

“I Will Remember”

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Today is our final time together in our series *Thin Spaces—Encountering Glory*. During this series we have listened to narratives of how God has torn away the veil between the immortal and the mortal, between the transcendent and that which is made of dust. Most of our observations have been related to a particularized setting and time in the life of an individual.

Today we are going to listen to the word of the Lord that came to Ezekiel the prophet describing, from God’s perspective, his relationship with a community of people—the nation of Israel. Specifically, God sends a message to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to tell them of their relational history with God. Entangled in the telling of that history is a revelation of the heart of the Divine.

Last week we reflected on the story of Elijah and how the narrative of his deeply disturbing time under the broom tree related to our own human plight of sadness, sorrow, grief, depression, melancholy and being disconsolate. In this text we will have the strange experience of encountering our broken-hearted God. Some of the language of the text is exaggerated, overblown, excessive and perhaps even hyperbolic. There is a reason for this. The language of the text is seeking to capture the suffering and pain of the Divine heart. God expresses in this text sorrow at a magnitude that only extreme language can somehow hope to disclose.

Ezekiel 16 is written as a metaphor—the use of this linguistic tool may be to create a sense of distance from the turbulence we mortals feel as we encounter God’s self-description as a betrayed lover.

It is my lofty but humble hope that somehow, since we have the mind of Christ, we would be able to comprehend what God is saying about himself in this text. Or, if you do not yet know Christ, that God would, by the power of his Holy Spirit, open the eyes of your heart to encounter the heart of the living God.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for being present with us on so many Sundays and helping us see your love come close to the human race. Today, I pray that we would be granted the ability, by your Holy Spirit, to see the extent of your love for us, and the ways that we have broken your heart. Rend the veil, for the sake of your glory, your fame and your name—come close by your Spirit. Amen

As we consider Ezekiel 16 today, we are going to look at it both in its historical context and as it speaks to us today.

1. The God who says, “Live.”
2. The God who says, “Mine.”
3. The God who says, “I will Remember”

A. The God who says “Live!”

Ezekiel 16 opens with a dramatic account of the origins of God’s people. The text begins with a general statement and then becomes very specific and descriptive.

Generally:

“Your origins and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite”

The earliest written records mentioning Canaan are ancient Egyptian manuscripts from the late 15th and 14th centuries BC—mentioning the deportation of Canaanites. At times the term Amorite occurs as a general name for the inhabitants of Canaan as in Gen 15;16; 1 Sam 7:14. Canaan was never consolidated into a unified political whole—it was split up into many little city-states usually under the rule of a king.

The borders of the Canaanite city-states were fluid, each ruler attempting to expand at the expense of her neighbors—meaning the region of Canaan was in a constant state of warfare. These Canaanite city-states would enlist bands of nomads to fight for them.

The Hittites appear in the 14th to 13th centuries as an enemy of Egypt. As part of the Canaanite region they were often under the sovereignty of Egypt.

By the Iron Age use of the name Canaan for that particular region was rarely used.

The cult of Canaan is of course the cult of Baal—which included sexual excesses and perversions as acts of worship as well as human sacrifice. There is archaeological evidence that the founding of the Phoenician colony of Carthage in about 814 BC that worshiped Baal demanded up to 200 children of the most affluent families. Carthaginians began buying children or raising servant children so they could offer them up instead of their own.

The origins of the people of God are the Canaanites, Amorites and Hittites—small and despised ethnic groups.

Socially -these were violent people groups in a constant state of warfare—fighting to expand their borders for hundreds of years, never able to consolidate into a great nation due to their irascible and violent nature.

Religiously -the cult of Baal was cruel, disgusting and evil.

Specifically, the origins of the people of God are described this way:

“And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. ⁵ No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.”

When we meet this girl-child she is in a state of helplessness and hopelessness. She is without God in the world. Who is she apart from God? Who are the “people of God” apart from God? Who are you apart from God—apart from his grace, his provision, his love, his mercy, his resources?

She is naked. Her nakedness symbolizes her complete lack of resources—spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally, psychologically and in every other way. She is completely dependent on resources outside of herself and these have been denied her.

