Message Four

God's Recovery by Life

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 34:11-31; 36:21-38; 37:1-14

I. Israel is a type of the church (1 Cor. 10:1-13); thus, in reading Ezekiel we should not merely be concerned with the history of Israel but consider the picture of the church—in particular the picture unveiled of the degraded situation in the church:

A. Because the degradation of Israel is a picture of the degradation of Christianity, what we see in this picture is applicable to today's Christianity:
   1. In their standing Christians are God's elect, but many have become rebels against God—Ezek. 2:3-4; 3:7.
   2. Instead of being a vine, they have become thistles and thorns—17:6-8; 2:6.
   3. Instead of being a wife, they have become a harlot; today's Christianity is altogether a whoredom—6:9; Rev. 17:1, 5.
   4. Among Christians what we see today is not a flock producing meat and wool for others but stinging scorpions—Ezek. 34:3; 2:6.
   5. Although some Christians may be a treasure to God, most have become dross—22:18-19.

B. In principle, the reasons for the degradation of Israel and the church are the same:
   1. The first reason for their degradation is idolatry—14:3, 5; 6:9:
      a. Anything within us that is a substitute for God or that we love more than the Lord is an idol.
      b. Whatever is more important to us than the Lord is an idol.
      c. If we do not love the Lord with the first love, that is the sign that we have some kind of idol—Rev. 2:4.
   2. Idols bring people into association with the world—Ezek. 11:12:
      a. As long as we have something within us that is a substitute for the Lord, we will be associated with the world—Rev. 2:4, 12-14.
      b. Anything that we love more than the Lord will bring us into association with the world and lead us into worldliness—1 John 2:15-17.
   3. After the people of Israel became associated with the world, they began to walk after the manners and customs of the nations—Psa. 106:35-39.

C. "Although we are in the Lord's recovery, I am concerned that some may still have an idol within them, may still be associated with the world, and in their daily living may still walk after the manner of the heathen" (*Life-study of Ezekiel,* pp. 145-146).

D. Whenever the condition of God's people does not match His righteousness, holiness, and glory, God will exercise His judgment for the purpose of recovery—Ezek. 1:4, 28; 8:2-4; 9:3; 22:17-22, 29.

II. God's recovery of His people is by life—34:11-31; 36:21-38; 37:1-14:

A. In His heavenly ministry, Christ is recovering His flock by life through His shepherding—Heb. 1:3; 13:20; Ezek. 34:11-31:

1. As a Shepherd the ascended Christ seeks out His flock, delivers His sheep from the places where they are scattered, and brings them back to their own land—vv. 12-13.
2. As our Shepherd the ascended Christ brings us back to the high mountains, back to the experience of the resurrected and ascended Christ—vv. 13-14.
3. As our Shepherd the ascended Christ brings us back to the streams, back to the Spirit of life, who flows forth from Christ in His resurrection and ascension—v. 13.
4. As our Shepherd the ascended Christ feeds us by the streams and brings us back to the good and rich pasture—vv. 13-14.
5. As our Shepherd the ascended Christ causes us to lie down and rest—v. 15.
6. As our Shepherd the ascended Christ binds up that which was broken and strengthens that which was sick—v. 16.
7. In His shepherding the ascended Christ causes us to become a source of blessing to others, that they may be supplied with Him as the showers of blessing—vv. 26-27.

B. The inward recovery by life is for the carrying out of God's economy—36:21-38:
1. The inward recovery by life is carried out by God for the sake of His holy name—vv. 21-23.
2. In the inward recovery by life, the Lord washes us with clean water—v. 25.
3. In the inward recovery by life, the Lord gives us a new heart to love Him and a new spirit to receive Him—v. 26.
4. In the inward recovery by life, the Lord puts His Spirit into our spirit and causes us to walk in His statutes and to observe His ordinances—v. 27.
5. As a result of the inward recovery by life, the desolate and waste places will become like the garden of Eden—vv. 34-36.
6. In His recovery by life, the Lord desires to increase us "with men like a flock"—vv. 37-38.

C. Ezekiel 37 reveals how God's Spirit comes into us to enliven us that we may become a corporate Body formed into an army and also built up as God's dwelling place:
1. In Ezekiel 37 the wind is the breath, and the breath is the Spirit—vv. 9, 14; John 20:22; 3:8.
2. Ezekiel 37 reveals that we were not only dead—we were also dry bones that were scattered, independent, and separate—vv. 1-2, 11-14; John 5:25.
3. The Lord comes in to rescue and recover His people through the prophesying of His word—Ezek. 37:7-8, 10.
4. Through the breathing of the Spirit, God's people become the army and the house to fulfill God's twofold purpose to express Him in His image and to deal with His enemy—vv. 10, 26-28; Gen. 1:26; 2 Thes. 2:8.

D. The issue, the result, of God's recovery by life is a holy building; this indicates that God's goal is the building—Ezek. 43:7, 10.

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