

# Jesus Gives

Ezekiel 36:22-38

As we continue in our Gospel series on the 10 Saving Acts of Jesus, let's step back and consider the big WHY. **Why has God done all of this?** Why did He send His Son to earth? Why did Jesus die? Why did He pay the price for our sin and set us free from its power?

The answer is right there in Ezekiel 36 in the verses that were just read.

**“Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O House of Israel, that I am about to act, but *for the sake of my holy name*... I will vindicate the holiness of my great name... *and the nations will know that I am the Lord.*”** Ezekiel 36:22-23

This passage makes it crystal clear that **it is NOT ABOUT US and is ALL ABOUT GOD**. It is for the sake of **HIS** name - to vindicate **HIS** holiness - so that all people may know that **HE** is the Lord. If salvation had anything to do with us and our efforts, we would all be doomed - just as the nation of Israel was judged and punished over and over for their failures.

God was making it very clear that if it depended on us, we would all be in serious trouble because of how “prone to wander” we are, with hearts that worship everything but God. Nevertheless, God said, **“I am about to act.”** Though we were dead in our sins, God chose to rescue us. Though we were utterly undeserving, God chose to act on His own behalf. Though we were totally incapable of saving ourselves, God sent His only Son to save us.

This morning we'll see **the one purpose of God to save us** - entirely for His own glory. And then we'll walk through **the five promises He made** in Ezekiel 36 and see how all of them were fulfilled in Christ and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came, he lived, he died and rose again so that He could forgive us, change our hearts and fill us with His Holy Spirit - all to showcase the wonders of His love, mercy, grace and power.

For the sake of His own glory, God promised to transform, guide and empower His people. We sometimes struggle with **God's pursuit of His own glory**, but if you think about it, **what other aim would be worthy of God?** Anything else He sought to glorify would then be more worthy of praise than Him. That other thing would therefore be God.

For example, if God's mission in history was to glorify **us**, that would mean that **we** are the ones most worthy of praise and the greatest happiness and life could be found as we delight in ourselves and one another. But that would be like showing someone a glass of clean ice water and then giving them warm pond water instead. True life and fulfillment can only be found in

God - like crystal clear ice water. You are pond water and if you drink that you will get sick and die - but go ahead, drink up and see how that works out for you. Here is how John Piper says it:

“Because God is unique as the most glorious of all beings and totally self-sufficient, **he must be for himself in order to be for us**. If he were to abandon the goal of his own self-exaltation, we would be the losers. His aim to bring praise to himself and his aim to bring pleasure to his people are one aim and stand or fall together.” John Piper

“In view of God’s infinitely admirable beauty, power, and wisdom, what would his love to a creature involve? What could God give us to enjoy that would show him most loving? There is only one possible answer, isn’t there? **Himself!** If God would give us the best, the most satisfying, that is, if he would love us perfectly, he must offer us no less than himself for our contemplation and fellowship.” John Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-god-for-us-or-for-himself>

God’s purpose to bring glory to Himself is vividly presented here in Ezekiel 36.

### **One Purpose: for God’s Glory**

“I am about to act, **for the sake of my holy name...** I will vindicate the holiness of **my great name...** It is not for your sake that I will act... Then all the nations that are left all around you **shall know that I am the Lord...**” Ezekiel 36:22-23,32,36,38

**God’s mission has always been to magnify His own supremacy** - to showcase His own splendor - to work through Israel and then through the church so that the whole world would come to know that **HE** is the LORD - the One most worthy of praise; the One in whom life and peace and happiness can be found. All of life is about making the choice of whom or what to worship. Will we give our hearts and lives to the Lord alone or will we give some part of our worship to ourselves or other people or other pursuits?

Piper helpfully sums up his message in this line:

### **One Purpose: for God’s Glory**

“I am about to act, **for the sake of my holy name...** I will vindicate the holiness of **my great name...**” Ezekiel 36:22-23

- “God is most glorified **in us** when we are **most satisfied in Him.**” John Piper

God’s command is that we love HIM with ALL of our heart, soul, mind and strength. This must be an undivided love. Whatever we delight in most, whatever we treasure, whatever we think about and talk about - *that* is what we worship. And **for our own good** God commands us to love HIM with all that we are - with every fiber of our being - because He knows that He is the only One who can truly satisfy our hearts.

***This is God's one purpose: to magnify His own glory***, to draw attention to Himself as the spring of living water, as the only source of life and joy. That is God's singular purpose in history. And ***by being exclusively for Himself, He is triumphantly for us*** and our ultimate happiness IN HIM. To accomplish this purpose He made five promises. Let's walk through them as we study this rich and encouraging passage of Scripture.

First, to magnify His own glory God promised to gather His people together.

