

God's Servant-King

So, you're a preacher now?" Kordell asked his old high school friend, Ayren.

The class of 1993 was in Forest Park for their 30th class reunion. Ayren hadn't been to a high school reunion since their 10th one. He was walking with the Lord by then, but things were still new.

In high school, Kordell was not a saint. He always seemed to be chasing a greater thrill and a higher high. But being around his old friend now, Ayren couldn't help but think that he was slowing down. And it wasn't just a matter of aging.

"I do feel a little burned out," said Kordell, as the two were sitting alone at one of the picnic benches near the softball game.

Kordell was twice divorced and somewhat estranged from his three young adult children. A few of his former escapades had left harmful, lingering consequences. In addition, Ayren sensed a hollowness in Kordell. Ayren kept engaging Kordell, and occasionally shared how the Lord was enriching his life.

"Yeah, but God wouldn't want me," confessed Kordell.

"He's dying to have you. Or rather, He already did!" said Ayren. "Turn your back on your old life and desires and come to God."

"The Lord will accept you. He has so much good in store for you," Ayren continued. "But most of all, God will never leave you. He will be your God forever."

1. *What things that people do could become an idol to them?*

2. *What are the most prominent idols you see in your society? What makes them so prominent?*

3. *What idols are most alluring to you? Explain your answer.*

LESSON FOCUS: Abandon your idols and serve the King.

The Reunification of God's People

Ezekiel 37:21-23, KJV

21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 37:21-23, NIV

²¹“And say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.

²²I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.

²³They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.’”

The prophecies in the last third of Ezekiel (33—48) came to the prophet after the Babylonians conquered Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This portion of Ezekiel contains messages of hope to be fulfilled when God's chosen people were restored to the promised land and they related to the Lord by a new covenant of peace (34:25; 37:26).

In 37:1-14, Ezekiel portrayed God's people as a vast army of slain soldiers, but God brought those bones to life, showing that He intended to restore His chosen people to

their homeland. Though the nation had divided into two kingdoms after Solomon, the Creator could reunite His exiled people, for He alone is the "Sovereign LORD" (vs. 21). This title for God is used 217 times in Ezekiel, while occurring only 103 times in the rest of the Old Testament. The title emphasized God's supreme authority over Israel and His faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises.

Israel's God pledged to gather the exiles and return them to their ancestral land from the foreign "nations" where they lived. Bible commentators disagree about the timing of the restoration. Some see the passage as detailing an event that has not yet occurred. Others see this restoration as Israel's return from Babylon, with the cleansing (vs. 23) provided by Jesus' blood and the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

God promised to unite His people into a single "nation" (vs. 22), flourishing on the "mountains of Israel." Rather than having the many kings they had prior to the exile, the returnees would be ruled by "one king."

When the people were previously in their homeland, they made it unclean by the way they behaved. They defiled themselves by venerating "idols" (vs. 23) and an assortment of obscene "images," as well as by other rebellious acts. Thus God, in His anger, punished His people by scattering them throughout the surrounding nations. Yet, in the future day of restoration, God would redeem His people from all the "sinful" ways they had corrupted themselves. Divine cleansing would replace "transgressions" (KJV). This purification would enable the returnees to be God's "people" and exclusively worship Him.

4. *What bold promise did God make to His exiled people?*

5. *What would the Lord do about the longstanding division between His people?*

6. *From what would the Creator "save" (Ezek. 37:23) His people?*

The Blessings of God's People Being Reunited

Ezekiel 37:24-28, KJV

24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

28 And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

Ezekiel 37:24-28, NIV

²⁴“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. ²⁵They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.

²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant.

I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.

²⁷My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. ²⁸Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.”

Along with the restoration and reunification of God's people in their homeland, the Lord declared that He would bless them by installing “My servant David” (vs.

24) as king over Israel, dwelling forever in their midst.

