

The Cure for Separation Anxiety

Ezekiel Overview

(preached Pine Grove 9/27/15; Sunday PM)

Introduction

Separation anxiety is a real struggle for parents who have to drop their toddlers off in a nursery or at a pre-school.

Our own John Andrew has been experiencing some of this as 2 and now 3 year old.

Parenting tips on how to deal with a screaming child vary.

And what works for you and your child may be different than the next parent.

When our girls were going through it as toddlers, we read and asked for advice from more experienced parents...

And the suggestions were generally the same, and we found success with some and failure with others..

But the top 3 suggestions were this...

#1) prepare your child for the separation that is coming...

#2) don't make it a long drawn out exit..

and #3) reassure your child that you will be back to pick them up...

Overall, all of those strategies were helpful and there are plenty of others...

But I thought that the last one was really effective for us..

And that was the calm reassurance that you give to your child that you will be back...

Now, they may be screaming when you tell them that, but we found it helpful to just remind them that the separation would only be for a while...

And that Mommy or Daddy would be back to get them..

When you think about that from a child's limited perspective, you see how important that is..

Here you are dropping your kid off possibly with a stranger to them....

They are now in a completely new environment...

And the last thing your child sees is you walking away...

The person that brings them comfort around strangers and in new environments is now running out the door...

That is enough to make me cry....

Now, your child may not understand what it means when you say you are coming back, but once you do return, they begin to understand ..

And the separation anxiety goes away as quickly as it showed up...

Tonight, we are going to explore the book of Ezekiel in our overview of the Bible series..

And I have entitled this big picture look at Ezekiel...

“The Cure for Separation Anxiety”

Because a major focus of the book of Ezekiel is that God has not abandoned Israel forever...

Now, it is going to appear like that to Israel...

Because like that 2 year old child, Israel is going to be taken to a new environment where they will be surrounded by strangers..

And the thought they may be tempted to have is that God has abandoned them forever...

Maybe he isn't ever coming back to get them from the Babylonian nursery....

Maybe God is finished with them...

Maybe Israel has become the unruly teenager who has been shipped off to boarding school...

Never to return to God.

Yet, the book of Ezekiel is going to be God telling Israel....

"I am going to come back and get you."

"You will not be in Babylon forever."

However, you have to wait until the end to get to part...

Because the first section of Ezekiel copies the pattern of the rest of the prophets...

And that is the idea of God's judgment...

You can see from the outline that chapters 1-32 are more warnings and reminders of judgment that Ezekiel delivered to Israel and to the nations...

And we can even learn from the layout of Ezekiel that God takes sin seriously...

Yes, He will not let Israel or any of His people fall beyond recovery...

There is day of redemption ahead...

There is a time of restoration coming...

But that doesn't give Israel or us the excuse to live in sin...

We have the hope of heaven but that is not a license to live an unholy life...

God will rescue His people, but they must remember why they got in this situation...

And that is because they sinned against the Lord.

For the Christian in here today...

Your sins are forgiven. The eternal consequences of sin do not hang over your head any longer.

You are waiting for heaven...

But that doesn't mean that you will escape the short-term consequences of sin...

Though the long-term consequences of sin are banished for the believer at the cross, the short term effects of sin are still very much a reality.

Though God will never abandon Israel, that doesn't mean that He won't deal with them harshly in the short term...

And the same is true for all of us as well.

The sting of death may be gone for the Christian, but the sting of sin still hurts..

And I think we see that in the writings of the prophets..

Yes, there is hope of a return and restoration of God's people, but there is also the reality of judgment for their sin now.

Before we jump into our outline, let me bring ourselves back into the grand layout of the OT..

You can see from the slide that Ezekiel writes toward the end of our chart..

Most likely, he wrote from about 593 BC until 573 BC, which is a period of around 20 years...

If you reach into your memory banks, Ezekiel is writing to the southern kingdom of Israel known as Judah..

Israel had split into two kingdoms in 931 BC.

Up until that point, Israel had been a united kingdom under a series of kings, beginning with Saul around 1100 BC..

Followed by David and then Solomon...

Before Saul, as we trace our way back in time, Israel had been ruled by judges and before that, Israel was led by Moses and then Joshua.

Before that, Israel was simply a nation of about 70 people that all began with Abraham way back in Genesis 12..

Now, when the nation split into two kingdom in 931 BC...

Israel was the name of the northern kingdom and Judah the name of the southern kingdom....

And so Ezekiel is a prophet to the southern kingdom, which is in exile....

And here is what I mean by exile...