### **Five Promises for God's People**

#### **1. To Gather Us Together**

***"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land."*** Ezekiel 36:24

***Life has rhythms of scattering and gathering.*** Farmers scatter seed then later gather in the harvest. Families come together at the holidays, then scatter back out to their regular responsibilities. We do this every day on a smaller scale, scattering each morning to our different duties then gathering back together around the dinner table. We have this pattern at church - we gather every Sunday for worship and fellowship, then we scatter back out to our own homes.

***Scattering and gathering is natural in life.*** It has also been **the pattern of history**. At first people were all together with one language. But they used this unity to bring glory to themselves instead of God by building a giant tower, so God confused their languages and scattered them out so they would obey His command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply," and "fill the earth and subdue it."

***The Jewish people gathered together into the promised land***, then were scattered back out in the exile due to their idolatry and failure to worship the Lord wholeheartedly. There was a great ingathering in the time of Christ and the early church, but when the disciples failed to go out from Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them to do, ***a great persecution came along and scattered them*** in every direction, carrying the gospel with them.

Since the time of the early church God's people have developed a pattern of **gather and go**, come together for a season and scatter back out for a season. There have been times of great harvest and gathering in. And there have been seasons of drought and just holding things together. Oakwood itself has had seasons of rapid growth, gathering many people in, and seasons of sending people out - such as when ***Candlewood was launched*** 10 years ago.

This promise through Ezekiel to the nation of Israel came as ***the shadow of the exile loomed darkly over them***. Thousands of Jews, including Ezekiel, were taken as slaves into Babylon in **597 BC**. 10 years later Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege to the city, eventually burning it to

the ground and destroying the temple completely. Imagine how comforting these promises were as the exile began - promises of being gathered back together; of being restored to "your own land."

***This was initially fulfilled in the return to the Land around 70 years later.*** The temple was rebuilt but it had only a shadow of its former glory. ***The greater fulfillment is happening right now*** as the Lord is gathering a people from every tongue and tribe and nation who will worship Him forever in the final promised land - when He makes all things new, restoring the entire universe to the splendor of the original creation. Think about that: God has scattered believers all over the globe for the express purpose of gathering the rest of His sheep together into one fold.

That is the promise for all of us today: the Lord our God may scatter us apart for the years of this short life. But ***the time will come when He will gather us together for the great wedding feast of the Lamb*** - and then we will be together forever and forever! In this world we are foreigners and exiles, but one day soon we will be HOME. Listen to Jesus' words in John 14:

### **Five Promises for God's People**

1. To **Gather Us Together** - bringing us **Home** to be with **Him**

*"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and **will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.**" John 14:3*

We feel that reality in our hearts. **We were made for relationship and we experience separation.** We were made for peace and we feel conflict. We were made to be whole, but we feel divided and fragmented. Ultimately, we were made to be with the Lord so we feel like something deep and significant is missing - because it is! We see Him now as in a dim reflection. One day we will see Him face to face, when He gathers us all together - at that last trumpet. **Then, we will be home!**

Brothers and sisters, whatever you are going through - hold on; stand firm; be strong. ***We are in exile now, but it won't be long and we will be home!*** We are often apart now, but one day soon we will all be together. Some of you feel the grief of loved ones who have already gone to be with Jesus. There is a great reunion coming! Hold on to that blessed hope!

God promises to gather us together. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and He will come back to get us so that we can be with Him forever! He will gather us together! Second, God promises to wash away our sins.

### **Five Promises for God's People**

2. To **Wash Away Our Sins**

*"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from your uncleannesses, and **from all your idols I will cleanse you.**" Ezekiel 36:25*

The imagery here is of **gross uncleanness** being washed away. The Bible is actually more graphic than this, but I'll use the imagery of **a high school guys' locker room**. Imagine the smell. Imagine the clothing after a muddy football game. Imagine the guys. **Unclean**. When God sees a divided heart - a person who loves, trusts and obeys things other than Him, it is disgusting to Him - like sweat-soaked, mud-covered football socks. (Some of you know how gross those are.)

What is it that God must cleanse us from? **"From all your idols I will cleanse you."** The problem in Israel was idolatry. In ancient times the temptation was very real to worship **little statues** that offered fertility or wisdom or blessing.

Today our idols are more subtle but no less present. Today we worship money, status, success, comfort pleasure, security (and 1,000 other things). You are probably drawn to some idols and I am drawn to others, but Calvin was right - the heart is an idol factory. We are constantly producing and worshipping more and more idols. **Anything we love, trust and obey more than God becomes an idol to us.**

Often it is the **good things** that we make ultimate things that are most dangerous as idols because we usually don't see them as such. Our **kids**, for example, are wonderful blessings. But if we make them ultimate in our hearts - our first, best and main thing, even ahead of God - then we place more weight on them than they can bear and they will let us down and the pressure we place on them will cause them harm.

