

“God Is Ever Showing Us the Significance
of What we Are Doing”
Sermon for 5 August 2018
Text: Ezekiel 12-15

Exodus 32:7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘[lit. these are your gods] This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” 9 The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are [lit. a stiff-necked] an obstinate people. 10 Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” NASB

This stunning act of corporate defilement (my Chosen people **have corrupted themselves**) by which the people of God, newly rescued from slavery (!), both debauched and degraded themselves in carnal and false worship *of the golden calf* (things they actually did—through licentious and immoral behaviors—was the precipitating cause of God’s fury. He was ready not only to abandon them (departing) but, having removed himself from them, **he would actually destroy them**—and **make of you** (Moses singularly) **a great nation**. (v.10) The threat to withdraw his presence, which follows this threat of annihilation, is the first in a series of sad, sad moments recorded in Scripture. It is covered in Exodus 33.

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ 13 Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight.

Consider too, that this nation is Your people.”

14 And God said, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15 Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. 16 For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the [ground?] earth?” NASB

The Lord God responds with: **My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.** Then Moses pleads with God:

16 For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the [ground] earth?”

17 The Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.”

Does a desire for God’s presence characterize us as his people? Are we distinguished by our passion for his presence with us wherever we are? Whomever we are with? **If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.** (v.15) Does this sentiment resonate with our morning devotions? Our private worship? Do we dread facing the world enough—not facing God, but the world!—so as to refuse to budge until we are convinced that he goes with us, before, alongside and behind us?!

Here is another sad note from Judges 16. Samson having been deceived and defiled by consorting with Delilah (a defilement coupled with the breaking of his Nazarite vow—a **razor was never to touch his head**), awakens to rise and fight the Philistine assassins, **But he did not realize that presence of the Lord had left him.** (v.20) He did not know, but soon discovered how weak he was in his own strength. *And so, I add, aren’t we all!*

Then there is Eli’s daughter-in-law. When she heard (1 Samuel 4:19-22) that the ark of the covenant had been captured by the Philistines and that both her husband, Phinehas, and her father-in-law, Eli, were deceased, *she was so grieved that she went into labor.* **The women said, ‘Do not be afraid, you have born a son.’ But she did not answer or pay attention.** (v.20) She named her newborn son, Ichabod, which means **Where is the glory?** or **The glory has departed.** And, then, she died. Washington Irving strives to capture this catastrophic sense of loss in his “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in which Ichabod Crane personifies the glory that was New England (its intellectual, church and cultural brilliance in the past). This tale is an adaptation of an Irish folk tale involving a headless horseman. Bones, who is the embodiment of ascendant raw masculinity (the uncultured, uneducated and ignorant man of action), masquerades as the headless horseman to drive Ichabod out of town and win the hand of the lovely town lass. The tale is part satire and part parody; a piece of early American cultural consciousness. The climax of the action occurs on “the old Church bridge.” This symbolizes the absence of divine presence by purported “obsolescence.” Progress.

Does our desire for God make us distinctive today? In our families? In our towns? Cities, or country? Are we noticeably like Asaph?

25 Whom have I in heaven but You?

And [with] besides You, I desire nothing on earth.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail,

But God is the [lit. rock] strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Or are we passionate about God as David:

63 O God, You are my God; I shall seek You [lit. early] earnestly;

My soul thirsts for You, my flesh [lit. faints] yearns for You,

In a dry and weary land where there is no water.

2 Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary,

To see Your power and Your glory.

3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,

My lips will praise You.

Are we known as those who have a **heart after God**—or are we even noticeably “religious?” For if we either resembled Asaph, or David, we would be outstanding!

IN HELL THE *PAIN OF FORSAKENNESS* WILL GREATLY
EXCEED ANY *PAIN OF PUNISHMENT*, OR TORMENT.

Well, thanks be to God that the Father forsook his Son on the cross so that the Son would never forsake, or abandon us! Neither in this age, nor in the one to come! *This we know, that God knows whether we treasure his presence whether we are in public or in private*—in this world there are no God-free zones!

No God-free zones. So we come to a major insight here. God gives Ezekiel this visions of the carrying's-on in Jerusalem because 1. he wants us to know that he sees what we are doing; 2. that what we are actually doing (not just what we present to ourselves and to the watching world) eternally matters; and 3. that we should know the significance of what we are doing. God enlightens and God instructs—he both reveals and explains by visions. Therefore we know that we are implicated and that we are without excuse—when means convicted, condemned and in need of salvation and the Savior's continued advocacy. He both died for us, and he now pleads for us—even now. This hour, this day.

God is ever showing us the significance of what we are doing.

Another way to address this is to remind us that what we are doing does have significance to God.

