one sense, anybody with a weapon could kill but only God can bring back to life.

Only God can restore. This is why he's talking about glorifying his name in the redemption of sinners because he is doing something which only God can do.

And this is one reason why, as I mentioned with the children, despite, you know, with full respect to our brethren in the Baptist denominations and meanings and understanding where they are coming from and respecting their understanding of Scripture and personally believe that the doctrine of infant baptism is far deeper and more scriptural and covenantal because in it we indicate, we demonstrate that the grace of God isn't something that we cannot possibly do anything to receive.

No amount of words we speak, no amount of dedicating of ourselves to the Lord. Nothing we can do, nothing we can say, no amount of preparation or training for it can ever make us ready or ever make us worthy to receive this free grace of God which is given to us and bestowed lovingly and freely.

[11 : 02] Whosoever would, Jesus says in Revelation, let him come and take the water of life freely. Nothing we can earn, nothing we can do, nothing we can merit.

I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land. Now for the believer, their own land is ultimately the promised land.

It is glory where the Lord is and it is all nations under heaven and we should be thankful for that that the gospel came to our land, to our islands so long ago.

we are not the people of Israel by race or by nature. We Gentiles have received their benefit and their blessing and their Messiah because the word of God went out unto all nations.

Verse 25, it says, then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. Now anybody who's trying to do any cleaning, whether a kitchen or a house of any kind, any place, knows that sprinkling anything, especially sprinkling water on something, doesn't actually physically wash it.

[12 : 18] It doesn't actually drench it, wipe it, swab it, whatever. Just sprinkling is not going to physically actually clean or wash anything.

So we can see right away in Ezekiel this needs must be symbolic of a cleansing which man cannot himself do.

I'll say that again. This sprinkling needs must be symbolic of a cleansing which man himself cannot do.

It is only by way of God's grace that we are ourselves cleansed. I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean not by virtue of such drops of water as may land upon the people of Israel.

God is speaking in symbolic terms. That which symbolizes his grace freely descending like a dew from heaven sprinkles upon them and washes them from their filthiness not by any cleansing potency in the drops of water but by the work of the Lord by his grace.

[13 : 32] Now you could take another instance I suppose you could say the only way in which something physically might be cleansed by sprinkling is if you intended to wipe a surface clean.

Sometimes you might scoosh a disinfectant on it and you got one of these bottles and you scoosh it and it sends out a little mist a little kind of vapour that lands on it and then with that vapour landing on it you wipe it clean and when you wipe it and you swab it clean then the sprinkling does help yes to cleanse it but only because you are completely wiping the surface clean and again it's not the surface that does it it's you that do it somebody else has to do the work the sprinkling alone does not do it so likewise with us the sprinkling itself will not cleanse our souls but by the sprinkling we symbolize God's desire to wipe clean our souls from all their sin God's desire to give us as he says a new heart and a new spirit to put with us to take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh another instance if you think about it some of you may know from pilgrim's progress where Bunyan has that example of somebody sweeping out the room full of dust and the more they sweep the more clouds of dust just keep coming up and no matter how much they sweep they can't get the room clean because the dust just keeps on coming up in clouds and then settles down but then when they sprinkle some water around the room and then it settles and then they sweep then the dust comes up into its piles and it doesn't fly all over the place anymore just a little maybe all that it takes if the work is to be done and applied but those receiving the water cannot themselves do the work it is something

God does by his grace and by his mercy a new heart will I give you and a new spirit verse 26 will I put within you I will take away the stony heart of your flesh I will give you a heart of flesh well of course if we don't have a heart of flesh we're not alive if we don't have a true living spirit we're not alive and this again is what God is saying you haven't really been alive until I give you this so many of the human race are wandering about in a state of living death they are going around in their existence because we do not begin to live we do not begin to experience life as it was intended until we receive that life from the Lord until we receive not our spirit afresh but his spirit and you spirit will I put within you I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and so many of our hearts are hard our hearts are always hard until the

Lord changes them we continue to be with a heart of stone we continue to be with a heart of death with a living death until we are brought alive by Christ and this is what he promises to do to give us a real life a living life a heart that is a heart of stone is not a living heart is already dead even while it perhaps beats it is what the Lord desires to give us is a living life a real life a real heart which we have only with the Lord and not otherwise isn't that what you hear so often when believers give their testimony they say how life completely changed the world itself looks different when you are in Christ the colors of creation the beauty of what the Lord has done his providence in all his care of us all the wonder of what he has done in our lives as we look back over the past we see the ways by which he has brought us which we always just put down to ourselves and our own decisions before how many disasters were missed by a hair's breath how many mercies were brought to pass by circumstances that we really couldn't explain and once our eyes are opened we are enabled to see these things our hearts are enabled to love the

