

## “Then You Will Know that I am the Lord”

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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Very often in the Prophets of the Old Testament, especially in Ezekiel, after a litany of judgments against the enemies of Israel we find the words, “And then they will know that I am the Lord” (e.g., Ezek. 25, 28, 29, 35 - 39). The general idea is that when they receive their punishment for abusing the Jews, then they will know for sure that the Lord rules, and not they themselves nor the gods of their own imaginations. As it says in Ezekiel 25, “I (the Lord) will execute great vengeance on them with furious rebukes; *and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I lay My vengeance upon them*” (v. 17).

But in the well-known vision of the resurrection of “dry bones” (ch. 37) the prophet makes it clear that he is speaking of Israel herself when he says,

“Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. *And then you shall know that I am the Lord*, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. And I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. *Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,*’ says the Lord” (vv. 12-14).

All this is interesting for a bunch of reasons, not least of which is *how* or *why* they would know, given the fact that the Lord had been doing dramatic things like this for a thousand years and they had continued to forget about Him, worshiping idols and doing all sorts of other things that not only contravened the Lord’s commandments but actually invited the suffering that they experienced generation after generation. Despite everything there was a natural tendency for them to think that the prosperity they enjoyed *until* the time of judgment was due to the very worship of those phony gods, and that the punishments they suffered were due to *rivalries among the gods* rather than their own foolishness.

So the teaching for the New Church is confirmed as we read in this passage: -

“The fact that miracles do not make any contribution towards faith becomes quite clear from the miracles performed among the Israelite people in Egypt and in the wilderness; those miracles had no effect whatever on them. Although those people had not long before seen so many miracles in Egypt, after which they had seen the (Red) Sea divided, and the Egyptians drowned in it, with the pillar of cloud going before them by day and the pillar of fire by night, and with the manna raining from heaven each day; and although they had seen Mount Sinai smoking and heard Jehovah speaking from it, and other miracles besides, nevertheless, while yet in the midst of such wonders, they fell completely away from faith, and from worship of Jehovah to calf-worship – Exod. 32:1-end” (AC 7290:3).

In addition, common sense *and* the doctrines show us that punishments in themselves don’t really change people; they only prevent or deter us from behaving in undesirable ways (see HH #543 & 550). Sure, people who endure punishment sometimes do change, but just as often they don’t; it all depends on their attitude and their *willingness* to change.

So what can we learn from these prophecies about knowing that the Lord is God? Why are they important, what do they teach us about the power of a good or bad experience to change people, and how do they affect us today? *When*, in fact, will WE ever be fully convinced of the Lord’s power and control?

Well, for a start, just as the Jews may have been convinced *in the moment* of any great miracle, so we may be convinced *in a given moment*, especially as to our faculty of understanding. After all, we know that the human understanding can be raised even into the light of heaven, complete with heavenly acknowledgments (Mark 1:24, DLW 244, etc.), but that nobody can sustain that enlightenment if he doesn’t have a compatible WILL. This applies to the natural mind as well as the spiritual, so, for example, a worldly minded person might be convinced of the Lord’s power by the sight of a natural miracle, and a spiritually minded person might be convinced by a rational argument, but in either case, if the will isn’t really in it, the conviction will quickly fade and almost any excuse will do to explain it away.

The so-called near death experience is a good example. People who have this experience are almost always profoundly affected. But some are confirmed by this in their belief in the life after death and others after a brief flirtation with belief chalk it all up to hallucinations, or some weird brain chemistry. Again, in science, the incredible order and refinement of life leads some for a while to believe in God, but when challenged it can all be explained as nothing more than natural selection and the survival of the fittest. Sometimes, too, when we listen to a powerful, articulate speaker we can see exactly what he means and believe every word – until we hear another very powerful speaker with another view. Such is the nature of our will and understanding.

In fact we know that the human mind can generally confirm whatever it wants, whether good or evil, true or false (DLW 267), *but anyone who wants to can confirm spiritual truths*, since, as the Writings say, “there is no lack of evidence” (DLW 351-357).

Digging deeper, then, for more explicit answers to our questions about what really causes a person to know the Lord, let’s turn to the context of the prophecies in Ezekiel (these are not unlike other prophecies, by the way, but we have to start somewhere...).

In this case what we might call “the prediction of conviction” begins at the end of chapter 23 and really gains momentum in chapters 25 through 39. First we read about the condemnation of Israel and Judah for their idolatry, then we note the dire predictions of judgment on the nation-states surrounding them, and finally we come to the restoration of Israel and the destruction of their final enemies, Gog and Magog (also mentioned in the book of Revelation, chapter 20 as coming from the four corners of the earth). Traditionally, of course, these prophecies have been associated with specific historical or still anticipated events actually occurring in the middle-east, but we know from the Writings for the New Church that they all represent spiritual things going on in the life of the church, or any church member.

Patently, therefore, we will never really know that the Lord is God until or unless we give up our idolatrous ways, that is, until or unless we stop worshiping the false gods of our own imagination, whatever these may be. It’s not for nothing that such worship is referred to as whoredom, since it involves the prostitution of spiritual truths for selfish gain or pleasure.

But seriously, you might ask, who does these things?