She is abandoned—she has been thrown out like a piece of human trash. This story of a girl child abandoned in the wilderness to die is repeated around the world to this day—as unwanted female children are left to die immediately after birth because their families cannot afford to feed them or pay the bride price that will be necessary to a future marriage. This child is alienated from God, alienated from other human beings and alienated from the harsh environment which will eventually take her life.

She is swaddled in blood—the blood that covers her tells us the story of her identity. The very form of her coming into selfhood is revolting—she makes her way out of her mother through the violence of tearing flesh and imposing suffering.

She is part of a violent human race—if this child were rescued, cleaned up and given a life of her own, she would become exactly like the rest of her race. She would become no different than those who left her to die. She is part of a murderous, self-serving species that kill their own for personal gain.

The shame of her own worthlessness and the shame of her people cover her in death.

But how does this make sense of the fact that this girl-child is also a creation of the God whose name and identity is love? How does this make sense of the origins of the human race?

God created the universe in a state of wholeness and goodness as an expression of his own beauty—God’s creation broadcast the glory of God.

Psalm 19:1 *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”*
God created two humans whom he declared to be “very good” Gen 1:31. *“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”*

The couple were “very good” because they were reflections of the beauty of God mirrored in a limited and dependent form—they were made in the image of God. “So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Only two adjectives other than “good” are chosen to define the condition of humankind immediately after their creation.

Genesis 2:25—*“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*

Like God, humankind had an internal sense of value and dignity. The text states that they were not ashamed even when exposed—they knew they mattered. The state of being naked did not reflect an impoverished state, rather it reflected strength and bold joy. Adam and Eve were secure in their relationship with God and with each other. As missiologist Arthur Glasser reminds us, *“There were no barriers, no secrets, no regrets, no facades, no intimidations, no status distinctions, no suspicion.”*

God’s desire was to create creatures who could declare his glory by the very act of being.

Isaiah 43:7, 21 *“everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. . . the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise”*

The bold, unashamed nakedness of this couple declared to the world that they were “very good.”

During a personal journey of self-discovery, the pair chose to redefine who they were as persons. With the intention of discovering a new level of self-awareness *“the tree was desirable to make*

one wise” Genesis 3:7, they became disfigured by evil. Christopher Wright suggests that four dimensions of the human person were radically stripped bare due to alienation of the self—the physical, social, spiritual and rational faculties no longer purely reflected the glory of God. Radical insecurity is the response of every sinful human heart to the wholeness and perfection of God. Adam and Eve hid from God and each other because they knew they were naked and therefore became ashamed.

The beauty of God will always condemn us. This is true even if the characteristic of God that we feel challenged by is his love. God’s perfect love for us displays the unworthiness of our own love, defines our own nakedness and condemns us. This was never truer than in this situation. God responds to the creatures who violated his trust, broke his heart and have begun the path of destruction for everything beautiful in his universe, even guaranteeing the death of his own beloved son—by coming out searching for them, seeking them out. God calls to Adam, “*Where are you?*” What greater love is there than this? No wonder Adam and Eve experience such a sense of radical insecurity marked by fear and distrust. God’s love exposed their own betrayal and unfaithfulness towards a God whose name is Love.

The profound sorrow of God can be heard in his next words to the couple, “*Who told you that you were naked?*” Of all the questions God could ask, He chooses these words. Every biblical reference to nakedness that comes after the narrative of Adam and Eve is always joined to guiltiness. Nakedness is symbolic of being empty of glory. God could have been saying to this couple, “Who told you that you were full of guilt and empty of glory?”

The symbolic provision for nakedness is the emotional climax of the narrative in the garden of Eden, after the couple has run from God. God kills some animals, sheds blood, makes clothes and personally covers the couple. Why meet this need for them? Food, shelter and clothing are three basic needs. The narrative does not tell us that God built them a shelter or showed them how to make a fire to warm themselves. God clothed them. He covered their nakedness. Why? This is what the whole conversation in the garden had centered around. The dehumanizing sense of shamefulness and the removal of glory that nakedness symbolized was the primary root of their need. The weightlessness of being when purpose is removed and alienation overwhelms had

to be addressed. The killing of the animals and the covering of humanity with skins prefigures a future killing that will happen, where eternal blood will be shed and the glory of it will be sufficient to overwhelm all of creation and cover all of the nakedness of a world of hearts bereft of meaning.