Lord and to love those around us in a way that they were not able to do before you see what the Lord does when he changes our heart we see this from verse 47 onwards as well is that he gives us a whole life he transforms our whole life he transforms not only our love and relationship to him but that affects everything else as well if we are a wife or a husband then becoming a Christian makes us a better husband a better wife if we are in work it makes us a more diligent and faithful employee if we are a boss employ others it makes us a more generous and more faithful and fair and understanding boss whatever our relationship if we are brothers or sisters it enables us to forgive one another because brothers and sisters will always at times be fighting or whatever and there's always a need for grace and for forgiveness in every family but this is what the

[19 : 01] Lord spirit enables us to do it makes us more diligent in our work it makes us more faithful in our relationships it makes us more appreciative of all that we receive it makes us more compassionate it changes for good every relationship and every act and every detail and every labour of love or toil or business or whatever it should be it transforms all of life because once we have this new heart this living spirit and soul in Christ we have a real life we have a whole life and all of it is transformed and the Lord talks here in verses 29 and 30 about calling for the corn and laying no famine upon us multiplying the fruit of the tree there a fruit of the tree and the fruit of the ground it doesn't just happen by accident it has to be tended it has to be ploughed it has to be worked at it is a whole life work and labour and toil and ploughing and sowing and reaping and fruitfulness all of life thus brought under the rule and blessing of

God's word and command is transformed if we have him first this is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the mount drink away with all shall he be clothed but 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 ideally when a child is brought within God's covenant of grace his visible covenant then not only are the Lord's people praying for that child and for those children but they become part of his or her family they become part of that support network ideally that's what we should be doing but even if we fall down in our duties God does not fall down in this and he blesses the fruitfulness of all that we seek to do he transforms our lives it doesn't mean we all get everything that we absolutely desire or want but it does mean the

Lord gives us everything that we need everything that we require God never leaves or forsakes his children and he says in verse 37 towards the end of the chapter 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 because the holy flock is the flock of Jerusalem I will yet be inquired of child of their baptism if they're an infant the infant does not know much about it they will not have any recollection of it when the day is over but if the Lord is at work in their life then he will yet be inquired of by them the day the day will come when they make their little childlike petitions which in the foolish of time will become older more adult more understanding petitions they will enter into that interaction and relationship with the

Lord they will have a prayer life and they will see prayers answered and they will be the more encouraged to pray again they will give praise to God they will confess their sins when they fail and fall they will acknowledge with thanksgiving what he has done they will plead for others who are dear to them they will offer up supplications for the world around them and the conversion of others and their life just like their physical life will grow and develop and mature their life with the Lord will likewise grow develop and ripen I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do that and the implication is Ezekiel speaks is that this is a vision that he is seeing in the future a vision that he hopes and trusts will come to pass and that the Lord has told him to pronounce in other words he knows it's not happening just yet he knows that Israel is still as yet in their lost condition he knows that Israel for all that the

Lord is reaching down and reaching out to them is not yet in that state of grace but that is not because God is not doing his part his desire is that sinners be saved his desire is to reach down to them and reach out to them I will yet be inquired of for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them all that he has said he desires to do ask and it shall be given now that see rain may not yet be ready to inquire for himself for the Lord but each of us who does come to know the Lord for our Savior comes to acknowledge in due course the waters of our baptism the covenant of our God the blessings he has bestowed in our life as we are compelled to look around and see what he has done to look back and see the ways by which he has brought us and so to look forward with the hope and the expectation that he will do as he has begun to do and likewise our desire to live the whole of our lives under his hand to give the whole of our lives to him our work life our home life our personal relationships any anxieties about decisions we might have to take if we committed to the

[24 : 59] Lord and we pray for his help that he has promised that he will guide us our desire to live the whole of our lives under his hand in the new spirit that he gives us and the new heart that he puts within us this will be blessed by him our work and our toil our labor and our leisure our sufferings and our blessings likewise to put it all in his hands and to continue in his covenant as a witness to the world and a testimony to the God that our salvation that we are his that we want to be his and that we intend to go on being his both for time and for eternity I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of

Israel to do it for them thus says the Lord and they pray that as he says he will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you may we who have been baptized recognize that that which the Lord has begun he desires to consummate and that which he does today for another little child he intends that it be brought to fruition this is the Lord reaching out to us all that we are required to do is to respond not just with a part of our lives but with all of our lives from this day on and forever let us pray