

²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. ²³ And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. ²⁴ For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. ²⁸ Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will deliver you from all your uncleanness.’”

Text: Ezekiel 36:22-29a A Pentecost 5-20-18 Ac. 2: 1-21 Jn. 14:25-27 Ps. 51 Resp. Ps.: 32
Hymns: 227, 229, 234, 777

GOD’S GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE

Holy Ghost, with light divine Shine upon this heart of mine;
Chase the shades of night away, Turn the darkness into day.

Let me see my Savior’s face, Let me all His beauties trace;
Show those glorious truths to me Which are only known to Thee.

Holy Ghost, with power divine Cleanse this guilty heart of mine;
In Thy mercy pity me, From sin’s bondage set me free. (TLH #234:1-3)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

In Ephesians 2:12 Paul gives the chilling description of unbelievers as “*having no hope and without God in the world.*” Thank God that in His grace – God’s undeserved love for us sinners – He saved us. Today we’re going to consider **GOD’S GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE**. On this Pentecost Sunday, we’ll see the essential role the Holy Spirit plays in our deliverance.

Ezekiel lived at the same time as Jeremiah and Daniel. Ezekiel served his fellow Jews in Babylon during the Babylonian captivity.

The heathen nations at that time believed that if a nation was powerful it was because its gods were powerful, and if a nation was weak it was because its gods were weak. The Israelites had rebelled against God in unbelief. God had allowed the Babylonians to defeat the Israelites to

punish them and to try to humble them and turn them back to Himself. The heathen nations thought the Jews had been defeated because their ‘god’ was weak. In this way the Israelites had “*profaned,*” or dishonored God’s name among the heathen nations (Ezek. 36:16-21).

God told Ezekiel, “*Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I do not do this for your sake, ... but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations.... And I will sanctify My great name...; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord ... when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, ... and bring you into your own land.”’*” The only way God could restore the honor of His name before the heathen nations was by delivering the Israelites from the Babylonians, which God eventually did. As we’ll see, this pictured God’s deliverance for us all through Jesus.

God had told the Israelites about their future deliverance, “*I do not do this for your sake, ... but for My holy name’s sake.*” Defeated and taken into captivity in Babylon, things were bad for the nation of Israel. But God is a God of grace. The Israelites did not deserve it, still God in His grace would deliver them. “*For the Lord will not cast off forever*” Scripture says. “*Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies*” (Lam. 3:31-32). In delivering the Israelites God would show the heathen nations that He is a loving, forgiving God who saves His people.

None of us is deserving of God’s mercy. If God treated us as we deserve, every one of us would be punished and condemned to hell. The psalmist says, “*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities*” (the idea from the original text being that if God held onto our sins and didn’t let them go), “*O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared*”: held in awe (Ps. 130:3-4). God assures us in His Word, “*I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions*” not because we deserve it but “*for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins*” (Is. 43:25).

God told the Israelites through Ezekiel, “*I will take you from among the nations, ... and bring you into your own land.*” This isn’t referring only to the Jews. After the Babylonian captivity was over, only some of the Jews returned to Israel. Many chose to stay in Babylon. And many other Jews were scattered throughout other nations. God was especially promising to deliver spiritual Israel – the Christian Church – all who believe in Him. God said, “*I will take you..., gather you..., and bring you....*” Jesus says, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*” (Jn. 6:44a). Our salvation isn’t by anything we do, but completely by what God does for us. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not from works, lest anyone should boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9).

God told His people, “*Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.*” God would deliver His people outwardly by bringing them back to their homeland after their captivity in Babylon. God’s real

deliverance for His people would be an inner deliverance by cleansing them from their sin and idolatry. Jesus says, *“If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed”* (Jn. 8:36)

Peter once fell down at Jesus’ feet and declared, *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”* (Lk. 5:8). Peter knew he was a sinner who didn’t deserve to be in the presence of the holy Son of God. Even at our ‘best’ how absolutely filthy and disgusting we sinners must appear before the perfect, holy God!

Yet because, as Paul says, *“Christ died for the ungodly”* (Ro. 5:6), then *“God justifies the ungodly”* (Ro. 4:5). Jesus paid for all of our sins by His death on the cross, and took them all away. God assures us, *“I will cleanse you from all your filthiness.”* John says that *“the blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn. 1:7). We guilty sinners have been washed clean by Jesus’ blood. For Jesus’ sake God declares us to be righteous in His sight.

Referring to cleansing His Old Testament people from their sins God said, *“I will sprinkle clean water on you.”* We New Testament people of God think of being cleansed by water and the Word in our baptism. Scripture says, *“Be baptized and wash away your sins”* (Ac. 22:16). *“Christ ... loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word”* (through baptism!), *“that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph. 5:25-27).

God told His people, *“I will cleanse you ... from all your idols”* – from worshiping the pagan gods of the nations around them. God cleanses us from the influence of the unbelieving world, and from everything we let get between us and Him. We pray with the psalmist, *“Lord, ... give me an undivided heart”* (Ps. 86:11, NIV) – a heart completely devoted to Him.

The Bible says, *“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:3b). The Holy Spirit must work faith in our hearts. God told His people, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”* This the Holy Spirit did whenever He converted a Jew who had hardened his heart against Him in unbelief. God removed his *“heart of stone”* – God changed his dead, unbelieving heart, into a *“heart of flesh”* – a living, believing heart. Scripture says, *“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* (Eph. 2:4-5). Thank God who has given each of us a living, believing heart!

God told His people, *“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”* The Bible says, *“It is God who is at work in you both to will”* (to want to do) *“and to do ... His good pleasure”* (Philip. 2:13). We have our believing

heart from God. But we also have our sinful flesh – our sinful human nature – that fights God and His Word, and wants to go its own way. God told His people, “*I will deliver you*” (from the original also, “*I will save you*”) “*from all your uncleannesses.*” God saves us from our sinful selves. With the psalmist we say to God, “*I will run in the way of Your commandments for You shall enlarge my heart*” (Ps. 119:32). We ask the Holy Spirit to help us, and He strengthens us to resist our sinful flesh and “*run in the way of [God’s] commandments.*”

God told the Israelites, “*You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.*” The immediate fulfillment of this was with the Jews who returned to Israel at the end of the Babylonian Captivity. There was a time of spiritual revival among them. Sadly, most of those in future generations fell away from God.

When God said, “*You shall be My people, and I will be your God,*” the real fulfillment is with spiritual Israel – all believers. Paul says in the third chapter of Galatians, “*Know that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham. ... And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise*” (vv. 7, 29, NASB). Everyone who believes in Jesus is one of God’s people.

Jesus said to His Father, “*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (Jn. 17:3). By faith in Jesus we have eternal life, right now in this life and forever in heaven! The Bible says of us believers in heaven, “*God ... will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God*” (Rev. 21:3).

“*I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols.*” *I will give you a new heart.*” “*I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.*” “*You shall be My people, and I shall be your God.*” “Lord God, thank You for Your gracious deliverance.”

Holy Ghost, with joy divine Cheer this saddened heart of mine;
Yield a sacred, settled peace, Let it grow and still increase.

Holy Spirit, all divine, Dwell within this heart of mine;
Cast down every idol throne, Reign supreme, and reign alone.

See, to Thee I yield my heart, Shed Thy life through every part;
A pure temple I would be, Wholly dedicate to Thee. Amen. (TLH #234:5-7)