But at the end of the Eden narrative humankind are alone and spiritually naked in a hostile world.

This is where we find the girl-child, in the condition of a people alienated from God—swaddled in blood, abandoned, alone, hated.

Apart from God this is the existence of every human being.

“And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I made you flourish like a plant of the field.

Note the details of the text:

I saw you

Remember the context—she is but a mote of dust, hanging by a thread in a galaxy of spinning worlds, yet, the God whose presence cannot be contained by the whole of the universe sees her!

Wallowing in your blood, kicking about in your blood

All that is left to her as a human is to struggle in her nakedness—with nothing and nobody to help. Ephesians 2 might describe her this way, *“strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”*

I said to you in your blood

God not only sees but he acts. For God to speak is to call into being, to speak is divine action.

The text repeats again the idea that she is in her blood—the blood signifying her state of being unwashed, not rubbed with salt, not wrapped in cloths, unloved and abandoned.

Live

Although this girl-child has nothing to offer and God has everything to lose—God says “Live.”
Live!

The text repeats this twice for emphasis.

“I said to you in your blood—live!”

I made you flourish

To Live is not to survive— it is to flourish. God does not simply make us survive; he makes us flourish.

Let’s take a pause here—just for a moment.

When God speaks Live over you it is not because of what you have to offer God. You are kicking about in your blood—you are part of a murderous race who betrayed God’s love, abandoned God and you are on a planet where there is unremitting conflict, warring and bloodletting—either with physical violence of the verbal violence of gossip, slander, outbursts of rage, sarcasm, mocking, bullying.

When God speaks Live over you it is because of who God is. God is love and in him is no darkness at all.

*“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵
Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have*

come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:14-16)

Do you know and believe the love God has for you? You cannot know and believe the love God has for you if you do not know the story of your origins.

Where did God find you? Do you know in your heart of hearts that God found you kicking about in your blood struggling to live. If you do not know the story of your own origin you cannot possibly know the love of God.

2. The God who says, “Mine.”

“And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

⁸ *“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine”*

The girl-child is no longer kicking about in her blood struggling to live. However—she is naked. To be naked, biblically is to be experiencing radical insecurity, an inability to measure up. Originally, we were created to be naked and unashamed. Naked has to do with identity—the ability to be fully seen and fully known without a sense of shame.

The girl child is naked—she requires not only to live but to have her nakedness removed. The only way for nakedness to be removed is to be covered. To be covered is related to personal identity.

What does God do? In the garden God killed an animal and made garments to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve.

In this text, God spreads the corner of his own garment over her and covers her nakedness.

In ancient times the glory of a divine or royal being was synonymous with their robe or covering. For instance, in Mesopotamia ‘*melammu*’ is used in royal and mythic literature to describe the

radiance, supernatural, awe-inspiring sheen inherent in things divine and royal. The term can imply both a terrible splendor and a supernatural garment, cloak or headgear.” In other words, the “glory” of a god was often synonymous with a garment or covering that surrounded the god himself.

Biblical literature is rich with the concept of “covering”

“Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty” (Psalm 104:1)

God’s glory in this text is symbolized by the clothing that covers Him just as with other Mesopotamian deities.

God spreads the corner of his garment over her and covers her nakedness. The symbol of the supernatural garment, covering the girl child indicates that she shares in a terrible splendor, this is verified later in the text when God says, *“because of my splendor which I bestowed on you”* Ezek 16:14

The very splendor of who God is becomes her identity and defines who she is. God takes his own glory and spreads this over the young woman.

