



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 17 Issue 7

February 18, 2018

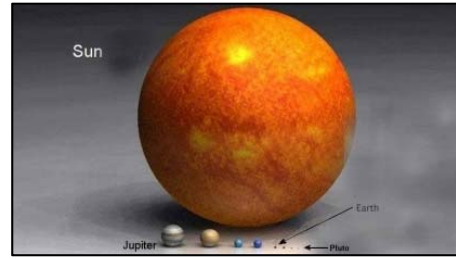
A Pilgrim Mind, Part 5

Our Importance to God

When you look at creation, how vast it is and yet how small man is, we really are left to wonder:

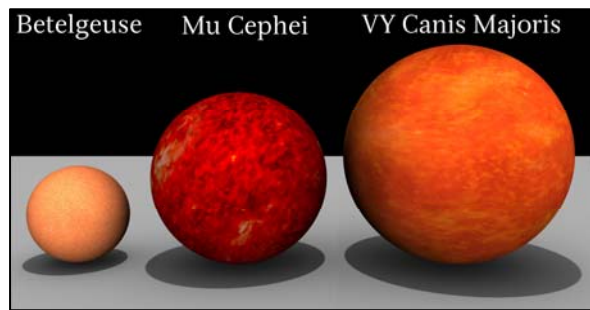
Psalms 8:4a, "What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him?..."

Once again, consider the place of man in the universe. Our galaxy which has more than a trillion planets/stars is but one of an estimated 100 billion galaxies. And in these galaxies are stars and planets which dwarf not just the earth, but also the sun! For example, the Pistol Star found in the Milky Way is 186 million miles in diameter; if it were in our solar system, it would fill everything within the orbit of Earth!

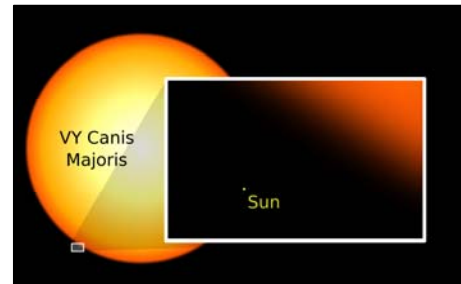


The first is a picture of the planets of our solar system next to the sun- which is massive. 960,000 earths could fit inside the sun! The second picture is of some of the largest stars that we know of in the universe. Notice the first one, Betelgeuse. This star is twice the size of the earth's orbit around the sun! In fact, 262 trillion earths would fit inside Betelgeuse.

Then there is Mu Cephei. 2.7 quadrillion earths would fit inside it. Let's put this into perspective. A million seconds is twelve days. A billion seconds is thirty-two years. A trillion seconds is 31,709 years. But a quadrillion seconds is 30,800,000 years! With that in mind, again consider: 2.7 quadrillion earths would fit inside Mu Cephei! The largest star pictured is that of Canis Majoris. Its size is incomprehensible. Seven quadrillion earth's would fit inside of it!



Finally, consider the third picture which is of the sun as it is pictured next to Canis Majoris! Canis Majoris is so large that if the sun were placed beside it, you could not see the sun! And yet- and this is the point- these stars and planets (everything you know, everything you see) are nothing in comparison to God! Truly, in the words of...



Psalms 8:4a, "What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him?..."

Yet get this: Of all of creation, that which holds a special place in the heart of God is you, me, God's people (Psalms 33:12)!

All of this brings me to the question of the hour: As God's delight is in you and me, will you trust God for your future? Will you by faith embrace the truth that God has created and saved you for a purpose that goes beyond this present age (cf. Proverbs 16:4a; 2 Timothy 1:9)? In this regard, I love the words of Christ to Peter:

John 13:7, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you

shall understand hereafter.”

God’s purpose and plan goes beyond our present life and, in fact, centers on the life that we shall enjoy for eternity with God! All that God has and is doing has this end in mind -- which means that while today we may NOT understand what Christ is doing; the day will come when we will!

That in part was Ezekiel’s purpose in prefacing our passage with seven truths to frame our thinking in the face of trial and difficulty. With these truths (you have them before you in your notes), God transitioned to our section which is comprised of three sets of two exhortations explaining the reason behind the exile -- and so the tragedies and difficulties of life. Last week we saw the first set. Why the difficulties and trials?

