**Restoration for The New Year**

***22****“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.****23****And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.****24****I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.****25****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.****26****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.****27****And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.****28****You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.****29****And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.****30****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.*

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***33****“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.****34****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.****35****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.’****36****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. (Ezekiel 36:22-30, 33-36, ESV)*

 God, for the sake of His glory, will restore us his people, and it will be evident in our lives. May it be a happy new year to all of you, and I hope that you are already celebrating a blessed Christmas/Nativity season. On the occasion of the start of a new year, I believe that God has prepared a beautiful year of restoration for us as God’s people. I believe it will be a year of restoration of hearts, minds, and lifestyles unto God. Every new year brings its ups and downs, and before I begin this message, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our church members and those present at APC. Be they elders, deacons, or those that served or attended, I want you to know that you have all been blessings, you have all prayed, and you have desired the best for us, both individually as pastor and my pastoral family. May the Lord give you all the heavenly graces of his Holy Spirit, and may his fruits be even more evident in all of us in this upcoming year. If mistakes or misunderstandings happened, or if there was some angst between us, let us come together and forgive each other, whether the issues are between you and me or between yourselves among your family members. Forgive me, forgive each other, and let us be a people that forgives, strives to understand each other, and loves each other in God. Let us be renewed by God who is a Restorer, he who sent Jesus and made renewal available once and for all through the sending of his Holy Spirit. Again, getting back to our theme, I believe that God will be renewing us this year for his glory as his people, and that this process is going to be fruit that will be evident in our external lives. Let us meditate aloud a bit more.

 God is a Renewing God – this threshold of a new year is an opportunity to turn to him and to be renewed. The book of Ezekiel, from which our passage is taken, is recorded during the exile of God’s people to Babylon, later becoming Persia because of Darius’ the Mede’s takeover. It is very likely that Ezekiel was the high priest of Israel in exile there, and his book is filled with startling visionary experiences. In addition to those, he also conveyed a number of rebukes from God to his own people. Today’s passage is a more “hopeful rebuke,” if there ever was such a thing. God was saying in his mercy, that he would bless the people even though they had not been obedient to him. He was going to sanctify his own name, in other words his own reputation and bring it back to its deserved high honor and praise. He was going to bring unity among his people and gather them in one place, a kingdom which he would establish through them. He was going to cleanse them both from uncleanness and idolatry – he would give them a new heart. Even more startling, he was going to give them his Spirit, for the first time as an internal gift. They would have his watchful eye over them according to his promise, and he even promised to resolve their endless economic and geographic security issues. However, his intent was that they would be ashamed of their mistreatment of him and that they would hate their own sins and abominations and turn to him again. He was also doing this so that his own name would not be an evil one among the nations – since his name had been denigrated by the behavior of his own people. He was going to right and guide his peoples’ thoughts about him by his own unilateral goodness (something totally undeserved).

 When someone has a built-up good reputation, it becomes quite painful when in response to all the good, the honest work, the humility and conscientiousness, the worker receives blemishes or slander by accusers regarding their person. What would that person do? They would either go to court against the accusers or find a way to repair their reputation. In Armenian, part of a saying goes, “May a man’s name never be mentioned.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Today, God continues to invite his people to renewal for his own reputation’s sake. We, of course, are his people. We, by our lives, either spread his good name or denigrate it. God has done such a good thing for us by sending Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to each one that receives Christ, that our only proper response is to come to him in constant renewal. God is not only ready to open back the doors of renewal through Jesus, but he is also able to renew other areas of our life as well. God is not a self-contradictory God that he sees our need but tells us, “Go and provide for your needs,” when He himself is the True Provider. Rather, as a renewing experience, the Lord wants to gather us to himself again, to give us peace within and among ourselves, to cleanse us of all unrighteous deeds and expressions. All he waits for is our realization – that his door is always open to us; that his mercy is always abundant; that his forgiveness, his power, his Spirit’s fullness is always present and able to restore us, to cleanse us, to heal us, and to help us to live out the life that he wants for us.

 God is a Restoring God, but he waits for us to return to him, to give him our burdens, to be forgiven and to forgive each other and to live so that we do not bring a blemish to his reputation. God, in this new year process, calls us to return to him and enjoy the prosperity of a year of restoration and spiritual rebuilding.

 God is going to be restoring us who are his people for his glory and that will be evident in our lives. It is only up to us to be open to that restorative process by living our lives through His Son.

 May the Lord bless you all and may this be a truly happy new year for each of us. Amen.

1. As in, may their reputation never become the topic or byword on people’s lips. May they never have a bad reputation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)