Let’s take a moment to pause and think about this means for you personally—what is your ultimate identity? You are “in Christ.” The beauty, the glory, the terrible splendor of the Son of God—is yours. You are in Christ. This is your ultimate identity—you are covered by the life of Christ, your life is hidden in Christ, you abide in Christ, you are a child of God.

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” Gal 3:26

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” Col 3:3

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” 2 Cor 5:21

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” 1 John 4:13

You are covered in a terrible splendor—because your life is hid in Christ.

Let's also think about what this means for us personally in our relationships with others, and especially at FOL. We have been covered in a terrible splendor by Christ and one of the ways that beauty and splendor and glory is evidenced is in how we cover others.

Proverbs 17:9

“Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but the person who repeats a matter separates close friends”

Or

1 Peter 4:8

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”

Why do you think it is that we are so quick to repeat a matter and to talk about others rather than talking with others about our offenses?

Why do we find it so hard to cover the offenses of others?

I think this comes down to nakedness, shame and identity issues. Remember, God has covered us with the corner of his garment, we are covered in a terrible glory. But what happens if you are not experiencing the reality of that covering? What if you are feeling naked and ashamed? What will you do? Well, if you are naked and ashamed and you live amongst a community of people who are naked and ashamed, how do you cover up your nakedness being seen by others? Only one thing you can do—grab another naked person and expose their nakedness and shame to another so that your nakedness is covered. Your covering for nakedness and shame becomes exposing another. Rather than the beauty of Jesus being your covering, you choose to divert others to see the nakedness and shame of someone else. This is what all gossip and slander ultimately is—a covering for our own nakedness and shame.

FOL—the splendor of God has been bestowed upon you! It is only possible for individuals already covered by the beauty of Christ's splendor to have the strength of identity, personal

security and radical freedom to cover others with the same love with which they have been covered.

We have an enemy—Satan—who is the accuser of God’s children. Satan and his forces spend the majority of their time stripping folks of their value, worth and significance. Those of us who have been embraced by the Divine and who have heard the words “you are Mine”—are uniquely able to pass by others for the purpose of covering.

Lesslie Newbigin long-term missionary to south India, theologian and missiologist said this, “The church...is the place where Jesus is made present here and now so that all people, righteous and unrighteous, are enabled to taste and share the love of God before whom all are unrighteous and all are accepted as righteous. It is the place where the glory of God (glory as of an only son) actually abides among us so that the love of God is available to sin-burdened men and women”

Once the beauty and wonder of the Lord God become the garment of covering for nakedness then God makes a vow and enters into a covenant of marriage. God makes a betrothal vow to the young woman and she becomes “Mine.”

Betrothal for the ancient Jewish culture is different than a betrothal in many of our cultural backgrounds. A betrothal was the same as a marriage. The marriage ceremony or marriage night consummate the marriage, but the marriage in many ways began with the vow of betrothal. At the betrothal ceremony, a marriage contract, called a Ketubah, was presented to the father of the bride. After the term of the Contract was accepted, a cup of wine was shared to seal the marriage covenant. The second cup of wine would be shared many months later during the marriage ceremony.

The Betrothal included the giving of gifts by the bridegroom to his Bride. In the text we can see the gifts God gave to his bride.

“Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a

beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil”

Many of these ancient metaphorical gifts are precursors of the gifts we receive as believers.

Notice the gifts that come with the betrothal and the possible relation to the gifts we receive as the bride of Christ.

1. Bathed you with water and washed your blood from you
Baptism
2. Anointed you with oil
3. Giving of the Holy Spirit
4. Beautiful clothing, ornaments, rings, earrings
5. Gifts of the Spirit, of the church, graced nature
6. Eating fine flour, and honey and oil
7. God’s Word—is our food and nourishment

The result of God saying “mine”

“You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. ¹⁴ And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD”

The shared identity with the King of the universe and the gifts he bestowed upon her made the young woman exceedingly beautiful and she became a royal person. Her renown went forth among the nations because of her beauty—it was perfect through the splendor bestowed on her.

In these words, you sense the joy, the pride, the sense of love God has for this woman whom he has joined to himself by covenant as his bride.

From a girl-child kicking about in her blood struggling to live to perfect beauty that makes her a person of renown among the nations.