1. Vindication: That all may Know that God is the Sovereign Lord of Creation, v. 21.
2. Instruction: That God’s People Might Know that they are Ever and Always Precious to the Lord, vv. 21b-22.

We pick it up with a third stated reason behind the trials and difficulties of life: An explanation as to the pilgrim nature of Christianity, Ezekiel 39:21-29.

- Vindication: That all may Know that God is the Sovereign Lord of Creation, v. 21.
- Instruction: That God’s People Might Know that they are Ever and Always Precious to the Lord, vv. 21b-22. Vindication: That all may Know that God is Just, vv. 23-24.

Ezekiel 39:23-24, “And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.”

Before we address this passage, there are three ancillary points which we must address. First, what the Bible means when it says that God is just (Nehemiah. 9:13; Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 John 1:9)

Deuteronomy 39:23a, “And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile

Seven Important Truths that Frame the Pilgrim Mind

1. Gog and Magog- the present age in which we live which is hostile to God- are in God’s Sovereign Control, Ezekiel 38:1-8.
2. Gog and Magog are Culpable before God for its Sin, Ezekiel 38:10-13.
3. The Passion of Gog is to Oppose God’s People, Ezekiel 38:14-16- which means this world is NOT a friend of grace and so God’s people in Babylon ought not to get too cozy with the nation!
4. When the Culmination of the Desires of Gog and Magog are Brought to a Climatic Point in Time, God will Bring about Severe Judgment upon this Earth, Ezekiel 38:17-22.
5. God will Make the Passion of the World- which is to attack and so destroy God’s people- its Undoing, Ezekiel 39:1-8.
6. The Net-Result of all Worldly Opposition against God’s People will be for the Benefit of God’s People, Ezekiel 39:9-10.
7. The End of this World Involves a Curse, Grief and Woe that Defies Imagination,

for their iniquity...”

When we speak of justice, we presuppose a standard which in jurisprudence is the established law which governs a land. In the west, that standard can be traced back to the word of God! In this regard, when we speak of the justness of God, what possible standard could God be measured by? Answer... Himself!

Accordingly, when the Bible says that God is just, it means that God’s actions are in perfect agreement with His nature! In other words, to say that God is just is to say that He always is consistent with His character. That means:

- God cannot show partiality (Galatians 2:16).
- God could never be a respecter of persons (Romans 2:12-16).
- God could never inflict hardship upon a person for the sake of pleasure (Ezekiel 33:11).

And so what a man receives from the Lord in this life is always deserved, which brings us to that which man deserves.

Ezekiel 39:23, “And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity...”

When God created the world, He entered into a relationship with man which would be definitive for all eternity:

Genesis 2:16-17: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.’”

This established a universal law that has and will continue to govern man’s relationship with God forever: Man’s relationship with God is always on a legal basis. If he obeys the standard established by God, he *must* live forever. If he violates that standard, he *must* die! Paul repeated this law when he wrote in Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death...” Truly, if you sin, the payment *must* be death! That is justice.

And that, by way of note, this why so many words associated with redemption are legal like the words *Covenant, Expiation, Propitiation, Justification, Forgiveness, and Justice*. Now all of this is NOT to say that God cannot nor has He established special relationships with certain men or groups of men which likewise are based on a standard. For truly, He has. Consider the Old Testament Theocracy. The Old Testament nation of Israel was established on the basis of national fidelity to God and His word. If the nation rebelled, God would hold them to a specific standard. And what was that standard?

Leviticus 26:14-16a, 32-33, “But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, I,

in turn, will do this to you... 32 And I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it. You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.”

That is exactly what God did in 586 BC! God’s people went into exile because as a nation, they did NOT uphold responsibilities placed on them when the Nation was established. Now thinking of our relationship with God in Christ, our standing is NOT based on our actions, but the actions of Christ. Yet don’t miss it! When it comes to disobedience, while our *BEING* is NO LONGER up for grabs when we sin, nevertheless our WELLBEING is (that is, the health of our walk with Christ). Accordingly, as Christians we know that while our sin could NEVER cost us our salvation, it CAN and oft-times WILL cost us blessing. Speaking to David in his rebuke, Nathan/God told the monarch this:

2 Samuel 12:8, “I also gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!”

David’s sin cost him this future blessing-- and so much more, like joy, which is why in his repentance David prayed this way:

Psalms 51:12a, “Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation...”

