



This week we continued our 'Sin and How to Solve it' series by looking at the extraordinary passage of Ezekiel 16. In it God tells a story to proud, rebellious Jerusalem/Israel outlining why they are soon to be defeated by the Assyrians. God does not stack up pieces of evidence but rather, to make the point, tells them a story. It's a graphic, shocking chapter that reveals that God does not see sin as simply breaking rules but rather as being profoundly relational. We noted that this is both the story of Israel, but also the wider story of humanity.

The chapter alternates between a focus upon Israel and then God's response.

v1-5: Israel's Helplessness

The chapter starts with Israel's hopeless beginnings. The city has a tendency towards arrogance and pride and so God pops that by reminding her that her ancestry is dubious and mixed - the reference to Mother a Hittite and Father an Amorite is not simply name calling, but probably harking back to the fact that Jerusalem was initially a Canaanite city that was defeated and adapted when the land was conquered. He also reminds her of her hopeless beginnings, describing in graphic terms that she was unloved, un-cared for and near to death. She had been discarded and is vulnerable to death. The bible pulls no punches in describing Genesis 3 humanity in similar terms - our natural position is one of sinfulness and hopelessness.

v6-14: God's Kindness

God rescues her from the pool of blood and adopts her and causes her to grow and flourish - giving her life, providing for her and rescuing her. And he - in spreading the corner of her garment over her - marries her. God is saying that he will totally provide for all her needs and in v9-14 he does so! He lavishes his love upon her and dresses her as a queen such that she becomes famous and known throughout the world. Again the parallels as God relates to humanity are clear as we see his extraordinary generosity in blessing us in so many ways.

v15-34: Israel's Response

Israel's response is shocking - it's one of insatiable shameless promiscuity in 15-22 the focus is on religious promiscuity, in 23-34 political promiscuity. The problem begins in v15 as Israel finds pride in what she has rather than in who gave it. From v16 through to v19 we see her using thefts that God gave her, not to thank Him but rather to serve other gods. As the focus shifts to political alliances, again Israel is not trusting in her husband but rather paying the neighbours 'tribute payments'. God likens this to her being a prostitute that pays her clients, rather than in being payed by them. It's a section that is meant to make us feel awkward because it reveals the reality of our sin and how God sees it. The 2

thoughts we chewed over from this section was 1) remember who gave you the gifts and 2) use them as they're meant to be used. So often we're given gifts by God but then we use them to serve other gods - he gives us money and we bow to the god of wealth, he gives us beauty and we bow to the god of image, he gives us relationship and we bow to the god of love etc

v35-62: God's Judgement and Grace

The final section outlines the outworking of Israel's promiscuity. We see God initially giving them over to what they wanted - they had gathered the nations to be unfaithful with them, now God will gather the nations and they will be destroyed by them. The idols they've been worshipping will be their undoing - to rule them and ruin them. God also removes his garment from them such that (v37) they are back to being naked, exposed and vulnerable in the world. He will judge his people for their sin, and yet in his love he will also show his kindness in restoring them. We focused in on 2 things from v62 and 63 to illustrate this restoration - 1) remembering who God is - their rebellion had been the fruit of forgetfulness - trusting other gods because they forgot how good God is and 2) atonement - rather than Israel making atonement for her sin, God will make it for her.. This theme is developed in Ephesians 5v21 onwards and also finally completed in Revelation 19 as the bible ends with talk of a marriage - Gods people finally dressed in white linen, married to their husband forever.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

Why do you think this passage is so graphic?
What does it say about how God views sin?

What does God do for his people in the story?
Why do the people do in response?
What are the similarities with Israel's story and ours? What are the differences?
How does God promise to deal with his people?

How do we apply this chapter to our situation?

The theme of God being married to his people is picked up later in the bible.
How does Ezk 16 add to our understanding of
- Eph 5v21 onwards?
- Revelation 19v6 onwards

What 1 thing can you take away from this passage?