

God for us

Part 3, Ezekiel 26:24-38

²⁴ “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. ³⁰ I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. ³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. ³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!

³³ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. ³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. ³⁵ They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.”

³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’

³⁷ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to Israel’s plea and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, ³⁸ as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed festivals. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

In the US the distance between the railroad tracks is 4 feet 8.5 inches.

Why this funny number? Because that’s what they were in England.

Why? Because people who built the tramways used that gauge.

Why? The tools for wagon making were set to that gauge.

Why? Because the roads were rutted at that distance.

Why? Because the Romans built the first roads wide enough for 2 horses backsides.

So why is the US railroad 4 feet 8.5 inches? Well, because of 2 horse’s butts!

Sometimes in life, things are the way they are... and we never ask why?

The book of Ezekiel is a long prophetic message give to Israel. Just as they are being taken off into exile. Things are as bad for them as it has ever been, even worse than as slaves in Egypt. And the people all ask Why? Why is this happening? Why are things the way they are. Ezekiel opens their eyes, to how they had gone astray from

God. But he in 36 and at the end of the book shows them that there is hope of restoration. God has not forgotten them, and will not abandon them.

This passage is about the great miracle God will do for the people of Israel in restoring them back to power after such a destruction at the hands of Babylon.

But it's not all sunshine and roses, look at verse 32:

³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD.

One of the things we see in the Old Testament time and time again is how God is zealous for his name, zealous for the nations to know his power. This sounds a bit strange to us – God being egotistical about his fame – but God wants his name to be glorified so all peoples will know him. This is how he reveals himself in the OT, through the people of Israel.

As much as they are the lucky chosen ones, it's never really about them. He chooses them not because they are great, or holy people but he chooses them that through their weakness and failings He might show the world how great he is.

He does it for his name's sake, that all creation, all human history might know his name – and I don't mean know as in have heard of him but understand he is the great "I AM" the one of many names. He is: Creator, Alpha Omega, Father, Redeemer, Messiah, Emmanuel, Trinity. And he chooses to reveal to us, his name, through the history of the people of Israel.

But this passage is not about what Israel has done, it's about what God will do IN them. His greatest triumph will be the transformation of Israel's hearts and souls, not the transformation of their cities, or armies, of farm lands. That will come but it will be small fry. What brings true glory to God is that he will turn hearts of stone to hearts of flesh.

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

This is monumental stuff, God once again will be the active agent of change. He will be the one recreating, cleansing and transforming.

Two things are important, he will change their hearts. This is his promise to them, their old hearts of stone made new, made of flesh once again. AND he will infuse them with his spirit. This is uncommon language in the Old Testament.

Already at this time, 600 years before Jesus, Pentecost is being promised and prophesied. And at the end of the exile, for some unknown reason Persian king Cyrus, sends them all back, gives them money and lets them rebuild Jerusalem and Israel. This is a miracle of its own, why Cyrus did this is never explained, except that God's plans would not be stopped, that his promised would always be fulfilled.

But the real lesson from Ezekiel 36 is that God is a God of transformation. This is the God we follow – a God that sees barren land and desires to spring plants and rivers and create something beautiful from something barren.

God glorifies himself in transformation. God brings honour to his name by the re-creation of his people. Because God want to make his people anew... to transform us into the image of his Son.

I once heard of a man who had been going to a Bible study for a year or two. A very quiet guy who rarely shared anything and he owned a TAB.

The leaders of the group where really sure where he stood with God. He was relatively new to the faith, didn't seem to talk about his belief much. One day in their group he just piped up and said, I think I have to sell the TAB. Why's that? well I don't think a Christian should make his money from problem gamblers.

I don't know much about running a TAB, but I'm sure there is plenty of money in it. This man was being transformed, right in front of their eyes. He was willing to give up is career, his security, financial stability to be made more in the image of his saviour.... Wow.

God delights in transforming his people. Because The transformation of God's people brings glory to his name. It sends out a message to the world, I am God, this is what I do.

³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken.

God spirit is the catalyst for change. In chemistry, a catalyst is a substance that when dropped into a chemical increase the rate of a chemical reaction. Like a Mentos into diet soft drink His spirit poured into our lives starts the chain reaction for amazing change.

If we let his spirit into our lives, if we surrender to his will, stop resisting transformation then God can turn a heart of stone into flesh again.

Anyone here own a bonsai plant? By restricting the roots of a plant, and with careful cultivation you can get a maple tree in perfect scale, standing a foot tall. But it's the restriction of the plant that keeps it like that – not allowing the roots any room to grow that keeps it so small.

Sometimes we have a bonsai faith. We restrict the spirit room in our hearts to grow, and our faith stays small. God calls us to fling open the doors of our chest that we might be given a new heart, that its infused with the power of the Spirit so that we might be a new creation.

Globally we spend 2 billion a year on the self-help industry, people want to change, people want to be made anew. But in Jesus we have true transformation – not some cheesy book – but the words of eternal life, with the Spirit as our personal trainer.

Notice how this process of internal renewal, begins with an external act – the sprinkling of water, an act of spiritual cleansing starts with water. And what does this sound like to us? Baptism.

Some scholars say that this is the first biblical reference to the ritual that becomes baptism. But I think the imagery here is strong, our internal change come from the external. We live in a time where spirituality is very in vogue, we speak in spiritual

language about exercise, surfing, even clubbing. People talk about these things as a spiritual experience where they reach deep into themselves and reconnect. But in all these forms of spirituality there is one thing in common – they all focus on turning inward, looking deep at yourself to find the answers. The answers to transformation, to contentment, to life in general – all those answers can be found internally.

But God shows us that this is the problem, humanity's love affair with self. That answers to transformation, real transformation is not by looking in but it's by reaching out to the God who made all things, who will recreate all things and who seeks to transform all his people.

My challenge to you is will you let him? Will you open yourself up to God's transforming powers in your life?

God is standing there waiting, but you need to be willing.

I remember being a teenager on the bus to school still figuring out if the faith of mine meant anything. I knew the right answers but did it mean anything? Did it change me? Did it change my answers?

One day I was struggling with temptation of partying so I got out the Gideon's Bible, smallest one I had so people wouldn't see and I read it on the bus just looking for an answer and I came across this verse, 1 Peter 16

For it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

And I thought... yeah, what kind of an example am I being to my mates? Where in my life is the evidence that my faith changes me? And that passage did change me, I stopped drinking at the parties and wanted to be an example to Christ to them.

God changed me because I wanted him to, I was searching out his word. I let the external word, become a catalyst for change in me.

God delights in changing us. Do you feel barren? Do you feel dry? Do you feel like life is in ruins? God delights in making his people new creations. He is the God of transformation – as long as your heart is willing God's spirit is able.

Why don't you this week really open yourself up to his transforming power. Let him in to all the deepest darkest regions of your heart. All those places you keep hidden, so that he can do a new thing in you. Because when God is in us transforming us God is for us. And when God is for us who can be against us?