

Not for our sake, but for God's

Obviously most of the Bible is not included in the three-year cycle of lectionary readings for our worship services. We “hear” all the missing words from God only if we read through the Bible in our devotions and/or participate in a Bible study.

There are many Scripture passages I wish were in the lectionary. One is Ezekiel 36, the whole chapter, but especially vss. 16-27:

The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, **they profaned my holy name**, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ But **I had concern for my holy name**, which the house of Israel **had profaned among the nations** to which they came.

“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. 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. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 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. 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**. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

God's chosen people had profaned his name in their homeland, and then profaned his name when he scattered them abroad. How did they profane his name? Luther's explanation of the first petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism (“Hallowed be thy name.”) sums it up well:

How does this [hallowing God's name] come about? Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God's children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches profanes the name of God among us. Preserve us from this, heavenly Father!

In other words, Israel's false teaching and sinful behavior had given God a bad name, a bad reputation. Through Ezekiel he tells his people that he will rescue them, but not for their sake. He will act for the sake of his name.

We are no different than the house of Israel. False teaching, and immoral and sinful behavior are all around, including in Christian churches. We profane God's holy name. When we persist in

profaning his name I sure hope and pray he acts for the sake of his name in our midst – in our nation and our churches.

I also like this passage because of the concise, clear promise of what God must do for the sake of his name. He takes away our stone cold hearts and gives us living hearts in Jesus. He does away with our pitiful and evil human spirits, and gives us his Holy Spirit. It is the only way for God to vindicate the holiness of his great name.