Well, let’s think. Has anyone here ever used a truth of the Word to justify some pre-conceived personal desire? What about using the Word to excuse resentment or anger, to avoid helping someone in need, or to make ourselves look or feel better than others? Basically any time we look to the Word for reasons to do what we want, or excuse ourselves from doing what we don’t want, rather than *looking for instructions* about what we should do, we are involved in a form of spiritual idolatry, maybe even spiritual prostitution. And only when we stop doing that will we be able to appreciate the Lord’s own love and power in our lives.

So the prophecies continue, railing first against the Ammonites and the Moabites to the east, then against the Philistines to the west and the people of Tyre and Sidon on the north coast, and finally against the Egyptians and the people of Seir, both to the south. We could talk for a long time about why these particular people were condemned as literal enemies of the Jews, but the real reason they are mentioned is because of what they represent – spiritually – in our lives.

You may not remember the story, but Ammon and Moab were both sons of Lot, Abraham’s brother, who were conceived through drunken, incestuous relationships with his own daughters. Of course this in itself is no reason to condemn their offspring; after all, a person has no responsibility for his own conception! Even so, *representatively* they stand for something disorderly, and in the stories of the Old Testament they did cause Israel a lot of problems. They lived outside the borders of Canaan proper, and often interfered with Israel’s ability to possess and cultivate their land. So in the Writings for the New Church we read that they represent influences that are external and not internal, natural and not spiritual, specifically the tendency we all have to qualify the goods and truths of the Word with our own worldly feelings and ideas.

The prophecy against them specifically says they would be condemned “Because [they] said ‘Aha!’ against My sanctuary when it was profaned...” (25:3) and “Because [they] say, ‘Look! The house of Judah is like all the nations...’” (25:8). In other words, the judgment was against their contempt of Israel, which represents our very own contempt for spiritual life when we favor the worldly life. And so of course! There’s no way we can experience the Lord’s love and wisdom when we have this attitude. But when we see the emptiness and the negative consequences of this focus on worldly life a way is opened for us to know the Lord.

Next in order the prophet condemns the Philistines and the people of Tyre and Sidon, all of whom were sea traders living on the coast of the Mediterranean. In a good sense these represent all who have a special interest in the truths of faith, especially as a gateway into the church. But in a perverted sense they stand for worldly reasoning about those truths, and for the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, which does away with any real responsibility to live by the commandments. They are condemned because “They bartered human lives and vessels of brass for their merchandise” (27:13) and “By the abundance of their trading became filled with violence...” (28:16). The fact that they inhabited the western parts of Canaan also signifies thought and reasoning from self since the west represents self-love.

Now it is true, some people feel a tremendous sense of the Lord’s blessing in their lives in that they believe He died for their sins and so saved them through no effort of their own. But do they really know the Lord? Not if they believe in the vicarious atonement! Not if they believe He can save us without our full co-operation. So it is in *our* lives, that when we judge and reject these concepts as completely misleading and recognize the importance of all His teachings about heavenly life, *then we will know the Lord*; then we will appreciate who He really is.

As for the Egyptians and the people of Seir – or Mt. Seir – these people to the south-west and south-east of Canaan were known for their wealth of knowledge and insight, and so they represent all those who have these riches in a spiritual sense, but who from their knowledge are inclined to arrogance and domination of others. The sun of the middle-east is brightest in the south and so the south signifies a state of enlightenment, but when this enlightenment turns to arrogance it leaves no room for the Lord’s love, and so what wisdom they have is perverted and becomes destructive. As the prophet said, “The pride of her power shall come down” (30:6) and her own anger and hatred will be turned against her (35:11).

Here again we read a message of repentance, a warning to shun the evils of intellectual arrogance and contempt of others, so that we can really know the Lord.

The climax of the prophecy up to this point is that wonderful story of the dry bones in Ezekiel, chapter 37, where the Lord breathes new life into the old bones and says,

“I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. *Then you shall know* that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,’ says the Lord” (vv. 12-14).

There is a whole sermon in this chapter alone, but seeing its place in the sequence of judgments leading up to it we can especially appreciate the new spirit of truth and understanding that can fill our minds when – and only when – we have dealt with the selfish and worldly attitudes that keep us from receiving it. For it is ***when we remove the obstacles***, when we reject the idolatry, the spiritual whoredom, the cynicism and the arrogance of our trust in ourselves and the appearances of this world that we are at last able to receive the Lord’s life in true faith and charity so that we really do know and experience Him as our God.

Then no matter how threatening the forces of selfishness and materialism may be, as represented in the next two chapters by Gog and Magog, no matter how insidious the suggestions may be that we have no responsibility for anybody but ourselves, that “this is all there is,” that we don’t need revelation to lead a good life, or even that the Word itself is flawed or dated or too hard to understand – all these and many other spiritually life-threatening suggestions can be judged for what they are and set aside in favor of a deeper, fuller awareness, acknowledgment *and conviction* about who the Lord is and how He works in our lives.

It’s not magic, and the conviction doesn’t come without temptations and struggle. But it WILL come when we do our part; it WILL come when we fulfill the prophecies; it WILL come when we co-operate with the Lord to learn and do as He has taught us, shunning the evils of our own presumed but ever limited intelligence in favor of really hearing and really honoring His Word.

Amen.

Lessons: Mark 9:14-29 (& John 4:48)  
Children’s talk: Strengthening Our Faith

Ezekiel 25  
Doctrine of Faith 1-3a, 11-12