

Christ Church Clifton Sermon Notes & Questions



Series: Spring 2017
Passage: Ezekiel 11:14-25 The Promise
Preacher: Janet Lee **Date of Sermon:** March 19th 2017

Last August went to Orkney Isles for a day trip visited these 2 old Nissan huts left over from WW2, inside Italian prisoners of war had decorated their own chapel, beautiful inside, far from home in captivity, What is it like to be in exile? to live far from home, far from familiar surroundings? More refugees now than at any time in history, thinking today of Ezekiel's' prophecy in chap 11, Ezekiel a young prophet,(his name means God strengthens or God is strong) a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, exiled along with others from Israel to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin, living by R Chebar canal, far to the East of Jerusalem, first called to be a prophet in 5th year of captivity he was already a priest son of Buzi the priest, and now a prophet, he wrote in Babylon but about Gods divine judgment on Judah and Jerusalem for chap 1-24, then prophecies on surrounding nations then Israel restored chap 33-39, finally Israel in future, kingdom New temple,

Chap 8-11, Ezekiel had a temple vision carried by the Spirit from river bank near Babylon to temple of Jerusalem, date Sept 592BC.(prophecy about 5 years before actual fall of Jerusalem) In midst chapter, as glory of God slowly leaving the temple and departing coming judgment on Jerusalem for their sin and worship of idols there is a little ray of hope, a promise of return for exiles see chap 11. Today's passage is a message for hope for those in exile far away,

1. A promise of sanctuary in exile, v16
2. A promise of giving back of the land v17
3. A promise of an undivided heart, v20

A promise of sanctuary v16

¹⁶ *Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone."*

Those left behind in Jerusalem, not taken away were boasting "you exiles are far from the Lord this is our land, you are second class Jews, they were sneering saying God is only here in Judah with us not with you far away. Because you are on foreign soil you are unclean, God forsaken" Look at comfort of v16, I sent them I scattered them yet I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone. God says you are not cast off, forgotten I am still there, your protection your strength, I'll make up to you for lack of temple and sacrifices, God has and will provide for them even in exile. Meditate on sanctuary, God is our sanctuary, refuge from persecution or pursuit or a nature reserve, place of protection, in church architecture part of the church around the altar, East end, holy of holies, the real sanctuary is God himself not a place. do you need a sanctuary? Place of safety in your life? Rest in God, lean into him, seek him,

When I lived in Western Kenya after uni, miles from home cut off from church, friends family, no English people, for over 30 miles all around, no phones just weekly airmails. I had to rely totally on God, everything was stripped away from my life I grew more than than before sustained by Bible study and prayer, God was my sanctuary in 2 year exile.

A promise of giving back the land v17

¹⁷ *Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again."*

God is sovereign, little phrase this is what the Sovereign Lord says. He will gather, collect together, opposite of scattering, bringing together again. Promise of the land of Israel again, land is precious it was promised to Moses Promised Land precious, your desert experiences in wilderness won't last for ever, Hope for those in exile, God has heard and will deliver on his promises But exile lasted 70 years so it was actually next generations which returned. This prophecy has various fulfilments, Babylonian

exile ended in 538BC, after WW2, state of Israel founded in 1947, amazing giving back of land to the Jews God keeps his promises- remember. God gathers and He restores, mediate on that. Believe God's prophecies and his promises they will be fulfilled History and experience tells us. I am looking forward to a restored heaven and earth, imagine a restored Bristol!

A promise of an undivided heart and a new spirit v19

¹⁸ *'They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. ¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰ Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. ²¹ But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done, declares the Sovereign Lord.'*

A double promise undivided heart and a new spirit, When Israelites return from exile, God himself will give them an undivided heart (not 2 kingdoms Israel and Judah but one), and a new spirit within them. There is another lovely promise in 20b. They will be my people, I will be their God. New heart metaphor seen in Saul 1Sam 10, in Jeremiah and later in Ezekiel 36, ¹⁹ ***I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.*** Consequence of this ²⁰ *Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws* God will bless them, a radical heart transplant will take place, they'll love to follow his law to obey him, the new spirit, gift of Holy Spirit, changes us completely. My experience as my faith has grown God has changed my heart I am much more careful nowadays about following his laws, obeying laws of the land, not speeding parking correctly, but also small things not lying not gossiping, How can we have this undivided heart? A soft fleshy heart not as hard stony heart? this new spirit?

Note the word remove, twice in v18,19 remove, remove vile images and idols in v18 and remove heart of stone, we must put away repent our sins on the outside, God will remove put away our hard hearts and replace them with softer hearts of flesh, a new covenant relationship with them. What are the vile images and idols God detests in your life? Remove them.. Be willing to repent, take steps to show your repentance, recognise and repent of our sins. Note consequences of not repenting or turning away from evil, see v 21, they will be judged. ²¹ *But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done* Jesus preached about 2 ways, narrow and wide, 2 destinations heaven hell, obey God or disobey God, no halfway house, Serve God or mammon, cannot have divided heart divided loyalties.

So 3 promises to hold onto, a promise of sanctuary, a promise of the land restored and given back, and a promise of a new undivided heart and Spirit,

At end of passage a very sad picture in vision the glory of the Lord leaves Jerusalem since chap 8 slowly leaving inner temple, to threshold, to East gate now outside to Mount of Olives (always east –that is where exiles were). Step by step, a picture of God waiting hovering will they repent in time before his presence leaves? How awful, a picture of Gods glory leaving the temple, the city of Jerusalem , but hovering standing by in case of repentance, God is leaving Jerusalem, (actually Fall was 586/587 BC) finally vision ends and Ezekiel finds himself back amongst people in exile in Babylon and tells them everything.

So what is the point of Ezekiel's vision over 2500 years ago to us today?

A promise of sanctuary in exile, wherever you are God is there, in exile a far off land (Italian chapel in Orkney) even if lose your building/temple, captured by foreigners far from home God is there –hold on. Find rest, protection in Him.

A promise of land restored, there is hope for the future, our desert experiences won't last forever, God will gather us together again, look to future restoration second coming new heaven and Earth, God fulfils his promises.

A promise of a new heart and spirit, repent and receive the Spirit of God ask for a softer heart a new spirit,

Ezekiel says there is hope, in middle of disaster and forthcoming judgment there is hope God will restore a remnant of his people. There is a future, God is sovereign, so repent and prepare yourselves before God to be our God wherever we end up living in this world.

Questions for study:

Optional starter Have you any experience of being in exile? Cut off from church? From other Christians? What was it like? What sustained you ? Have you been to the Italian chapel on Orkney?

1. Read Ezekiel 11:14-25, what is the context for this passage? (see chp 8-11, temple vision in Jerusalem)
2. Identify the 3 promises in this passage. V16,17 and 19,20.
3. See v14-16, what were the Jews still left in Jerusalem sneering about to those in exile already? What was God's response?
4. What does the image of sanctuary mean for you? How can God himself be our sanctuary wherever we are living?
5. God promises to give back the land,v17 how was this fulfilled, in short, medium and even long term? Note Prophecy can have more than one fulfilment over time.
6. Read v18-20, what does God promise to do and what should the people do?
7. Share how have you seen hearts change and a new spirit in people.
8. What does an undivided heart mean to you?
9. There is a warning and a consequence here for the people. What would the present day equivalent be of removing vile idols and detestable images look like? And what is the consequence of disobedience, v21?
10. (If time) read chapters 9-11 and trace the departing movement Eastwards of the glory of God from temple, to Mount of Olives. What does it symbolise ?