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A Pilgrim Mind, Part 6

Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

The word for “mind” is φρονέω (*phroneō*) which references far more than a person’s thoughts. It denotes a mindset, disposition, and so the mental processing of the things of this life. As the focus here is that of the “mind of Christ,” the command is for the Christian to process this world – to look at it- the way Christ does!

Talk about captivating! Do you understand it is possible — in fact it is commanded — that you and I process this world the same way as does God:

- To see life as He sees it.
- To hear it as He does.
- To view the world as He views it.

And so to respond to the contingencies of life as God Himself would if He were in our situation!¹

We learn that on account of the Fall, the non-Christian's mental process is broken; he has a darkened understanding:

Ephesians 2:3: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience [that is, the spirit of the age]. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind [this is the key word here], and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."-

Notice, the non-believer's problem is NOT only that they have improper desires, passions, motives, and goals (that is what is referenced here as "the desires of the flesh"), BUT their ability to process this world is broken! So, what do you suppose God does at salvation?

1 John 5:20a, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding..."-

The word for "understanding" here is the same word used in Ephesians 2:3 for the non-believer's darkened mind. When Christ saves an individual, He gives them a new tool with which to process life- He "renews their mind." And so, now as redeemed individuals we have two systems with which to process the things of this life:

- (1) The fallen mind and
- (2) The redeemed mind! As that is the case, notice the exhortation of Scripture as it relates to the child of God...

Ephesians 4:22-23, "In reference to your former manner of life, ...lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and... be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Do you understand what this means? It is possible to be saved and yet process this world from the perspective of our flesh/fallenness! In fact, the two approaches end in drastically different places.

Romans 8:6, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

How do we avoid using our fallen mind to process the things of this life? Answer: We have to

labor to inform our renewed mind with truth, which is why Paul gave this exhortation:

Romans 12:2a, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

There is no question that the process of renewing our minds involves re-educating ourselves in the truth of God’s word! That is where Ezekiel illumines our minds. It is 585 BC and God’s people arrived in Babylon having been ripped from their homes, their nation, and their religion! The question before them now was:

- What were they to think?
- How were they to process what just happened to them?
- Is their religion a sham?
- Is the teaching of Yahweh a joke?
- If God truly is THE God of the universe, is He good?
- Why the trial and difficulty?

As we have seen, God answers these questions. This is how God would have all His people process the trials and difficulties of this life. We could summarize another exhortation that Ezekiel gives with the exhortation of Peter.

1 Peter 1:13b, “...fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

We need this so that we may know that God keeps His promises.

Ezekiel 39:27-28, “When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them *again* to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer.”

This is an interesting result of the exile. God’s dealings with Babylon (by which the Lord proclaimed His sovereignty, omnipotence, and goodness, Dan. 2-6) notwithstanding, the initial response of the nations to The Exile was one of arrogance and a sense of superiority by which they looked down upon God. Speaking of the exile, God told the Babylonians:

Isaiah 47:6, “I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage, and gave them into your hand...”

Way before the exile occurred (Isaiah was written in 740 BC), God knew that the initial response of the nations to the exile would be twofold:

- (1) Denunciation
- (2) Arrogance

The text continues:

Isaiah 47:6b-7a, "...You did not show mercy to them, on the aged you made your yoke very heavy. Yet you said, 'I shall be a queen forever'..."

The exile "profaned God's heritage" and left the door open for the Babylonians to mock NOT ONLY God's people, BUT the Lord- which they did, "I shall be a queen forever!" And yet, it wasn't just the Babylonians... it also was God's people.

Isaiah 48:1-6, "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel and who came forth from the loins of Judah, who swear by the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel, *but* not in truth nor in righteousness. [Their devotion to the Lord was only external!!!] For they call themselves after the holy city [rather than God], and lean on the God of Israel [yet we know it was all a show- for one thing escaped their notice...]; the Lord of hosts is His name [God is the great 'I Am' before whom nothing is hidden. Speaking of the exile, God continued...]. 3 I declared the former things long ago and they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them [IOW, the exile should NOT have been a shock to God's people; He predicted it centuries before, specifically here!!!]. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your forehead bronze, therefore I declared *them* to you long ago, before they took place I proclaimed *them* to you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.'" -

Amazing! NOT ONLY would God's name be profaned among the nations, BUT the overwhelming temptation amongst God's own people would be to question the sovereignty and/or goodness of God! See, when God entered into a relationship with Abraham, the Lord gave him a series of promises (cf. Genesis 12:1-3)! In Genesis 15, God summarized the promises He made to Abraham.

