

We sing of this new Exodus in Psalm 126:

Sing Psalm 126  
Read Colossians 1

Last time we saw how God delivers his people –  
not for their own sake,  
but for the sake of the holiness of God’s great name.

Israel has defiled the land,  
profaned God’s holy name  
and so Israel has become unclean.

There must be a new Exodus where God will cleanse his people from all their uncleanness,  
and that is what he has done in the cross of Jesus!

He has brought us out of Exile and sprinkled us with clean water and cleansed us from our sin!

We saw last time the Baptism/New Creation theme in v24-28.

- 1. The Problem: God’s Name Has Been Questioned(v16-21)**
  - a. At Home, the House of Israel Defiled Their Own Land (v16-19)**
  - b. In Exile, the House of Israel Profaned My Holy Name (v20-21)**
- 2. The Solution: God’s Name Must Be Vindicated (v22-32)**
  - a. I Will Vindicate the Holiness of My Name (v22-23)**
  - b. I Will Restore My People (v24-32)**
    - i. I Will Cleanse You from Idolatry (v24-25)**

<sup>24</sup> *I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.* <sup>25</sup> *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.*

**ii. I Will Give You a New Heart and Spirit to Obey (v26-28)**

<sup>26</sup> *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* <sup>27</sup> *And I will put my Spirit within you,*

*and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. <sup>28</sup> You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

### **iii. I Will Give You Abundance (v29-30)**

*<sup>29</sup>And I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.*

And when God saves Israel from their uncleanness, and restores them to the land,  
then he will make the land fruitful again.

While verses 29-30 focus on the fruitfulness of the promised Land,  
we need to see this in view of the Edenic language in Ezekiel.  
The salvation of his people  
also means the salvation of the created order.

But let's get a little more specific:

Never again – God says – will they “suffer the disgrace of famine.”  
What does this mean?

It means that creation itself will function properly when the sons of God are revealed.  
Paul says in Romans 8 that the creation *groans*  
as it waits for the revealing of the sons of God.  
This means that the restoration of the creation has *not yet* happened.

Because the restoration of the creation has to do with the *body*.  
Paul also says in Romans 8 that we ourselves are eagerly awaiting the adoption as sons –  
the redemption of our bodies!

The resurrection of the body is connected with the restoration of the whole of creation.

Paul uses this language of fruitfulness  
to refer to the spread of the gospel in Colossians 1.

You see,

with the coming of Christ, we have the beginning of the fulfillment of Ezekiel's promise.  
But the beginning of the fulfillment can only be seen by faith!  
At the present time, we walk by faith – not yet by sight.  
We see the fruitfulness and abundance of the new creation  
in the growth and spread of the gospel –  
not yet in the created order.  
We have received the spirit of adoption –  
but not yet the adoption of our bodies.

The “not yet” is especially clear in verses 31-32.

**iv. I Will Shame You by Blessing You (v31-32)**

<sup>31</sup>*Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations.* <sup>32</sup>*It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.*

This may sound like an odd response!

The restoration of God’s people will produce shame and self-loathing.

This may sound really strange!

When I save you, then you will loathe yourselves!

Nowadays we don’t like talking about loathing or abhorring ourselves.

That’s not considered “good” self-esteem!

This word for “loathing” is used earlier in Ezekiel 6:9 and 20:43  
in exactly the same way as here:

you shall loathe yourselves for all your abominations.

Job 10:1 also uses this word when Job says,

“I loathe my life” because of all his afflictions.

Psalm 95:10 says that God *loathed* the wilderness generation  
that continually rebelled against him.

And Psalm 119:158 says “I look at the faithless with disgust, [with loathing]  
because they do not keep your commands.”

Psalm 139:21 also says that I loathe them that rise up against the LORD.

It may sound odd to us to loathe people:

but the reason why it sounds odd is because we have misguided love.

If we love the LORD our God with all our heart,

then we will loathe all that is contrary to that which we love.

And therefore, when we see things in ourselves that are contrary to the one we love,  
we loathe ourselves!

I abhor myself because I see in myself things that are contrary to God.

I hate everything that is opposed to God!

And therefore I abhor myself – because far too often I turn away from him!