And again this is all review but I hope it helps us kind of set the geography and history of the day...

And therefore, increases our understanding of the Bible..

And so here is map of this region on this slide...

Once Israel split into two kingdoms, a natural thing occurred, it became weaker as a nation...

Now, you must understand that Israel has always been surrounded by enemies...

It was no different in that day...

The Assyrians were a great power in the region, and so after the split, the Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom which was called Israel and destroyed them...

People of the northern kingdom were carried off into exile in 722 BC...

Now, in that attack, God did not allow the southern kingdom of to fall along with Israel...

And so, Judah survived.

Now, Assyria began to fall from her prominence,
and Babylon began to rise..

And so in the early 600s BC, the Babylonians
attacked the Assyrians..

And a strange thing happened...

The Egyptians head out to help the Assyrians,
which was unusual because the Assyrians and
Egyptians were always enemies..

Anyway on their way to help the Assyrians, Judah
sends out her army to stop the Egyptians..

Because #1 - they would love to the Assyrians fall.

They had always been a thorn in their side..

But #2, we also know that as the Babylonians were
rising to power, evil king Hezekiah of Judah was
busy making friends with them...

And so the Assyrians fell to the Babylonians, and
Judah thought all is well..

The Babylonians love us, so we will be fine..

But guess what?

The dog you fed yesterday may bite your hand today...

And that is exactly what happened...

The Babylonians came to Judah and wanted some more taxes from them around 605 BC, and though the king of Judah went along for a while...

He eventually resisted and tried to rebel, but Judah was no match for the Babylonians...

And the nation began to fall in stages...

The first group of Jews were taken captive back to Babylon in 597 BC.

It was a group of roughly 10,000 Jews and in that group was the prophet and priest named Ezekiel...

And when he gets to Babylon, he is settled in an area along a river named Chebar in a town known as Tel-Abib...(you can see it on the slide here)

And it is from this town where God inspires Ezekiel to write his prophecy that we are going to look at tonight...

So, let's take a quick look at some of the book tonight...

And again, this a quick flyover...

I. Ruin for Jerusalem/Judah (1-24)

A. The Prophet's Call (1-3)

The opening chapter of Ezekiel contains some of the most symbolic images in the entire OT...

Ezekiel and the fiery wheel is what it is most often called...

And it is simply a picture of God's glory on display as comes to call Ezekiel to act as his mouthpiece to Israel and the nations...

You find similar language and imagery in the book of Revelation and even in other parts of Ezekiel...

What are we to make of all of this?

God is glorious is his holiness, in his justice, in his righteousness..

So much so that it is beyond the limits of human language to even describe accurately at times...

Much has been written and speculated about this opening chapter as men have tried to describe God's glory through the words of Ezekiel...

Often times, we get distracted by the details and miss what we are seeing here..

What are we seeing in chapter 1 in the fiery wheel?

We are seeing exactly what Ezekiel said we were seeing at the end of verse 28...

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

There is only one response to seeing the glory of God...

A face plant...

John did it..

Isaiah did it.

Ezekiel did it, and so did many others in the Bible.

And then we get the very clear purpose of why God called Ezekiel in chapter 2...

I just want to read this because this is such a good description of what does through the prophets in the OT...

The purpose of the God's spokesmen is seen so clearly here...

2 Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" 2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. 3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 I am sending you to them who are [a]stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord [b]God.' 5 As for them, whether they listen or [c]not—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. 7 But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or [d]not, for they are rebellious.

And then we find some symbolic language in verses 8-10 but we need to see the importance of this as well..

8 "Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that

rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.” 9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a [e]scroll was in it. 10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.

And in chapter 3, Ezekiel consumes the scroll..

And the point of this scene is to point to importance of God’s messengers being filled with God’s Word..

I cannot stress that enough in my ministry..

There is no power in a pastor or a Sunday School teacher when they step away from the Scriptures..

The power of ministry is found in the Word of God...

That’s why God’s people need to be filled with the Word...

I cannot deliver to you what I have not digested myself...

Men who go on the internet and steal a sermon are not pastors or preachers...

Because God’s Word has never penetrated their heart before they give it God’s people...

And men who deliver sermons from a source other than God's Word are not pastors or preachers..

Because they are relying on their own cleverness or oral abilities to feed God's people...

People in the pews don't need to be filled with man's wisdom or thoughts or agendas, they need a steady diet of the Word of God.

Ezekiel would only be effective as God's spokesman if he internalized God's Word to his heart and life first.

You can't preach what you don't have...

And you can't deliver God's Word if you aren't building your message from it.

