

**Introduction:**

A. *Illus.*: **A. J. Jacobs**, a thoroughly secular writer living in New York, decided to try to live for one year obeying the Bible literally. He started from scratch by buying a stack of Bibles and reading them voraciously. He told his fascinating story in *The Year of Living Biblically*. One thing he set out to do in order to obey the Bible was pray. This is what happened the first time:

As for what to say, I'm not sure. I don't feel confident enough to improvise yet, so I've memorized a few of my favorite prayers from the Bible. I walk into our living room, stand in front of our brown sectional couch, hold out my arms, bow my head, and, in a low but clear voice, recite this passage from the Book of Job: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

It's a beautiful passage, but I feel odd uttering it. I've rarely said the word Lord, unless it's followed by *of the Rings*. I don't often say God without preceding it with *Oh my*.

The whole experience is making me uncomfortable. My palms are sweaty. I'm trying to speak with earnest intent, but it feels like I'm transgressing on two separate levels. First, I feel like I'm violating some sort of taboo issued by the agnostic high priests. Worse, what if I'm breaking the third Commandment? If I don't believe the holy words I'm saying, isn't that taking the Lord's name in vain?

I glance at the clock. I've been praying only for a minute. I've promised myself I'd try to pray for at least ten minutes three times a day.

So I get back to work. I squint my eyes and try to visualize Him. It's a fiasco...

- B. Jacobs' problem is not that he doesn't know how to pray. It is that he doesn't know the LORD. I don't only mean that he doesn't have a relationship with the LORD. He doesn't understand who the God of the Scriptures really is at heart. He doesn't know what the LORD is like, so then he doesn't know how to pray.
- C. He's not the only one. I dare say there are people here this morning who don't really know the LORD. You may know that the name, the LORD (when it is in all caps in our Bibles), signifies the Hebrew word, *Yahweh*, what we used to call *Jehovah*. *Yahweh* is God's personal name, not his title. His people were taught to call him by that name because it is the name he used in his covenant with them. It means *I AM*. But we may not realize who we're dealing with when we come to worship God whose name is *Yahweh*.  
**And that is a precarious ignorance!**
- D. For six weeks we're studying a few chapters in the center of the OT book of Ezekiel. Turn to **Ezek. 36**. Have you picked up what the most common phrase is in Ezekiel? God says, "Then you will know that I am the LORD," (or a close variation) 75 times! 75 times!! The only other book in the Bible to use that phrase frequently is Exodus, which is no coincidence, because both Exodus and Ezekiel are about God's amazing deliverance of his people from captivity.
- E. If you've been here the last few Sundays you know that Ezekiel was a prophet to the people of Israel after they were conquered by the Babylonians about 600 years before Christ. The shattered remnant who survived were carried into captivity nearly 1000 miles away. They had it comin' to 'em because they refused to know the LORD. It wasn't just a matter of understanding. It was a matter of obedience. Listen to **Ezek 7:27**, "*The king will mourn, the prince will*

*be clothed with despair, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them.*

*“Then they will know that I am the LORD.”*” God says that kind of thing to Israel over and over. He also says it to the surrounding nations when he vows to punish them for the way they disdained his people and land. *“Then **they** will know that I am the LORD.”*

- F. Ezekiel 33-39 has been called the Gospel of Ezekiel because despite God’s terrible sentence upon his people, God sends them good news—gospel—through Ezekiel. This morning we’re looking at the second half, **36:16-38**.
- G. God tells us here what a terrible bind *he* was in, and how he resolved it, in order that we might know what it means that he is the LORD. Everything that God does here arises from *“the holiness of his great name.”* **To know God as the LORD, watch how he displays the holiness of his great name.**

Listen to how this prophecy begins in v.16: *“Again the word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions.’”* Here is one thing that we must know about the LORD:

### **I. THE LORD GOD WILL NOT OVERLOOK SIN (36:16-23)**

- A. When I was a college student at Trinity a professor told us that no other religion or philosophy treats sin as a serious issue except the Judeo-Christian tradition. Others may talk about sin, like Islam for example, but isn’t seen as a deadly and impenetrable obstacle to a relationship with God.