**Work** can often be this way. Work is a good gift from God. But if we let this good thing become **an ultimate thing** in our hearts it will crumple under the weight of our worship and let us down every time. Nothing can satisfy our deepest longings but God Himself. He is the only spring of living water. Yet we turn away from Him and dig little ditches, thinking that in them we will find the water of life.

This is the filth from which God promises to cleanse us - washing away not only the sins we commit, but the idolatry that is beneath them. This is not just trimming back the weeds of our sin, but is **tearing it out at its roots**. Listen to 1 John 1:9

### **Five Promises for God's People**

#### **2. To Wash Away Our Sins - cleansing us from Idolatry**

***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9***

God not only promises to forgive our sins but to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If you have been forgiven and justified then you have been set free from the power of sin and have become a new creation in Christ. The Holy Spirit lives in you and is devoted to your perfection - He will not

only forgive your past sins but will work to purify you and make you more and more holy, more and more like Jesus, every single day.

The next promise shows us how. God promised to give us new hearts!

### **Five Promises for God's People:**

#### **3. To Give Us New Hearts**

**“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And *I will remove your heart of stone* from your flesh *and give you a heart of flesh.*”** Ezekiel 36:26

***The heart is the control center of the person***, not just the seat of emotion as we think of it today. The nation of Israel had a heart as hard as stone. They were stiff-necked, refusing to bow before the Lord. They were resistant to His leading, rebellious against His teaching. They did not delight in His Law as Psalm 119 exhorts, but fought against it. Their heart, as a group, was hard like stone.

But God promised to change that. He promised to transform the nation from the inside. That is precisely what each one of us needs - a total change. This is why Jesus talks about being “born again.” ***We don't need just a little moral improvement. We need to be reborn.***

- Apart from Christ we were dead in our sins, only through Him can we come to life.
- Apart from Christ we were blind, only He can open our eyes to spiritual truth.
- We were deaf, only He can help us hear His voice.
- Apart from Christ our hearts were stone - resistant to truth, cold to the Lord.
- Apart from Christ we were enslaved to sin, trapped in an inescapable labyrinth of idolatry. Only Jesus can save us from all of this.

Apart from Jesus we cannot please God, we cannot obey God's Law without being born again and receiving a new heart. But when a sinner turns to Jesus in faith she is given a new heart that comes with ***new desires and new patterns of thinking***. The new believer is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.

### **Five Promises for God's People:**

#### **3. To Give Us New Hearts - with new Desires and Thoughts**

**“If anyone is in Christ *he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*”** 2 Corinthians 5:17

**So what is new in the new believer?** A new heart means that the center of who you are is totally different than it was before. You used to love sin, now you love God. You used to trust and obey your own flesh, now you trust and obey Jesus. You used to be governed by the law of sin and death, now you belong to Jesus and are governed by the Law of the Spirit of Life.

You've probably heard stories of *people with dramatic testimonies*. **Scott Lothery**, who attended here at Oakwood 20 years ago and was my supervisor in Chicago, was a hard core sinner before Christ. He loved drugs and the sinful lifestyle that went with them. But after he gave his life to Jesus all of those desires went away. He didn't like the taste of alcohol anymore. He didn't want to use drugs anymore. He didn't want to disrespect women anymore. He wanted to please Jesus. He was totally different. And he became an evangelist, then a pastor, preaching the good news that had changed his life.

***For me, the change was more gradual.*** And it wasn't a clean upward progression. There were jumps and setbacks, seasons of great growth and seasons of struggle. I remember talking with Scott back in 2004 as I was doing my church planting internship with him. I was asking for help in dealing with the remaining sin in my life - essentially ways it was clear that I loved myself more than God - both in ministry and in marriage. He asked a very simple but a very insightful question: **"What do you want more?"**

So I'll ask you the same question today. As the Holy Spirit shines His light into the corners of your life, "What do you want more?" Do you want to love, trust and obey Jesus - to worship Him above all things? Or do you want to continue to serve your hidden idols - to cherish and delight in them above all? What do you want more? What will you pursue?

As a believer in Jesus you have a new heart. Before Christ we loved ourselves and our sins, after Christ we hunger and thirst for righteousness. But as we learned from the Momentum Bible Study, ***those desires must be cultivated***. Just as we must cultivate an appetite for healthy food and not eat greasy burgers and hot fudge sundaes all the time, so we must cultivate the soil of our hearts, nurturing the good desires that are implanted there and not falling back into our old ways of being hard, shallow, rocky, thorny soil.