Genesis 15:1, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.'"

Then in Genesis 17, God extended these blessings to the children of Abraham:

Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."

Because of this, God's people falsely concluded that it did NOT matter what they did, God had to protect them (it is as if they'd won the lottery). If God didn't, then the question naturally would have been asked, "Did God forsake His people?"

That is the point of Ezekiel 39:27b. God has deigned to be “sanctified [that is, set apart and so understood to be the only wise, powerful, holy, and gracious God] through them [His people- which includes you and me] in the sight of the many nations”! Now this is the question of the hour: How would He bring about this vindication? By fulfilling His promises to them.

Ezekiel 39:28, “Then they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, AND THEN [I] gathered them *again* to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer.”- again, this clearly could NOT be speaking of any event that has occurred in Redemptive or World History; the final statement in v. 28 bears it out, “...and I will leave none of them there any longer.”

Accordingly, this most certainly is speaking about the Final State! At that time, God will vindicate His name (v. 27)!² We need to understand Paul’s exhortation:

2 Corinthians 1:20, “For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

Every promise God ever made to His Old Testament people are fulfilled in Christ! That having been said, what is the point? At that time the unbelieving world — ALL OF IT — will behold God’s Redeeming Work (in which not one of His promises have failed) and then they will profess that God truly does keep His promises to the praise of the glory of God!³

That is the point of the text Ezekiel 39. Though sometimes God’s providence seems like a setback (both in His Kingdom and in our lives) nevertheless it is God’s plan to bring maximum glory to Himself in the end, by fulfilling all His promises!

In this regard, think with me... which is more glorious/amazing? A dominant sports team soundly beating another team as everyone would expect? Or a last-minute buzzer beater/touchdown where the underdog comes out on top? It’s the latter AND it is how God says He works in the text before us!

According to Ezekiel 39:27-28, God’s modus operandi when it comes to His promises is to bring the child of God to the brink of disaster only then to bring about His good purpose in their lives! This means the Christian life — your life — is intended to be a buzzer-beater that proclaims to the nations the glory and goodness of God! Isn’t that what happened in Abraham’s life? Romans 4 speaking of Abrahams says:

Romans 4:18a, “In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations...”

How was God gloried through Abraham? The Lord fulfilled a promise He made to Abraham when all hope had come to an end! Do you see? We have a fourth quarter God!!

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego all went through the fire! They were NOT spared!
- Joseph spent years in a pit in Egypt!
- Noah endured a world-wide flood!
- So many prophets were martyred!
- All the apostles save one suffered horrible deaths

Yet in and through it all not one of His promises failed!

Consider the metaphor Paul used: Our lives are the strophe's of a poem- "we are God's workmanship," Ephesians 2:10- which God intends the whole world to read and digest. We need to ask, what is God's intended message? As any good story/poem, through tension and release it is God's intention to vindicate His name through the deliverances He effects on behalf of His people!

This is the fifth purpose behind the trials and difficulties of life! They are given that God might be glorified when "in hope against hope" He fulfills His promises to His people!

This brings us to the last reason for the exile- and this one is directed at God's people, that God's people might understand that central to the Lord's plan is the salvation of all people's to Himself.

Ezekiel 39:29, "'And I will not hide My face from them any longer [this speaks of a blessing that could never be lost], for I shall have poured out My Spirit⁴ on the house of Israel,' declares the Lord God."

This is an important statement which once again points to a different age than the one in which Ezekiel lived. We understand that throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit of God indwelt believers. Think of it! According to Galatians 3, the salvation we enjoy today was and is the salvation any genuine believer enjoyed as a descendent of Abraham.

Galatians 3:13-14, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us- for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT through faith."

If you are in Christ, then you have joined with the many who were genuinely saved in the Old Testament era! And how were they saved? According to this passage, they received "the promised Spirit⁵ [the Holy Spirit] through faith!"⁶ OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS WERE INDWELT BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD! And thus, we read:

1 Peter 1:10-11, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you [Peter is talking here about the Old Testament prophets — how they...] made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ WITHIN THEM was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the

glories to follow.”

There is no question that the salvation enjoyed in the Old Testament — as it is now enjoyed by all in Christ — occurred through the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

Yet you ask, “If the Spirit of God has always indwelt believers, then what is being spoken about here when it references the ‘pouring out of the Spirit of God’?” The answer to this question is of emphasis (not a change in program).