So Ezekiel is commanded to pack up his stuff, shoulder it and to depart through a tunnel, an escape tunnel, dug through the city wall. **You shall go from your place like an exile, from one place to another.** . . as a homeless person? A vagrant? He is to symbolize the attempted escape of the frightened citizens of Jerusalem! King Zedekiah and some of his troops will attempt just this, be defeated in battle and captured. The King's last sight will be that of watching his sons be slaughtered and he will be led blind into exile in Babylon—he will never “see” it.

The word of the Lord will come to Ezekiel six times in Chapters 12-13 and there will be a fourfold, negative response to that word: disbelief, denial, disregard and distortion. Ezekiel does as he is told and some of those watching come and ask, **What are you doing?** (v.9) Ezekiel responds that this is a specific message for Zedekiah as just related. Then comes to second illustration: shuddering and trembling as he eats his bread and drinks his water. This is to indicate the future for those in Jerusalem. (vv. 19-20) The third illustration entails the reversal of an old proverb: **Those who predict judgment are wrong! Each passing day proves it.** Ezekiel offers in its place a new proverb: **The days are near and the fulfillment of every vision.** (v. 23). Then there are those who will deny the word of the Lord, **The vision he sees if many days from now, and he prophesies if times far off.** (v. 27) Therefore say, **none of my words will be delayed any longer.** (v.28)

The sixth **word of the Lord** occurs in the opening of chapter 13 and it is a command to **prophesy against the prophets of Israel** who are prophesying

from **their own hearts . . . who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing.** (vv.2-3) They are **jackals among the ruins!** They have not **gone up into the breaches**, nor have they **fortified the walls** of the besieged city! In verses 1-16, Ezekiel inveighs against the male prophets—and in vv. 17-23, against the female prophetesses. **They**, the men, **have seen false visions and lying divinations.** (v. 6) and they have misled the people proclaiming **Peace, where there is no peace.** (v.10) They will be judged with giant hailstones (divine wrath) (v. 11), the collapse of **a giant whitewashing wall** (their lies). The first judgment seems particular and customized; the second more generalized. The female prophetesses deceive with amulets, bracelets, charms—wrist bands and head scarves! They are hawkers, predators who prey on the gullible and misled with talismans and divination—the implication is they are practicing witchcraft **for barley and pieces of bread**—rather like palm readers and tarot card predictors. . . beggars, gypsies and thieves: **putting to death those who should not die and encouraged the wicked to persist in their evil ways.** (v.22)

The sins of the nation occupy Ezekiel in the first twenty verses of chapter 14. His wrath would fall even if Noah, Daniel and Job were numbered amongst them as righteous citizens—*they alone would be spared!* So grave is the iniquity that God will send **sword, wild beast, famine and pestilence.** (v.21) There would survive some number of the purified—that all might see the justice of the Lord in visiting judgment on the whole of Israel. Destruction was not God's primary objective; but rooting out sin was, still is. God's judgment is sent to improve our usefulness as loving and obedient children of God. His glory and our good are tandem concerns of God in history. Chapter 15, correspondingly, contains a treatment of Israel, likened to a useless vine—idolatry leads to uselessness!

What is striking in Ezekiel 14:1, 7-8, even alarming, for those who came to consult with Ezekiel follows:

3 “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces *the stumbling block of their iniquity.* Should I be consulted by them at all? 4 Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord [YHWH] God, “Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will be brought to give him an answer in [lit. it] the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, 5 in order to lay hold of [lit. their] the hearts of the house of Israel who are [lit. all estranged from me through their idols] estranged from Me through all their idols.”’ . . .

. . . “Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. 7 For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the Lord will be brought to answer him in My own person. 8 I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and [lit. proverbs] a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the Lord. NASB

It helps, I think, to recall that these “elders” were heads of household, not political leaders and they have, by their pagan hearts put ***the stumbling block of their iniquity*** (v.7) between themselves and God. *God will answer them face to face, personally and through direct action.* One must assume that to be discomfoting at least! So that God might **in order to lay hold of [lit. their] the hearts of the house of Israel.** (v. 5) and so convert others to Himself! Yes, coming to God is good, but coming to God with the right heart is necessary!

We should seek God:

1. on his terms not our own
2. count on God to be merciful *to all who repent*
3. remember that his glory and our good are the tandem goals of God
- 4, the ungodly will get precisely *what they deserve. And lastly,*
5. God is content that both idolators and false prophets should be punished by being abandoned to the deceptions in which they choose to live.

Fruitless is useless. And futility is both the living and the outcome of such a life. 2 Peter 1:5-8 contains the exhortation of Peter aimed at preserving the fruitfulness of all Christians, our brothers and sisters:

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral [lit. virtue] excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To this end God is diligent to show us the significance of what we are doing—painful thought it be—that we might both “see” and “know” what is good.

Amen.