

## "Adding It All Up" Ezekiel 36:22-28 Exaudi 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Some people believe that the Old Testament is Law and the New Testament is Gospel. That is so probably because the Old Testament contains the most concise and explicit summary of the Law, the Ten Commandments, and the New Testament reveals with such clarity and simplicity the Gospel. But the Gospel is woven throughout the Old Testament, and the Law is clearly stated throughout the New Testament. The first Gospel promise is in Genesis 3:15, and the Law is nowhere clearer or more demanding than in the Sermon on the Mount. So, when you add it all up, the entire Scripture reveals both Law and Gospel.

Our text is merely seven verses long. Nevertheless, there is clear and brutally frank Law in it, and the sweetest Gospel promises. God speaks a harsh truth about the people of ancient Israel, and I suspect, more than just a little truth about us. Then He makes sweet promises to them, and us. He speaks about Baptism, conversion, Pentecost, and saving us. So, when you add it all up, God is speaking to us, through Ezekiel. Our theme, then, is, "Adding It All Up."

Ezekiel is nothing less than profound preaching of the Law. God says, throughout the entire book of Ezekiel, that He had to destroy Israel and drive His people into exile. It was part of the covenant, a

## "Adding It All Up" Ezekiel 36:22-28 Exaudi 2022

covenant which they broke egregiously. God says, in effect, that if He had permitted them to continue without striking and punishing them, He would have become an accomplice – He would share in their sin.

Ezekiel even describes the sins in the chapters surrounding our text. He says that the priests were bringing Idols. He accuses the shepherds of the people of fleecing the flock. These are unfaithful and uncaring religious leaders and teachers who used their positions for their own ends. He said it like this, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.”

God wasn't talking about real sheep, but people. He wasn't talking about real food, but the Word. He wasn't talking about real wool, but the offerings of the people. He wasn't talking about real beasts of the field as predators on His people, but false teachers, and the false religions around them.

## "Adding It All Up" Ezekiel 36:22-28 Exaudi 2022

God also charges the people themselves. He speaks of the fat sheep and the lean. Listen to a few verses from Ezekiel 34: “And as for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet? And as for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet, and they must drink what you foul with your feet!’”

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them, “Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad, therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.”

What God is referring to is the domination of one child of God by another – the rich against the poor, the aggressive or powerful over against the timid or the mild. They were manipulating one another. They were taking advantage as though their religion was theirs and for them alone, between them and God and nobody else’s business and as though they had no responsibility toward each other.

## "Adding It All Up" Ezekiel 36:22-28 Exaudi 2022

When you add it all up, the children of Israel were acting even worse than the heathen around them. Because of their behaviour, and their lack of faithfulness, the name of God was profaned. It was made into something common and dirty – like a curse word – rather than something holy and precious and to be treated with respect. Because of these things, God destroyed Israel and drove them into exile under Nebuchadnezzar.

I shudder to draw comparisons. Christians today are mocked and their God is ridiculed because of what Christians do and say, what they permit and what they deny. We often seem neither to trust God nor appreciate their faith. We too often do not live as the children of a holy God, or as those who must stand before the righteous Judge of all mankind.

How are we seen in the community? Are we viewed as the home of sound doctrine and holy people? How does the county around us see us? Are we the home of God's holy people who live in Christian love with one another, or is it possible that the name of God profaned because of us? What they see is what you show them and tell them – not what you see. When you add it all up, our faith and our faithfulness are what people see and hear. How they evaluate Christians as a whole depends entirely on what you show them and tell them.

## "Adding It All Up" Ezekiel 36:22-28 Exaudi 2022

In our text, God says that He will prove Himself holy by how He will deal with His people. Ezekiel writes, “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. 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.”

What He is talking about there is the Gospel. He gathers His people, cleanses them with water, creates a new heart within them, pours out His Spirit upon them, and gives them a land to live in. That is the Gospel. The gathering of His people is the Church. The sprinkling with clean water is Baptism. The cleansing from all our filthiness is the forgiveness of sins purchased on the cross at the price of the pains and suffering and death of the very Son of God. It is our sins that are our idols – the idols mentioned by Ezekiel above – or we make idols of ourselves. When God calls us by the Gospel and enlightens us with His gifts and makes us His people, that is when He gives us the new heart, taking our stony and sinful hearts and giving us the hearts of tender

## "Adding It All Up" Ezekiel 36:22-28 Exaudi 2022

flesh, hearts that can love, and forgive, one another. He pours out His Spirit through Word and Sacrament and teaches us to love Him and do His will by forgiveness and grace.

When you add it all up, what God would have us known for is Jesus Christ, that He died on the cross for us, and that we have been redeemed and made holy by His blood and by His love. God would make His name holy among us and the people we live with by Baptism, and by our cheerful and willing witness to His good grace and love in Jesus Christ. He would have us be known for living out the forgiveness He has won for us, and His name made holy through us -- His holiness demonstrated through our faith, our love for one another, and our faithfulness to Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.