



Sermon Series Weekly Devotionals

Week of March 4, 2018

READ ch. 33: Vindication!

REVIEW. The first 9 verses remind us of 3:17-21 (see previous devos), with its message: God holds you responsible to warn sinners that Judgment Day is coming. The next verses (10-20) repeat ch. 18's call that the window of life and death is still open, and God will repay each individual for his own behavior. When a depressed sinner says, "I'm doomed, there's no way out," God says, "Stop it. I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Repent, change your ways, and you'll live."

In 21-22: Vindication! A survivor from Jerusalem's fall reports that the city has fallen. On one hand, that's awful news. On the other hand, it's sudden vindication for Ezekiel, who's been predicting it (24:25-27). Vindication for God as well: clearly He's the sovereign lord of history, in firm control, who can declare events before they happen. God releases Ezekiel's tongue, and he is free once again to engage in ordinary speech.

You'd think the Israelites would now flock to Ezekiel with awe for a true prophet of God, and obey his message. They flock to him, all right, but only for entertainment (30-33). "Let's go to the Zeke Show!" they laugh, but ignore his words.

MEDITATE. Clearly, we should stop confusing preacher popularity with real success. Servants of God are called not to big results but to faithfulness. Ezekiel has been preaching for over a decade, and everything he's said has come true, but still his message is ignored. A second misperception we have is that if people are coming to church or tuning in a TV preacher, they must be open to spiritual things. But they may just find it entertaining artistically or intellectually. The heart may be hard.

PRAY. Pray that the Lord will make you discerning, that you will not jump on bandwagons, or be too quick to judge success and spirituality. And that in your own life, you will prize faithfulness over "success."

READ ch. 34: The Lord is My Shepherd.

REVIEW. This beautiful chapter falls into three parts with three promises:

34: 1-10. “I will rescue you!” God promises his abused people that He will rescue them from the shepherd-rulers who have exploited them, fleeced them, and even slaughtered them, instead of caring for them.

34:11-22. “I will rescue you from both your enemies and from your ‘friends’.” God will also rescue them from exile, and bring them back to the land; and he will deliver the “lean” (poor, frail) among them from the “fat” fellow-sheep who bully them.

34:23-31. “I will bring you into a place of peace...forever!” Best of all, God promises that one day he will put a permanent “king David” over them who will rule them in a covenant of peace. In some of the most beautiful words in Ezekiel, God concludes: “You are my flock, the human flock of my pasture, and I am your (shepherd) God.”

MEDITATE. Sheep are dumb, directionless, and defenseless. So we’d prefer to be mighty lions, great elephants, soaring eagles, or smart dolphins. Slow down there. Only sheep get to heaven. Because only sheep have a good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Maybe you should be content to be a sheep today.

PRAY. Pray Psalm 23, and say, “Lord, shepherd me.”

READ 35:1-36:15, How You Treat Israel...

REVIEW. Israel's judgment is now over, and her bright future is being described. And at the outset, says Yahweh, I'm going to deal with those people that have mistreated Israel down through the years—fulfilling Genesis 12:1-3: "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you."

Representing Israel's enemies from ancient Egypt to modern Iran is Edom. The dark hatred of Edom for Israel dated back to the rivalry between their ancestor-Brothers Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27:41-33:16). At times, Israel volunteered to live as a brother with Edom, but Edom had hated her in return, dreaming of her destruction (Amos 1:11-12). This is very much like Israel and her Palestinian brothers today, in a Middle East where if Israel's enemies laid down their weapons, there would be peace today; but if Israel laid down her weapons, she would be exterminated immediately.

Edom's acts of hatred toward Judah intensified in Israel's darkest hours. When Nebuchadnezzar razed Jerusalem, the Edomites clapped their hands with glee. They even joined in the slaughter (5-9), and swooped in to loot and seize land (10). But they were oblivious to a crucial fact: the land's owner, Yahweh, had not gone, but was still in the land (10-12). Because of their mistreatment of his people, Yahweh will turn the tables on Edom, and make "the mountains of Edom" a wasteland just like the mountains of Israel (7-15). And this judgment will fall on every nation that has insulted or hounded or plundered Israel (36:1-15), for "whoever touches Israel touches the apple of His eye" (Zech. 2:8).

MEDITATE. What you think of Israel is one of the most important things about you. It's revealing, for it reveals exactly what you think of God and his chosen people. It's determinative, for it determines how God will treat you one day.

PRAY. Pray a blessing on Israel. Pray for her survival. Pray for her repentance. Pray for Jews for Jesus and their evangelistic campaign in Jerusalem this May.

READ 36:16-38, Not For Us but For His Name

REVIEW. There is no more exciting passage in the Bible about Israel's return to the land and national conversion than vv. 22-32. Tell Israel, God said, that it's not *because* of them but *in spite of* them that I'll save them. I'm going to do it for the sake of my name—my reputation—so that the whole world will know Who I Am (22-23).

God then promises seven things—that He will:

1. Regather Israel from all over the world and return them to The Land. 24
2. Cleanse them from her sins. 25
3. Give them a new heart and a new spirit. 26
4. Put his Spirit in them so that they will obey him. 27
5. Give them the Promised Land as their home. 28
6. Give them economic prosperity. 29-30
7. Cause them to recall their sins and loathe themselves. 31

Again, the Lord won't do all this for *their* sake, but for *his* own sake.

God's primary concern, he makes clear, is his own name, glory, reputation.

MEDITATE. The Bible tells us: "do everything for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). God's glory/reputation/name should be our chief mission and longing, we're told. Why is that? "Because it's my preoccupation and chief desire," God says here. "Even on the day I give Israel—and you—greater joys than you can imagine, it's not about *your* happiness but about *my* glory." Hmmm, what is *my* chief mission and longing?

PRAY. *I come to You Father, through Jesus the Son, and give You the glory great things You have done. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, how great Thou art, how great Thou art. Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love.*

What a beautiful Name...