Unlike before, when God's people refused to heed His ordinances and keep His "decrees" (vs. 24), after their return they would carefully obey His regulations. Moreover, as the people dwelt safely in the land, they and their descendants would faithfully follow their King, who would also be "their prince forever" (vs. 25).

Although both Ezekiel and his audience would have had a very limited perspective of the fulfillment of this prophecy, we know that "David" refers to Jesus, the Messiah, an ideal Davidic figure. The everlasting "covenant of peace" (vs. 26) is another way of referring to the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34) that would endure forever because its foundation would be God's grace. Also, the Lord promised the returnees a future "sanctuary" that would remain "forever" (Ezek. 37:26). God's unending presence in the land would enable His people to "increase their numbers."

Perhaps more important than Israel's dwelling in the promised land was their relationship with God. He had chosen them to be joined to Him in love and obedience. He also wanted them to be devoted and faithful to Him. In the future day of restoration, the former exiles would truly be God's people, and the Lord would genuinely be "their God" (vs. 27). Such a relationship would be characterized by intimacy and joy, along with loyalty and integrity.

The surrounding "nations" (vs. 28) would see that the Lord had established His "sanctuary" among His people "forever," and He would "make Israel holy." Here the concept of holiness, or sanctification, is essentially the same as righteousness. They would live in harmony with the character of God.

7. *What sort of life did God have in store for His people?*

8. *In what ways would the Lord reestablish His people in their homeland?*

9. *How would the people know that He was with them?*

Service to Our King

Serving our divine King is not a part-time job. Such service should be full time, for at any time of the day King Jesus may ask us to perform a service for Him or for others, and with a glad heart we must comply if we are to live a healthy spiritual life. The fact that there are influences all about us seeking to draw our attention away from our godly duties should clearly tell us how critical it is to be faithfully in step with our Lord and His guidance.

The pursuit of idols, however, propels us away from our service to Him. It absorbs our hearts and our minds so that we neglect our Christian obligations and forget the presence of our Lord. These idols might be as obvious as worshiping other gods or dedicating our entire lives to a political figure, or as subtle as being obsessed with our careers or being overly preoccupied with a hobby. Whatever stands between Christ and us is an idol and must be abandoned.

As with the Jews in Ezekiel's day, the Lord still promises to abide with us and to restore us to His good graces if we humble ourselves before Him and once more dedicate our lives to His service. Jesus Himself teaches us what service means and why it is important to our heavenly Father: "Whoever serves me must follow me," said Jesus, "and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me" (John 12:26). Among the greatest blessings is to be honored by almighty God, and such honor comes when we faithfully serve His Son, Christ Jesus.

10. *Who is God to you, and why does He, and not any idol, deserve your devotion?*

11. *Why do you regard it an honor and a privilege to serve such an exalted monarch as our Lord Jesus?*

12. *In what ways does God presently call you to serve Christ?*

Serve Christ Only

While the exiled Jews dwelled in foreign lands, they yearned for deliverance from their hardships and a return to their homeland. The prophet Ezekiel then conveyed the words of their God, who promised to make them one nation again in Israel, where they would denounce idols and serve Him only. That call to faithfulness God speaks to us today—to abandon any idols that have entered our hearts and minds and to fulfill the duties that He has assigned us.

► *We all have some idols we need to reject so we can serve Christ. Describe here how you can resist the lure of idols in order to serve Christ single-heartedly this week.*

KEY VERSE

My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. —Ezekiel 37:27, KJV

“My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.” —Ezekiel 37:27, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 19 through June 25

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Jeremiah 31:1-9—Love with an Everlasting Love.
- Tues.** Jeremiah 31:27-34—A New Covenant.
- Wed.** 2 Corinthians 5:1-10—We Walk by Faith.
- Thurs.** 2 Corinthians 5:11-21—Renewed in Christ.
- Fri.** Psalm 86—God Abounds in Steadfast Love.
- Sat.** 1 Corinthians 13—Love Is the Greatest.
- Sun.** Zephaniah 3:14-20—The Lord Is in Your Midst.