- Prior to the New Testament, the Spirit of God clearly indwelt and so engifted believers the way He does today (as we just saw). Yet His work was rarely spoken about, seen, or emphasized. Clearly the Spirit of God was content to dwell in the shadows!
- But with the advent of the final age — the New Covenant — the Person and work of the Holy Spirit came out of the shadows such that our understanding of the Spirit of God has been radically advanced. While He still is the shy member of the Godhead, nevertheless His presence is now seen and felt!

Ezekiel 39:29 references that time when the work of the Spirit of God would be more prominent amongst God’s people, “I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel.”⁷ And when would that be?

The answer is found in Acts 2. Ezekiel 39:29 actually is repeated in Isaiah 32:15, Joel 2:28, and Acts 2; the latter of which gives us an explanation of what ultimately was in mind when God gave the promise here in Ezekiel 39. Luke, endeavoring to explain what was happening at Pentecost wrote:

Acts 2:14-17, 33, 36, “But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: ‘Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: “‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.’” 33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear... 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ- this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Based on this commentary on Joel 2 and Ezekiel 39, when we think of the Old Testament promises of the “pouring forth of the Spirit of God” we understand them to be in reference to the New Covenant when God would return to this earth in Christ, restore the Kingdom that was lost at the Fall, and so begin reigning with His people now composed both of Jews and Gentiles!

That is the final point that Ezekiel makes in explaining the hardship and judgment that God’s

people just underwent. Through the trials and difficulties of life, it is God's intention to bring the gospel to ALL PEOPLES, "'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind!'"⁸ This is massively significant!

In theology we call this The Redemptive Principle. This principle simply states that every providence of the Lord is designed by God to glorify Himself by saving people from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (cf. Revelation 5:9)! In other words, in everything God does, He is Christ-centered! Did you get that? God is NOT man-centered in His providences; which is what many would have us believe. We want to live in a world where God is sensitive to our day, what is going on, our wants and needs! Christ, God is NOT man-centered in His providences! RATHER, He is Christ-centered and so focused upon the Redeeming Work that Jesus came to do!

See the Theocracy was never God's ultimate plan for His people! For that matter, neither are money, health, jobs, fulfillment, etc. If you and I could only understand this our entire world would be turned upside down. On every providence in our life, you must come to see one word, "Opportunity!" — the opportunity to be used by God to honor His name and so bring about His redemptive purpose. Paul clearly lived with this understanding:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23, "For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

You say, this doesn't touch upon the trials of life. Did Paul receive the trials of life as opportunity to honor God by bringing Christ to others? Indeed, he did.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

That is the sixth and final reason for the trials and difficulties of life!

Note(s)

¹ That in essence is what it means to pray “in Jesus’s name.” When we say this, essentially we are saying, “This I believe is the prayer that Christ Himself would pray if He were in my situation.”

² Recall how discouraging it was to Daniel that so few Jews returned to Jerusalem when they had the chance (cf. Dan. 10:2-3)! Never has nor will there be a time in this age when every servant of Christ is gathered into Palestine. This could and will only be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Christ.

³ It is what we read in Philippians 2:9-11. Speaking of Christ and the last day, “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is where world history is headed! In all that God is doing, it is His plan to vindicate His name through us by fulfilling every promise He made to us in Christ!

⁴ The Hebrew here utilizes the prophetic perfect which would be translated, “I have poured out My Spirit.” In other words, God’s future blessing is so sure, Ezekiel could speak of it as if it were a past reality!!!

⁵ This translation is supported by Ronald Y. K. (NICNT, pp. 151-152) and Fung H. Schlier (*Der Brief an die Galater* [KEK; Göttingen, 1965]).

⁶ R. Alan Cole wrote, “The promise to Abraham is nothing less than the gift of the Spirit, the distinguishing mark of the child of God. That is why Paul speaks so much of the Spirit in this letter, for the Spirit is not peripheral, but central to his argument.” (*Galatians*, TNTC, p. 144)

⁷ There is a twist here. Throughout Ezekiel we read of God “pouring out His judgment” upon His people. Here God takes up the same language, but this time to denote the richest of blessing, “I will pour out My Spirit.”

⁸ Once again, we see this clearly in the parallel passage, Ezekiel 36:24-28, “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. 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. 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. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. [Where ultimately does salvation lead?] And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.” Last time we considered the timing of this promise and saw that it could only be in reference the salvation we have in Christ- a salvation that begins in this age and continues into the age to come!