In Israel’s case God’s good and sacred land was desecrated—made unholy—by their sin. **V.18** says, *“they had shed blood in the land and defiled it with their idols.”*

They were guilty of both violence against one another and idolatry, worshipping other gods right in full view of the LORD! Israel clearly didn't know the LORD because they didn't take his repeated warnings of judgment seriously. And that is still true. People—including religious and even some evangelical people—do not take seriously the threat of God's judgment. They don't know that the LORD takes sin personally.

- B. So God punished them severely. Many were killed by enemies or famine, and those who survived were carried off into exile, while their homes, walls and temple were destroyed. **But that created another problem for the LORD.** Look at **vv.19-21**, *“I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’ I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.”*

When he says they profaned his name, he means that made it common instead of great. Like when people use God's name casually: “O Gawd.” They reduce it, make it ordinary, use the very names of God, the Lord, Jesus, and Christ like insignificant, even vulgar, punctuation, nothing more than oral italics or exclamation points. In Israel's case, it was worse because on account of them the Sovereign LORD was downgraded in the eyes of the nations to a defeated local deity.

The commentator, **Christopher Wright**, writes [pp.289-290, BST]:

Picture the Israelite prisoners of war arriving in the countries they passed through on the ghastly journey from fallen Jerusalem into exile, and then eventually in Babylon itself. Local people would ask each other, “Who are these people?”

“Israelites from the land of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar has captured their city and deported the survivors.”

“What’s the name of their god, then?”

“Yahweh, or so I’ve heard.”

“So they are Yahweh’s people but they’ve been expelled from Yahweh’s land! Yahweh is not much of a god, then, is he? No better than the gods of all the other nations our great king has conquered. Glory to Marduk!”

- C. So God says in **vv.22-23**, *“Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.’”*

**What stands out to you there?** God’s jealousy to preserve his great and holy name. Did you realize that God felt so strongly about his name? That’s one of the things he means when he says, *“Then you will know that I am the LORD.”* He means, *You need to know “the holiness of my great name.”*

He says in **v.23**, *“Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy **through** you before their eyes.”* Wait! *“Proved holy*

*through Israel*”?? They were the problem in the first place. How can he prove his name holy through the likes of them? It can't be through their punishment because the nations were misinterpreting that as God's weakness. So how then? How well do you know the LORD?

## II. THE LORD SHOWS THE HOLINESS OF HIS GREAT NAME THROUGH GRACE TO HIS PEOPLE (36:24-38)

- A. God had indicted the Jews on multiple counts. As we've seen, their very presence in Babylon instead of their own land profaned his name. They were deeply stained and dirty by their violence and idolatry. They were wicked through and through, heart and spirit. Their sin was so deep-seated they could not reform. Consequently, they were outcasts, refugees. They had no land. No city. No temple. And there was not a thing they could do about that. **God had proved himself holy by indicting and judging them, not letting them get away with such terrible sins against him.** But that's what put him in that bind. To punish them had left him open to the scorn of other nations as a weak god.
- B. So what is God's plan to prove himself holy through Israel before the eyes of the nations? He details it in **vv.24-38, a catalog of amazing graces.** They were fulfilled in one way in the years following Israel's exile but they are fulfilled in a much more wonderful and widespread way through Jesus Christ now and in God's kingdom to come. Let's walk through these verses:
1. **V.24**, *“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.”* God would bring the Jews back from Babylon, to their homeland, a second Exodus. Can you imagine their joy? The miracle of being rescued

and gathered home miraculously by God himself? How much more when the Son of Man “*will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*” Mt 24:30-31

2. Ezekiel continues in **v.25**, “*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.*” Sin creates indelible stains on our lives. *Illus.*: I talked to a young friend who told me that a few years ago when he was in high school he took a sweat test, to see if his body was sweating properly. Problem was it turned his skin very purple, and nothing would wash it away. Not for days. It was humiliating to go to school that way, so he wore a hoody despite the rules, and when his teachers saw his condition, they didn’t object! **Sin does that to us.** We are stained, and nothing we do can make it go away. Saying you’re sorry doesn’t undo your past. It doesn’t make you clean.