So, Ezekiel has God's Word but he must deliver it to an unreceptive audience..

We saw that in chapter 2 but God reminds Ezekiel of that again in chapter 3...

Look at verses 7 of chapter 3...

7 yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is [g]stubborn

and obstinate. 8 Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.

Now, you know where the phrase “hard headed” comes from..

The people were hard headed, so God made Ezekiel equally hard headed...

It is hard to go to a stiff-necked people, but that is the job to which Ezekiel is called...

And it is the job to which we are all called as well..

As the church, we take the gospel message into the world to a stubborn people as well...

And though we must be hard-headed in our determination to deliver that message, we still deliver it in love to the people.

It is ok to be hard headed, but don't be hard hearted to the world...

Share the truth in love..

So, Ezekiel is off to deliver his message...

Then we come to chapter 4, which is...

B. *The Nation's Fall (4-24)*

And we aren't going to spend a lot of time in what he says to Israel or the nations...

We looked at the content of the messages in Isaiah and Jeremiah..

Israel is being carried off to a foreign land because of her sin...

Jerusalem is set to be destroyed...

One thing that is worth noting in this opening section is found in chapter 10...

In verse 18, we read this....

18 Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.

In the same way that God had entered into the tabernacle and dwelt among His people, here God departs from the temple...

Before the Babylonians come in to destroy it.

And then the rest of this first section is a warning and of the coming judgment upon Judah...

And then in chapter 24, God gives the parable of the boiling pot where the nation is the meat that is thrown into the pot and cooked to symbolize the destruction that is coming to them...

And then let me read this in Ezekiel 24:14...

14 I, the Lord, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds [j]I will judge you," declares the Lord God."

As a kid, you always hold out hope that Dad or Mom will change their mind about something...

Up to point that they actually walk out of the store and get in the car and actually drive away, you think there is still hope that you might get that toy...

God is gracious and slow to anger, but we must never make the mistake of thinking that judgment will never come to us...

People in their sin do reach a point of no return with the Lord.

And God has to act because He keeps His word.

And he told Israel all throughout the years this simply phrase...

Obey and be blessed.

Disobey and be cursed.

And the disobedience has led to the curse of judgment and God is going to act with sorrow or regret...

We then move to the second outline point in chapter 25, which describes the...

II. Ruin for the Nations (25-32)

We are not going to spend time here because we saw prophecies and judgments against Gentile nations in Isaiah and Jeremiah....

And the point of including these prophecies against the other nations is to show that God did not fall when Israel fell...

Many of the nation may have assumed that Israel's God was not that powerful since He could not even keep them from being destroyed...

Yet, these nations were mistaken...

God was not just the God of Israel, he was their God as well even if they had not acknowledged him as God...

And he was going to judge their sin as well...

God had told Abraham that he would bless those that blessed Israel and curse those that cursed Israel...

And this section of Ezekiel and the other prophets who speak of judgment on the nations is simply a fulfillment of that original promise to Abraham..

That brings us to the final section and the happy ending of sorts, which I have entitled...

III. Return for Israel (33-48)

A. The Role of the Watchman (33)

This final section begins with an interesting illustration of just who Ezekiel was...

He along with the other prophets acted as watchmen for the people like men who would be stationed on a city wall to spot the enemy coming...

If he did his job and warned the people that trouble was coming, he was not responsible for what happened to them; he simply did his job.

If on the other hand, he fell asleep or neglected his responsibility, he was held responsible for any damage done to the people...

Let's look at Ezekiel 33:7....

7 “Now as for you, son of man, I have [b]appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a [c]message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his

iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. 9 But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.

In some way, this responsibility falls to the church in this age...

As we are called to warn people of the wrath to come if they do repent and trust in Christ to save them.

We become watchmen because we know from the Scriptures that trouble is headed their way.

God had told the prophets that Judah and Jerusalem were going to fall...

And there responsibility was to carry that message to the people.

And look this is the ultimate good news/bad news mission.

The bad news is that the city and nation will fall, but the good news is that there is still time to turn from your evil way and obey the Lord.

Nothing has changed today.

The bad news is that your sin will kill you not once but twice.

Sin will lead to your physical death, but it will also lead to your spiritual death.

The good news (the gospel) is that today is a day to turn from your sin and

Then in verses 21 of chapter 33, word comes to Ezekiel and the exiles that Jerusalem has indeed fallen to the Babylonians.

The year was 586, and the destruction was widespread and horrible.

And with that, God's judgment has fallen upon Israel because of her continual disobedience...