3. The God who says, “I will Remember”

The Jewish bride was set apart, consecrated, separated unto her bridegroom — the one who purchased her. So, while waiting for his return, she was to stay faithful.

However, this is not what happened with the bride of Yahewh, and it is not what has happened with the bride of Christ.

The excessive and lavish love of God for this abandoned, alienated, helpless and hopeless girl-child is betrayed. God is abandoned by his bride.

We hear the broken heart of God in these initial words,

“But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. And you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. Also, my bread that I gave you—I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey—you set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord GOD. And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?”

The grief of God in this text is palpable—you played the whore.

God accuses his bride of the following grievances

1. You trusted in your beauty—independence rather than God-dependence. Trusting in our “self”—even though that self has been granted by God.
2. Using the gifts of God for personal or selfish reasons. We might be able to understand what is meant here if we consider our personal prayer life. Is the primary goal of our prayers for God to get us the things we want or fix the things in our lives that are broken, or is the primary goal of

our prayer life to be with God? Is the Bible a place we accrue more knowledge about God and get “answers” or is the Bible a place where we commune with God and spend time getting to know him?

3. Slaughtering our children and making them an offering to other gods. What do you most desire for your children? No matter our aspirational goals, this will be evident in what we tell our children matter most—by where they should spend their time, what skills they should learn, what practices they should be engaged in. Do we want them to know God? To experience the love of God? To be in the presence of God? How is this evident in the ways you expect your child to spend their time? How is this evident in the spiritual practices of your family? How is this evident in the personal practices expected of your child? How is this evident in the activities that you want your child to be part of on a weekly basis? How is this evident in their priorities at school?

4. Your heart is sick aw-mal—languishing. A heart that is weak, not strong, to be feeble. They are returning to the condition in which God found them—not flourishing. The flourishing only comes from proximity to God. From receiving the life of God.

God’s language in describing the abandonment and betrayal of Israel moves from metaphorical to tangible when he describes the sins of Sodom that caused him to remove them from the face of the earth.

“As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it”

Israel betrayed God and abandoned their bridegroom when they engaged in the acts of Sodom—only to an even greater degree than Sodom:

- Pride
- Excess of food
- Prosperous ease

- Not aid the poor and needy
- Haughty
- Engage in abomination (perverse and evil act/s)

These are the things that break the heart of God. The heart of God is LOVE. The love of God says to every creature in our world “live.” None should be kicking about in their blood struggling to live! When we see people kicking about in their blood struggling to live—what is our response?

God’s love has given us more than enough resources to share with the entire world, and certainly with our neighbors.

God is abandoned and betrayed by us when we withhold love from each other because this is the splendor that God has bestowed upon us.

What does God say is the underlying reason for his bride’s devastating betrayal and abandonment?

*And in all your abominations and your whorings **you did not remember** the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood. V 22*

*“Because **you have not remembered** the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things” v. 43*

What is God’s ultimate response to betrayal and abandonment by the girl-child over whom he said “live” and to the young woman whom he covered in splendor and vowed to marry?

First, we hear the heartbreak of his agony, pain, sorrow and lament.

Then we see the unfailing love of God which is the beauty, splendor and glory of God...

*“For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet **I will remember** my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant...I will establish my covenant with you and you shall know that I am the LORD **that you may remember** and be confounded, and never*

open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.” V. 59, 60, 62, 63

God has remembered his covenant with us in the days of our youth. He has made an everlasting covenant with us.

In our youth we were kicking about in our blood and God said “live” and made us his bride!

When Jesus was kicking about in his blood struggling to live, God said, “die” and he made atonement for our sin.

Through the death of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus has atoned for us. Jesus has made it possible for us to be one with God again.

Now Jesus has said to us, “do this in remembrance of me. . .”

May the comfort of God the Father who says over you, “Live”, and the lovingkindness of God the Son who for you kicked about in his blood struggling to live, and the power of God the Spirit who is making your splendor complete be with you now and in every moment of your journey until we meet again. Amen and Amen