

An Order of Worship for the Home

July 19, 2020

Ezekiel: Visions of Hope – week 3

This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Invocation

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. (Ezekiel 11:19b-20)

Reader 1: The Lord has promised to be our God.
Reader 2: The Lord has promised to make us His people.
Reader 1: We gather in the name of the Lord...
Reader 2: The God who is Father, Son and Spirit.
Together: Amen.

Psalm 106:43-47

⁴³ Many times he delivered them,
but they were rebellious in their purposes
and were brought low through their iniquity.
⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,
when he heard their cry.
⁴⁵ For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
⁴⁶ He caused them to be pitied
by all those who held them captive.
⁴⁷ Save us, O Lord our God,
and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

“Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.” (Ezekiel 18:30b-32)

Christian Confessing: I confess that I have a stone heart. I don't love as I should. As a result, I don't act as I should. I don't speak as I should. I've hurt others. I've failed to help when given opportunity. Lord, forgive me and heal this heart of stone.

Christian Responding: Hear this promise: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)* You are loved and forgiven! All these promises spoken through Ezekiel are yours in Jesus.

Together: Amen.

John 4:7-15

Please read from your own Bible. This is the gospel reading for today.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. ² Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

³ Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. ⁴ Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. ⁵ Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. ⁶ And he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷ As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸ And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. ⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰ Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹ But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. ¹² And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

Message

Near, Perfected, and New

Last week you were asked to read sections of the final vision from the book of Ezekiel. This is by far the longest vision in terms of its description. Ezekiel spends a total of 9 chapters describing a perfected temple, the role of “the prince,” a division of land, and inclusion of all people in God’s plans to heal and restore his creation.

As we approach this vision, I wonder what you think of the description of the temple. If you read it you might have noticed it's detailed, and repetitive, and detailed (yes, it's detailed enough to warrant saying it twice). Yet, this is not an architectural plan God expects Israel to follow. Instead, Ezekiel is shown a temple which is in use already. This is a picture-message of what God has done and is doing for his people. This is the temple perfected. This is the temple exact in every detail. This is the temple completed in every respect.

But, that's a little lost on us. We don't connect to a temple, or priests, or sacrifices like Israel did. What meaning did the temple have for them? It was the place of relationship with God. This is where God made himself present with his people. If you wanted to locate an entry point for God's grace on earth, it was the temple. The temple was sacramental, just as much as the water of baptism or the bread and wine of communion.

But Ezekiel was living in Babylon, 500 miles from the temple. Not only that, the temple had been ransacked. It had been burned when Jerusalem fell.

The temple was distant. The temple was damaged. The temple was lost. And this is how Israel saw their relationship with God – distant... damaged... lost.

I wonder if you can relate? I wonder if, maybe, some of you reading feel that way too?

- God can seem distant when we're struggling to discern truth among conflicting political and medical (and even family) opinions.
- Our relationship with God can feel damaged when we carry guilt and shame over what we've done or where we've been.
- We can be lost – so far from God that there seems no hope of finding our way back into his family.

If you can relate to a distant, damaged, or lost relationship with God, then you can relate to Ezekiel and the people with him in Babylon. If you can relate to that, then this vision of hope is for you.

To people who feel far from God, he shows them a temple – the place where he draws near – restored in their midst. To people who have a damaged relationship with God, he gives a vision of perfect healing. To people who think they've lost their place in God's family, he reveals how he is making all things new.

There's more hope still! From the temple – the place where relationship with God is near, and perfect, and new – Ezekiel sees water flowing. Its source is the temple building itself, the very place where God dwelt.

Water flowing out... Water which is life... Water which brings life... It flows from God. It moves through the temple. It moves beyond the temple. As it goes, it brings life; it expands; it grows.

Is this something like a mustard seed which “is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree”? (Matthew 13:32) Maybe... Is this something like “leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened”? (Matthew 13:33) That’s possible... Is this something like seeds scattered by a man who then “sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how”? (Mark 4:27) I think so.

This is how the presence of God operates in our world. The river flowing from the temple is the grace of God flowing out to the world.

This is good, but it’s still hard to see what it means for us. I admitted earlier that temple worship is foreign to us. It’s hard to connect with this vision the way Israel would have. The temple held intimate, deep meaning for them.

You and I don’t long for the temple, and maybe that’s OK. You don’t yearn for the building, altar, or courtyards, and it’s understandable. You don’t miss the physical temple Ezekiel remembered. This is because you *are* the temple of God. The temple in Jerusalem is no longer necessary as a place for God to make himself near to his people. Now, he is present in his church – not a building but you, his people!

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

You – that’s plural by the way – are the place where God comes near to this world. That’s why Ezekiel’s vision carries hope for you. God has made you his temple by the work of Jesus.

Jesus came to this world in order to draw near, and he left his Holy Spirit dwelling with you as his ongoing nearness. Jesus lived a perfect life, and gave you his perfection in exchange for your guilt and shame which he took to the cross. Plus, in the resurrection of Jesus, you are given new life. This relationship is no longer distant, damaged or lost. In Christ, you are near to God, perfected, and made new!

Now, what about that water flowing from the temple?

Jesus said, "...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14)

He also said this: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

The water flows from the temple and brings life to the world. The life-giving gospel of Jesus flows from *you*, his temple. It's flowing from Calvary through K.A.M.P. Calvary, and through prayer quilts, and through the Alpha course, and through so many of our conversations and interactions.

The water of life is the grace of God. It flows from you, because you are the dwelling place of God. He is near to you. He has perfected you. He has made you new. Now he brings life to this world through you. What do you do now?

Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." (John 7:37)

Drink regularly from the grace of God; drink deeply from the well of his love. Read his word. share his forgiveness in your home. Speak grace to your church family, and receive grace from these brothers and sisters. Allow the river to flow out from these places and it will flow deeper and stronger. This river of God's grace will bring life to you. This river of God's grace will bring life to more and more of our thirsty friends and neighbors too. Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.

Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.

Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.

Reader 2: Receive our offerings.

Together: Receive us as your own.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing (adapted from Ezekiel 34:30-31, 23)

Reader 1: The Lord our God is with us.
Reader 2: We are His people.
Reader 1: We are His sheep.
Reader 2: He is our Shepherd.
Together: We will not be afraid. Amen.

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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