My iniquities and abominations are loathsome.

And yet – God loves me –

and so therefore I must also love myself!

But not for my own sake!

Bernard of Clairvaux wisely said

At first, man loves himself for his own sake. That is the flesh, which can appreciate nothing beyond itself. Next, he perceives that he cannot exist by himself, and so begins by faith to seek after God, and to love Him as something necessary to his own welfare. That is the second degree, to love God, not for God's sake, but selfishly. But when he has learned to worship God and to seek Him aright, meditating on God, reading God's Word, praying and obeying His commandments, he comes gradually to know what God is, and finds Him altogether lovely. So, having tasted and seen how gracious the Lord is (Ps. 34:8), he advances to the third degree, when he loves God, not merely as his benefactor but as God. Surely he must remain long in this state; and I know not whether it would be possible to make further progress in this life to that fourth degree and perfect condition wherein man loves himself solely for God's sake.

<http://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/onloving/onlov15.html>

So long as we love ourselves for our own sake,  
we cannot imagine what it would mean to loathe ourselves!

And indeed, if we love God for our own sake,  
selfishly, for our own benefit,  
then we still do not loathe ourselves!

It is only as we begin to love God for his own sake  
that we can begin to see ourselves from his perspective –  
that we can see how malformed and misshapen we are!

As the glory and greatness of God's holy name becomes impressed upon us,  
we begin to realize how perverse and wicked we are!

And therefore, we are ashamed of ourselves!

In our modern world, we like the passages that say, "and they will never again be put to shame"!

We tend to think of "shame" as psychologically unhealthy –  
and that we should never seek to shame someone else.

But that is not God's view!

God says that those who are redeemed by his mercy should loathe themselves!

Why?

"for your iniquities and your abominations."

But Ezekiel's grammar here is very clear.

It is not just that you loathe your sin.

You loathe yourself *for* your sin.

Why is this important?

We have a tendency to separate the sin from the sinner.

Love the sinner – hate the sin.

But think about what this does in your own case!

I'm a basically good person – I loathe my sin (sure!) – but I'm not that bad!

Do you see what this does?

Sin becomes something that is detached from “me.”

As we saw from 1 John 1 a couple weeks ago,

if we say we do not “have” sin – we deceive ourselves.

Our problem is not just that we have committed sins.

Our problem is that we *have* sin.

I hope you loathe your sins (too often we kind of like our sins,  
and so we play with them like a tiger kitten!

But then they grow up – and then there's a pet tiger that's devouring us!)

But it's not enough to loathe your sins.

You must also loathe yourself.

Why?

Because *you* are the one who is sinning!

You must *abhor* yourself.

You must be repulsed and disgusted by *yourself*.

As long as you are only disgusted by your *sins*,

you can deceive yourself into thinking that your sins are “out there.”

But when you realize that the problem is yourself –

that *you* are turning away from God!

that *you* are loving other things more than God!

then you must loathe yourself!

And you must be ashamed.

The key to developing a proper sense of self-loathing

is a healthy view of shame!

That's really a winning way of putting it!

But it's true:

The key to developing a proper sense of self-loathing

is a healthy view of shame!

We live in a law-based culture that emphasizes guilt.

You broke the law and so you are guilty.

And that is true!

But the scriptures were written in a culture that emphasized both guilt and shame.

It's not just that you are guilty for your sin.  
You should also be ashamed –  
because you have reflected poorly on your Father in heaven.  
The nations are speaking ill of your God because of your conduct!  
You have brought shame to the family!

Jesus said “by this shall all men know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another.”

Okay – that we can live with.

But now we go a step further:

Jesus also asked the Father that the church might be one,  
“so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”  
When the church does not reflect the unity of the Father and the Son,  
then the world can say “ah, the Father didn't send the Son.”

In other words, God's holy name is profaned – is treated as common – by the nations,  
when we are fragmented –  
when we don't live like his people.

We should be ashamed of ourselves!

Notice this:

Israel was *not* to be ashamed in the presence of the other nations (v15)  
but they *were* to be ashamed in the presence of God.

Remember what I said earlier:

The key to developing a proper sense of self-loathing  
is a healthy view of shame!