You already have a new heart if you are a new creation IN CHRIST. Then you have been reborn, brought to life in Christ and are no longer dead IN SIN. You have a new position because of your personal, eternal connection with Jesus. So the new heart that you have, is HIS HEART. That's where the new desires and thoughts, the new power, comes from! ***Jesus has placed His own heart into each one of us*** - by giving us His own Spirit. That is the fourth promise.

#### **Five Promises for God's People:**

##### **4. To Fill Us with His Spirit**

***"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."*** Ezekiel 36:27

A new heart that is pure and holy and righteous is what allows us to house the Holy Spirit of God. Just as **the temple in Israel** was constructed in a very unique way so that it was a sacred place, unlike any other building in the land, so ***the heart of each believer is a sacred place***. They



shaped every stone of the temple, many of them staggeringly enormous, far away from the temple site so that there was no noise of hammers in that holy place. The stones were brought in and simply fitted together. They followed very specific direction in the size, shape and design of the temple, with ornate golden doors and a huge purple curtain for the most holy place, where the ark of the covenant would house the very presence of God.

Brothers and sisters, **WE are the temple of the Holy Spirit!** You and me and all of us together - we are the holy place, the sacred space, where the Spirit of the living God dwells in all of His shekinah glory today. This is why we had to be totally transformed - given a new heart of flesh in place of our heart of stone - so that we could become a holy dwelling place for the Spirit of God. But that is what we are!

### **Five Promises for God's People:**

4. To **Fill Us** with His Spirit - so we can **Become** who we **Are** in Christ

*“Do you not know that **you are God's temple** and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16*

This is much of the reasoning of the New Testament related to sin. How can we who died to sin continue to live in it? **That is not who we ARE** - that is who we WERE! How can we who have been united with Christ unite ourselves now with sin? That is like a dog returning to its vomit; it is like kissing a corpse. It simply doesn't fit.

So the key to living as a fully devoted follower of Christ is like what Mufassa said to Simba in that deep Darth Vader voice: ***“Remember who you are!”*** We could also say, “remember whose you are.” You have been remade. You have been transformed. You are not who you were, if you belong to Jesus. At the moment that you put your faith in Christ, the old you died, crucified with Christ and buried with him. And something new came to life with Christ, raised up with him and seated with Him now in the heavenly places. ***You are a new creation in Christ!***

Some of you had a dramatic conversion and felt that change instantly. Others are like me and it's been more gradual. It doesn't matter which story is yours. ***What matters is remembering and believing the truth and then walking in light of that truth.*** Remember who you are! You are a member of God's holy people. You have been forgiven with all of your sins washed away. More than that, you have been justified, declared righteous in Christ, dressed in the fullness of His perfection. You have been given a new heart, with new desires. You have been filled with the Holy Spirit - the very same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

One final promise:

### **Five Promises for God's People:**

5. To **Restore Us** to His Blessing



***“You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God... I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant...” Ezekiel 36:28,30***

God has chosen to bring glory to His own name by bringing blessing to us. 600 years before Jesus, God promised to act. And he did act to vindicate His own holiness. He sent Jesus to bear our sins and to rise from the dead victorious over sin and death. He did this so that He could gather a people who would serve Him wholeheartedly, not just performing empty rituals but loving Him, trusting Him and delighting in Him above all things.

For **HE is the ultimate blessing**. Yes, we will enjoy the final promised land when the earth and the heavens are remade. Yes, we will enjoy the great reunion with our loved ones in the Lord and with all believers. But above all, we will rejoice - we will be filled with an untarnished and unending happiness when we see the Lord face to face. When we see Him, when we are with Him, there will be nothing else for He will be everything.

#### **Five Promises for God's People:**

##### **5. To Restore Us to His Blessing - Ultimately, God Himself**

***“They will see his face... They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:4-5***

The fruit that will be abundant in heaven will be the fruit of the tree of life - the fruit that can only come from God's own hand. There we will drink the living water that flows directly from the throne of God. There we will walk in the light of God's glorious presence forever and there will be no more night.

And so we see that God's purpose to be glorified and His promise to bless us are one and the same. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him” (John Piper).

- He will gather us all together - from a season of being scattered out to an eternity of being united as one.
- He will wash away our sins - from the filth of our idolatry to the final perfection of holiness when our sanctification is completed and we are glorified to be like Jesus when we see Him face to face.
- God will give us a new heart - taking us from the coldness of death to the fullness of life.
- God will fill us with His Spirit - moving us from empty ritual to wholehearted devotion.
- And God will restore us to His blessing - from the curses and consequences of sin to the joys of life with Him forever and forever.

This is what Jesus gives. He gives us EVERYTHING by giving us HIMSELF. Let's pray.