

Encounter – Sunday 3rd November 2019

READING – Ezekiel 45

Discussion groups

Questions

- What questions does ch.45 raise?
- What relation does a restored land of Israel have with the Christian faith?
- The good governance in offering and sacrifice in v.8b-17 envisioned by Ezekiel for a restored Israel have what to do with followers of Christ?
- How do the worship festivals in the new holy land (v18-25) help us understand our relationship to God?

Homily – Land. Prince and festivals: life in the Messianic Kingdom

Last month we looked at chapters 38-39 and the defeat of Gog. In our last two sermons on Ezekiel, tonight and next month we will consider the closing chapters, 40-48 of Ezekiel, first with ch.45 tonight and closing in December with ch.47.

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Considering these chapters is broad brush stuff, but it is important to hold in tension the Gog narrative in 38-39 with chapters 40-48. They are the negative and positive sides of the same coin.

The negative one is Gog, who is representative of the enemies of God and His people, but the enemy will never finally triumph, and will not frustrate God's people.

The positive is that God's people will ultimately enjoy his promise – perfection in their relationship with Him and with each other in total and eternal security.

In chapter 40 Ezekiel introduces his third 'vision of God.

- The first in chapter one had been the overwhelming encounter visions;
- the second starting at 8.3 were the aerial views of Jerusalem and its atrocities caused by God's departure.

- In the third vision there is a promise of the LORDs return to a renewed temple, a home among His people – all will be righted – it is a view of the Messianic Kingdom to come.

Remember Ezekiel's audience are the exiles in Babylon – they maybe wonder if there will ever be liberation.

Will the Lord shine His light upon His people once again? ...

The promise in this wider section is that the Temple and worship that were lost in 586BC **will be restored?**

The question for us today, as Christians, is how will God restore His poeple?

- How do we reconcile or harmonize the regulations in Ezekiel with those laid down through Moses in the Pentateuch – because they are not the same.
- How do you harmonize a literal interpretation of Ezekiel's temple vision with the millennial temple of the restored Jewish nation and with the death of Christ which should have brought it to an end – it's hard to do.
- Who is the Prince – is he a Messianic figure and if so, why does he need warning against sin we find in 45.v9?
- What about the call to make a sin offering for himself in 45.22 – really does the Prince need to do that if indeed he is representative of the Messiah?

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Do you see that this passage, like much of Ezekiel is not easy to unravel, but that doesn't mean we can't.

So, rather than ask how it fits with what we know, we rather ask – what distinctive truth does the passage teach.

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We must remember this is a vision and not legislation – legislation is designed to be carried out – either by harmonizing or superseding existing law, but when the Jewish nation returns to Jerusalem it did neither of these things with the words of Ezekiel.

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So, does the vision need to be carried out in the detail it is described, in order to achieve its purpose?

One commentary put it like this... Think about Martin Luther-King's 'I have a dream' speech.

I say to you today, my friends, though, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."...

And

I have a dream today ... I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope.

This momentous speech of King's was **designed to change hearts, inspire minds and stir emotions to change.**

It was to change the way the American people, and perhaps the world viewed itself. King didn't expect that every dotted i and crossed t of the speech would need to happen in order to make his dream come forth...

And so, the vision of Ezekiel is the same – to get the hearers of his word to change their hearts about the re-ordering of their world and of their worship... **through repentance, endurance and hope.**

So, let's get a little understanding of the section in which we find ourselves tonight.

The context is Ezekiel's vision starting in chapter 40 is of a restored Israel – with a new temple, the glory of God returned and the following of regulations for sacrifice and the priesthood.

Now in chapter 45 attention is on the restored holy land **and its division**

1. **Vs 1-8a** (see *diagram*) Ezekiel sets out the allocation of tribes north and south of the central area reserved for the Levites, the priests, Jerusalem and the Temple, and the territory of the prince either side of that.

This allocation is neat, tidy and square – perfect, but not geographically realistic.

It is theological division of the land – in other words it conveys a message – of perfection and centrality.

God is perfect and He is at the centre. God's holiness is centre.

For us today this remains true – God, creator, gracious, merciful and loving Father is true; is perfect in all, and for us as followers of Jesus – He should be central.

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But is He - both in our daily lives and our worship?

Just a tithing is a statement of fact that God gets the first 10th of our money, it is also a statement that all money is Gods. So, also the centrality of the space reserved for God's home at the centre of the temple, is a symbol that the whole of the land is Gods.

In other words – ALL is God's – life, the universe and everything, but most of all His people – they belong to Him.

That should be enough to make Him centre of our lives – DAILY.

2. **8b – 17** – considers the justice and righteousness in life of believers. Previous kings had laid heavy burdens on their people – but this is not the way in the new Israel.

The king has become the prince, who rather than burden His people, instead serves His people and lives by God's law.

The prince must lead in justice as demonstrated – he is responsible for accurate weights and measures; but also in his responsibility for providing the offering for special occasions – religious festivals, new moon festivals, sabbath days – He is to make the offerings so people are right with God.

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Who are the kings today who lay the heavy burdens upon us – is it the government, our employers, our families, ourselves maybe?

And who is the prince? The one who would not demand more than we can give, who would also offer sacrifice for us?

Hold those thoughts as I just consider the last section.

3. **18-25** considers the cycles of worship in the life of believers.

- There is twice yearly purification of the temple;
- Passover so that the people may remember their redemption and what that required of God – his mighty arm outstretched to protect and preserve their ancestors;
- and then the annual Festival of Shelters – the regular tribute to YHWH who is provider and a reminder of the peoples redemption and pilgrimage.

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I have said Ezekiel vision encourages **repentance; faithful endurance; and hope** ... of a future that is unlike the past.

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So, what can we take from our reading today

1. **The Lord alone is King** – this answers why the prince seems to have muted powers in the passage. Yes, the prince has privilege, but not undiluted power for there is one greater than He.

2. It is the **Lord alone who reigns** in the temple.
3. It is **God alone who is doing a new and greater thing** – across time and space.

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Ezekiel's sacrifices seem to be focused on the concepts of **Purification – Holiness – Righteousness**

- During the festivals, sabbath days, jubilees and the like – purity is sought, is desirable, and is at the centre of the restored land and restored temple –
- And at the heart is this is God.

God is at the centre temple and it is that which points us to Jesus, and not the prince.

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Think about what Jesus fulfills as a sacrifice

1. He is the atonement for our sins – He pays the ransom
2. He pays the tribute for us, having lived the perfect life that we cannot
3. He is the one in whom we experience the blessings of the fellowship offering (through the Lord's Supper) – he stands in fellowship with us before the Father
4. He is the One who cleansed the heavenly temple as a purification offering for all, so that God may dwell forever among His people.

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The answer as is ... JESUS

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And so, think about why we come to Church?

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- In our liturgy we come apart from the world and into the Holy;
- we become exiles from the world and enter the realm of God
- It is where we can leave our earthbound focus behind.

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Ezekiel envisions something new – something new that has come to pass in the person of Jesus.

Hebrew 1.1-2 puts it like this...

1 *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,*
²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

God is above all and so therefore our worship should also be...

1. We come needing forgiveness – coming to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
2. We come giving thanks – for His death, perfect obedience, and for resurrection...

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In His sacrifice the goals of worship are ...

... Fellowship with God and one another

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So, each time we come – we worship in His might presence – knowing Jesus purifies us from all sin.

God truly is the centre...

Let him dwell at the centre every day – in our worship, and in the way we live life – may it all be honourable and bring glory to the LORD.

Amen