God starts the cleansing with a kind of pre-wash prayer that he stirs within us, like David’s in Ps.51: *Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop [dipped in lamb’s blood], and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

God answers that prayer through the death and resurrection of Jesus. **1 Tim 3:5** says, “*when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...*”

3. That leads us to **v.26-27**, “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from*

*you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*

From God’s perspective, our heart and spirit; i.e., our mind and desires, can’t be rehabilitated. They must be made new. Recreated. Born again. So that’s what the LORD will do. What’s more, the new Spirit will be God’s own Holy Spirit, who can move us to loving obedience from the inside out. So the Bible says, *“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here.”* [2 Cor 5:17]

4. **Vv.28**, *“Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”* That is the familiar summary of God’s covenant with his people. The Jews were brought home to their land and their renewed covenant relationship with God. Now all of us who have been grafted into the people of God have this same promise. God will create a new heaven and a new earth, with the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, at its center. Then it will be said, *“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*
5. **Vv.29-30**, *“I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine.”* There is the picture of a God-blessed people. Saved. Satisfied. Honored. Blessed.
6. **Vv.31-32** sound jarring; a guilt-inducing downer: *“Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds,*



*and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!”* That sounds like a very grudging grace, doesn’t it? But we do this all the time, and gladly.

*“My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”*

*“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.”*

*“Died he for me who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love, how can it be,  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”*

We remember our sins, to be sure, but without the crushing weight of guilt.

Illus.: Years ago I read a story about a man named Kefa who came to Christ during the terrible time of Christian suffering in Uganda under Idi Amin. Kefa wrote of going to a meeting where people were publicly confessing their sins and finding God’s forgiveness. Each time someone confessed sin, the congregation would break into songs of praises for the blood of the Lamb. When Kefa mustered the courage to confess his sins, the same thing happened. When he sat down a man came and embraced him and said, *“This is victory, brother!”* Later a church leader explained, *“What we hear is not your sin, but God’s work in your life. We hear you giving witness to God’s power to break the chains of sin.”* [#1401, K Sempangi, *A Distant Grief*, p.37-38]

7. **Vv.33-36**, “*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “**This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden**; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.” **Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the Lord have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.**”* Israel at various times after that has flowered like a garden, but it would be a stretch to describe it as being “like the garden of Eden.” But there is coming a day when our homeland will make Eden pale by comparison. My Bible gives Rev. 22, the last chapter in the Bible, the heading, “Eden restored.”

Listen to **vv.1-5**:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

8. There is one more vivid description in **Ezek. 36:37-38**, *“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Once again I will yield to Israel’s plea and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed festivals. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. **Then they will know that I am the LORD.**”* Two weeks ago Jamie showed us in Ezek. 34 how God’s people were a flock waiting for God’s Good Shepherd. Here again they’re pictured as a flock, but not out in the fields. They are like the thousands of sheep brought to Jerusalem during festivals as sacrifices. But God’s people will be a peculiar kind of sacrifice—living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. There will be a day when God’s people are a nation of living sacrifices, wholly and happily devoted to serving the LORD. **Rev. 22:3** says, *“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.”*

## Conclusion

If you don’t know first-hand, in your own experience, those things about the LORD and his holy name, you don’t know the LORD God. Your sin is no less serious than Israel’s was. God’s judgment on you is as sure as it was on them. But God desires to prove the greatness of his name, Yahweh, **through you**; in your life. He wants *your* life to be a showcase of his grace to those around you. He wants to save *you*, cleanse *you*, give *you* a new heart and spirit—his own *Spirit*. He wants to give *you* a homeland and a people, and have *you* with him forever.

**“Then you will know that I am the LORD.”**