If we *love God*, then we will be ashamed of our sin,  
because our sin reflects poorly upon our heavenly Father.

Of course, this is where Jesus has covered both the guilt *and* the shame of our sin.

So yes, we *are* guilty for our sin –  
but Jesus has borne our guilt.

And yes, we should be ashamed of our sin –  
but Jesus has taken that shame upon himself in the cross.

And so while we *should* loathe ourselves for all our abominations and iniquities,  
we should not remain in a perpetual state of self-loathing!

There are a couple of hymns that connect guilt and shame in this way:

As Augustus Toplady put it this way:

“How vast the benefits divine which we in Christ possess!  
We are redeemed from *guilt and shame* and called to holiness.  
But not for works which we have done, or shall hereafter do,  
hath God decreed on sinful men salvation to bestow.”

Nicholas von Zinzendorf added:

“Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress;  
'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.  
Bold shall I stand in thy great day; for who aught to my charge shall lay?  
Fully absolved through these I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.”

Jesus' blood and righteousness has covered my guilt and my shame!

### **c. I Will Restore My Land (v33-36)**

<sup>33</sup>*Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. <sup>34</sup>And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. <sup>35</sup>And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'* <sup>36</sup>*Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.*

Verses 33-36 then return to the restoration of the land.

After all, so long as the land remains desolate, the name of God will be slandered.  
But the nations will know that I am Yahweh when I restore the land.

We will spend a fair amount of time on this when we get to chapters 40-48.

Ezekiel simply introduces the theme here,  
so I will do the same:

when God restores his people and cleanses them from their sins,  
in that day, God will cause the cities to be inhabited and the waste places to be rebuilt.

The Desolate Land – the land of dust and death –  
shall become like the garden of Eden!

There is a very small and preliminary way in which this was fulfilled in 538,  
when Cyrus permitted the Israelites to return to the land.

But Ezekiel 40-48 makes it clear that Ezekiel had a different idea of where this was heading!  
And Paul, in Colossians 1:6, helps us understand this, when he says that the gospel  
“has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing –  
as it also does among you, since the day you heard it  
and understood the grace of God in truth.”

The garden/temple language of Ezekiel gets taken up in Paul's language.  
The firstfruits of the new creation are found in the fruitfulness of the gospel  
as it increases and grows and flourishes.  
The fortified and inhabited cities are found in the church –  
the city of God.  
Once upon a time people referred to the church as “our beloved Zion” –  
because they understood that the church is the place  
where God's promises are coming to pass.  
The gospel is increasing and growing, bearing fruit throughout the world!

Ezekiel 36 concludes with the sovereign God finally allowing his people to say something!

**d. I Will Increase My People (v37-38)**

<sup>37</sup>*Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock.*

When the elders of Israel inquired of the LORD through Ezekiel  
back in chapter 14 and chapter 20,  
God refused to listen.

Now, finally, God says that he will let them ask for something!  
The numbers of the people have been decimated by battle, famine, disease and exile.  
But now, once more, God will increase their people like a flock.

The way he puts it is quite vivid:

<sup>38</sup>*Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts,*

For the exiles, longing for Jerusalem, this would have brought tears to their eyes!  
Do you remember the feast days in Jerusalem?  
Do you remember how the flocks of sheep would fill the streets  
so that you could barely walk?  
the shepherds trying to keep them moving in the right direction –  
parents trying to keep their bare-footed children from stepping in the results...

Thousands of sheep being driven through the streets to the temple,  
so that the priests could offer the sacrifices!

*so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people.*

You shall be my sacrificial flock!  
That's the closest Ezekiel will come in this chapter to giving genuine comfort!  
I will increase my people so that they can be a flock for sacrifice.

That's good news, right?  
Yes, it is!  
As Jesus said, “if anyone would come after me,

let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me!”

When your lord and master is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,  
then to be Jesus’ little lamb, is to accept his call to lay down your life for others!

If you are not convinced by such arguments,  
consider how Paul says it in Philippians 2:17,  
“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering  
upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.”

Jesus is the Lamb of God.

We are his sacrificial flock – as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices before him.

*Then they will know that I am the LORD.”*