

Explore the Bible: Values

January 3, 2022

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 16 focuses on Ezekiel 16:20-21; 23:36-39; Psalm 139:13-16.*

Every once in a while, we read a story of a treasure found at a garage sale, abandoned in an attic or left in a storage unit. These items sometimes are discovered to be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet to their owner, they were little more than garbage. It took an external appraisal for them to come to see just how valuable what they had actually was. Sometimes, that lesson was a blessing; other times, it came too late, and the result was only regret and questions about what might have been.

One of our biggest struggles is knowing the value of humanity. When Jesus told us we needed to, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31, NIV), he was striking at a perspective that has plagued humanity since the fall. We view ourselves as worthy of rights and privilege, even to the point of rejecting God’s law when it conflicts with our desires, but we fail to grant that worth to others. Consequently, one of the realities around us that is actually of greatest worth is viewed as something disposable and/or insignificant.

In our passages in this lesson, we first visit Ezekiel as he contrasts Israel’s perspective on life in contrast to God’s desires. In Ezekiel 16, he outlines the crassness and depravity to which Israel has fallen, highlighting several sins which they revel in. These sins reveal a disregard for God and his ways and a cheapening of the value of humanity.

In Psalm 139, the psalmist exposes the intrinsic worth of humanity by linking us intimately and significantly to our Creator. When placed together, these two passages grant us an appraisal of ourselves and others

that calls us to truly value human life and to find its worth in the one who created it.

Wrongdoing is Justified (Ezekiel 16:20-21)

Ezekiel points out in chapter 16 that Israel is committed to following other gods, while still expecting Yahweh to honor his covenant with them and to grant them protection and prosperity. Their audacity is highlighted both in their lustful pursuit of other gods, and in their destruction of their own children.

Ezekiel 16:20-21 mention Israel's activity of sacrificing their children to other gods. The images are both striking and terrifying as language of putting children through flames and "feeding" them to false gods is mentioned. When God has been abandoned, anything becomes a possibility. Indeed, how could we not see our offspring as expendable when we view the one in whose image we are all made as insignificant? When we view God through the wrong lens, it is inevitable that we will view his creation wrongly as well, and feel justified in doing so.

Callousness Becomes the Norm (Ezekiel 23:36-39)

When we justify our actions for a long enough time, developing a hardened heart to our sins and toward other people will be the result. In Ezekiel 23, the prophet has portrayed Israel and Judah as evil sisters, Oholah and Oholibah respectively. The images in this chapter are some of the most vivid and striking in the Bible. This language likely grows out of the overwhelming shame of the activities of the people and a desire by the prophet to saw something that would wake the people up from their

slumber of sinfulness.

Ezekiel couples the idolatry, sex, infanticide and murder with the worship of Israel. That the separate and totally opposite practices could be mentioned together at all shows the hardness of heart of the people. Increasingly, people in the United States see no disconnect between worshipping God and holding to the rights to abortion and euthanasia. Additionally, the plight of refugees, the homeless and the orphan also falls too many times on the deaf ears of the American churchgoer. If we are not careful, callousness, not love, will be our identifying feature.

God's Truth Revealed (Psalm 139:13-16)

There are many places one could go in Scripture to highlight God's view of the worth of humanity. Genesis 1 says we were made in his image. Revelations 21-22 highlight the resurrection and new life humanity will enjoy as God puts all things right, including bringing humanity to wholeness. In between these two is the death of the Son of God for the lives of humanity. God's word continually revisits the topic of our worth as a reflection of his glory.

Psalm 139 is one of the most intimate pictures of this truth. The language of the psalm highlights the interest and concern God puts into our very structures and declares us "remarkably and wonderfully made."

As the father of a special needs child, there have been times when I struggled with this truth, but since it is in God's word, I know it to be a truth I must accept nonetheless.

It is only when we can see humanity through the appraisal of the Creator that we can know our true worth. No human, from the womb to the oldest

among us, is trash to be discarded or looked past. May we understand and see this and receive the blessing of following God's perspective, avoiding living in the regret of another life wasted.

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