So while the relationship we have with God today will never and could never be broken, nevertheless there are facets of our walk with God that remain conditional which once again is why we can talk about leanness of soul.

While it is sometimes more and sometimes less, nevertheless at all times the world is watching.

Ezekiel 39:23a, “And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity...”

There is no question... the world is watching us! One of the many criticisms that Paul raised against his countrymen was that, Romans 2:24, “...the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you...”. Family of God, do you understand? No matter where we go or where we are, we are always a witness of the Lord! In fact, Paul gets even stronger in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:20, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ...”

What is an ambassador? An ambassador is MORE than a representative. An ambassador assumes the position of the one who appointed him. And so, an ambassador of the US is nothing less than the US to the country in which they serve. That is why their home and office is US soil!

And so it is with us in Christ. Understand that through salvation we are far more than a representative of our Lord; God intended us to be Christ to the nations! Speaking to Ananias concerning the newly converted Paul said this:

Acts 9:15, "But the Lord said to him [Ananias], "Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."

All that Paul did, he did, NOT simply as a representative of Christ, BUT as Christ Himself, he bore His name at all times to the Gentiles! In fact, that is what is behind the term Christian. It means "little Christ." This is why when God's people went into exile, that which ultimately was up for grabs was NOT their comfort or well-being, BUT the honor and glory of God!

Ezekiel 36:20, "When they came to the nations where they went, they [God's people] profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.'"

From all of this you must see that the world is watching us! What we do therefore is a commentary to the world concerning God! His honor and glory is attached to us! And yet, our audience is even bigger than that. If it isn't the world of man before whom God's character is proclaimed through us, it is CREATION which is why in the Bible God frequently calls upon creation as His witness in His dealings with man (cf. Micah 6:1-2; Ezekiel 6:2-3).

And if it isn't creation, it is THE ANGELIC HOSTS, both fallen and unfallen, who are watching.

Job 1:8a, "And the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job?'..."

The question was rhetorical, because Satan most definitely had seen him and at times was watching him. Do you understand? Satan and his demons are watching us! And yet, it is NOT just the fallen angels. Consider what Paul said concerning the unfallen angels:

Ephesians 3:10a, "...the manifold wisdom of God [is] made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*."

Get this! Unfallen angels also are watching us and so learning about God!

All of this brings us to the Ezekiel 39. Why the exile? Why is it that God seemingly abandoned the nation of His people? Answer: To give them the just penalty for their rebellion! For they bore the name of God, and yet they gave themselves to sin! So God acted.

Ezekiel 39:23-24, "And the nations will know [let us not forget that we are still speaking here about Gog and Magog] that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity [the word used here references moral perversion] because they acted treacherously against Me [the word is מַעַל (*mā'al*) which refers to purposed covenant rebellion], and I hid My face from them [this is the language of Leanness of Soul]; so I gave them into

the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword [just as God promised when He established the Theocracy]. According to their uncleanness [the word here is used of ceremonial unclean animals] and according to their transgressions [which another word for covenant rebellion] I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.”¹

Daniel Block wrote of this:

The nations, who had observed these events and puzzled over Yahweh’s harsh treatment of his own people (36:20), had concluded that Yahweh was either incompetent to defend his people against Nebuchadnezzar, or he had gone back on his own covenant commitment to them. In either case, his reputation had been seriously profaned, because neither of these explanations was true. Rather, Israel had brought this fate on herself. The people had provoked the exile by treating the covenant relationship with contempt and treachery. (Block, 1998, p. 483)

From this we see that a large part of the trial and difficulty that comes upon this earth is unto the vindication of God’s name! God is just... man is the sinner... man therefore is the problem! That is Ezekiel’s third point here!

With this, once again we are brought back to the very important question of “How?” “How does trial and difficulty on the part of the believer vindicate the name of God?” The answer in Scripture is that we, God’s people, once again MUST speak up!

Recall the account of Achan, how he was *aching* to steal from God and so in secret took that which God commanded Israel to burn.

Joshua 7:1, “But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel.”