Yet, like the mom who assures her child that she will be back to get him from the nursery in a little while...

The tone of the the entire book changes in chapter 34 with the promise of restoration...

B. The Promise of Restoration (34-48)

This is one of my favorite parts of the entire Bible and there is so much to be learned from these verses...

We don't have time to get into all the truths contained in these chapters, but know this....

So of these truth still await fulfillment for the nation of Israel...

Though some came true when they returned to the land after exile...

Others speak of a far distant day that is still future to us...

Here are the highlights of these chapters...

In chapter 34, Ezekiel speaks of a day when Israel will find good leadership...

When they won't be led by false shepherds who lead them astray...

Then in chapter 35, we see God's promise of restoring the land.

The trees of the mountains will bear fruit and the land will break forth in bloom...

Then in chapter 36, we see the promise of a new covenant...

That God will make with His people...

Let's look at this beginning in Ez 36:22...

22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. 23 I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

This is the key to understanding God's relationship with Israel...

Though Israel benefits from God's goodness to them, it is not because they are worthy of his mercy.

God's faithfulness to them is not meant to bring Israel glory, it is meant to bring God glory by showing His unmatched loyalty...

Israel was established to be a witness to the world of the goodness of their God, but they failed miserably...

However, God will not allow His name to be tarnished by their failures and sin...

So, he is going to restore them from their devastation to show how great He truly is.

And then we see a great focus of this restoration..

When God restores them, it will not be just another opportunity for them to fall back into sin...

You see, Israel always had a problem...

Even though they knew the true God and had His law, they were never able to keep it.

The law only caused them to sin all the more.

And they became a people who worshipped God on the outside but broke his laws all day in their hearts....

Therefore, when God promises to fully restore Israel, he also promises to give them something that will allow them to keep his laws...

Look back down at verse 24 of Ez 36...

24 For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you,

and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

And we know this speaks of a far future day from Ezekiel's perspective because the Holy Spirit only comes to indwell people after Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

And then the Spirit only indwells those who believe upon Christ to be saved...

That is why Israel even today is without the Spirit...

They have rejected their Messiah..

And no Messiah equals no Spirit...

And guess what you see in Jews today?

People who are trying to please God by keeping his law...

Who are trying to please God on the outside...

People who are trying to please God with their works..

Now, obviously, the Spirit doesn't keep us perfectly sinless...

But He enables us to obey God in a way that wasn't even close to possible before we had the Spirit...

When we as Christians step back and consider that we are indwell by the Spirit, it should be really humbling...

All those years, Israel needed a new heart and a Spirit to keep the law...

And we now have those as God's people in the new covenant that came through Jesus' death and resurrection...

Let me finish this final section of Ezekiel up real quick..

Another promise of restoration was that God was going to bring Israel back and then establish them in the land like never before...

WE see that in chapter 37....

And then we read of the Gog and Magog invasion of chapters 38-39...

Books have been written about this invasion that will come upon ISrael...

I believe this speaks of a future invasion that we still haven't seen today...

I think this invasion will be a lead in to the 7 year tribulation in Revelation...

I won't get into all that tonight, but just know that a future restoration does not mean that Israel will not have trouble...

It just means that trouble will help them see that God is the only One who will be able to deliver them in that day...

Then the final section is a promise of a restored temple and temple worship...

There will be a future temple in the land...

The NT even speaks of a temple in Jerusalem that was still future in their day...

Jesus speaks of a future temple.

WE are going to see that in Mark in a few weeks...

And then we also see that there will also be a temple in the 1,000 year reign of Christ...

Again, time limits what can be said about all this now, but we will be examine these issues on Sunday mornings in Mark very soon...

To sum it up, the promises that Ezekiel gives to Israel in chapters 33-48 are essentially promises that Israel will eventually be all that God had designed them to be...

They will be a nation...

They will be able to obey God..

They will only trust in God to save them.

They will be able to worship God rightly..

As I think through that, guess what God's promises are to us as believer?

We will one day be all that God designed us to be when he originally created man in his own image.

We weren't designed to be fallen creatures who sinned and battled our flesh because of Adam's fall.

We were designed to be bearers of God's image who ruled and reigned over His creation as we managed it for God's glory.

That's an incredible promise.

Conclusion

God did not make and then abandon us to the nursery and walk away never to return...

Just as he promised Israel in the book of Ezekiel that they would eventually be the nation He called them to be...

God promises to eventually return and make us the people that we were meant to be...

In some ways, this world is the source of our separation anxiety....

But don't live in fear.....

Our Father is coming back to get us....

Let us pray...