What was the result? The people of God suffered a horrible loss against Ai (because God is just, He cannot bless wickedness). The result was that God’s character was dragged through the gutter! In fact, it was even amongst God’s people! Listen to the accusation that Joshua himself leveled against God at this time.

Joshua 7:7a, “And Joshua said, ‘Alas, O Lord God, why didst Thou ever bring this people over the Jordan, *only* to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?’...”

In other words, what is your problem God? Why have You abandoned Your people? Have you ceased being just?

When Joshua was told that the loss was the result NOT of a lack of care on the part of God, BUT the sin of the people of God... when the sinner who sinned in private was exposed (Achan),

listen to the exhortation of Joshua:

Joshua 7:19, “Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.’”

Do you understand the role of public confession when it comes to the honor and glory of God? Joshua understood that God’s glory was at stake when it came to God’s people. If we, God’s people, engage in sin, forfeit God’s covenant blessing, AND YET REMAIN SILENT ABOUT OUR SIN, THEN the world/the church is left to accuse God of treachery!

So what did Joshua encourage Achan to do? Give glory to God and confess his sin! How would this give God glory? It would tell the world that the flaw when it comes to our living is NOT with God, BUT with us!

Oh Christian, if you love the Lord, this will be a very important concern to you. Let me ask you these questions:

- Why is this world a place of sin and misery? Because Adam- MAN- rebelled against God!
- And so, why do natural disaster’s occur? Why famine, sickness, and disease? Because this world is groaning on account of OUR rebellion (Romans 8:20, 22)!
- Why is their tragedy in this life such that many are hurt, maimed, sick, and dying? While it may NOT be your own sin, it is BECAUSE of sin!

Jeremiah asked the rhetorical question:

Lamentations 3:39: “Why should *any* living mortal, or *any* man, offer complaint in view of his sins?”

Consider the incredible witness of Job, given NOT out of obligation, BUT conviction after Job lost everything — his wealth, family, and health — we read this:

Job 1:20-22, “Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’ Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.”

And so it was with the exile. When the accusation was raised by the gentile that God had abandoned His people (cf. Ezekiel 36:20), this is what God’s people were called to do. To Jeremiah, God gave this command regarding His people:

Jeremiah 5:19, “And it shall come about when they [God’s people] say, ‘Why has the Lord our God done all these things to us?’ then you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land

that is not yours.’”

Through this witness and no doubt the witness of many others, the message was heard NOT only by the people of God, BUT by the nations as well. Upon the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC we read this:

Jeremiah 40:2-3a, “Now the [Babylonian] captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah [who at the time was in chains on account of his prophecies] and said to him, ‘The Lord your God promised this calamity against this place; and the Lord has brought *it* on and done just as He promised. Because you *people* sinned against the Lord and did not listen to His voice, therefore this thing has happened to you.’”

Do you see? The exile testified to the Justness of God!

So thirdly, why the exile? It took place to vindicate the name of the Lord! The world in which we live is broken on account of OUR sin! And though we are saved by grace through Christ, salvation does NOT give us a free ticket to sinning! Accordingly, when we confess our sin to a watching world, we glorify God by placing the blame for the miseries of this life at OUR feet!

Once again, this does NOT mean there is one-to-one correlation between our sin and our suffering (a statement we cannot say of the rebellious Christian under church discipline). RATHER it means that all that is suffered in this life is the result of man’s sin... our sin... my sin! That is how egregious sin is to the Lord! If no one had ever sinned and I committed that seemingly insignificant sin which I so easily rationalize, then all the miseries of this life would still be upon us, and Christ would still have had to suffer on the cross! Truly, the miseries of this life is man’s fault, not God’s! May we be quick to proclaim this message when trial comes upon us or this land!

Works Cited

Block, D. I. (1998). *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48 (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

End Note(s)

¹ J. B. Taylor wrote, “The nations of the world will learn from these events that Israel’s punishment was God’s intention, and not a sign of his weakness, and that the exile was a righteous God’s demonstration of his righteousness for all the world to see (23, 24): a holy God punishes iniquity in his own people as well as in others. Thus, the Lord would set forth his glory among the nations, for Israel’s experiences were to be a demonstration of the character of Israel’s God (21), and the scandal of 36:20 would be silenced for ever.” (*Ezekiel*, TOTC, p. 242)