



## Sermon Title: The Greatest Miracle

Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: *This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

### Scripture:

---

Ezekiel 36:24-31

<sup>4</sup> “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. <sup>28</sup> Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices.

---

### Transcript:

---

Our scripture comes from Ezekiel Chapter 36, and this is what it says. For, I will take you out of the nations. I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. God is speaking to Israel. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors. You will be my people and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the fields so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine.

Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. It was going so well until that last verse, right? Let's pray.

Holy spirit, what does this mean, and how do we live life out of it? In Jesus name, Amen. After all my years in ministry, I have become convinced that the greatest miracle and one of the rarest is when we can admit our sin, because we just don't like to do that. We do not like to admit we're wrong. We do not like to admit when we've messed up. We have a hard time admitting our sin. In my former church, there was one time the pastor preached a sermon on sin and a woman afterwards said to him, "I am so glad you preached that sermon on sin. I mean, I didn't need to hear it because I don't sin. But man, the people in this church are sinning all the time," and the pastor laughed and then realized sweet mother of mercy, you're serious.

He said, "Well, everyone sins," and she said, "No, I don't sin. Think about it." He was like, "I am thinking about it. I think you have the sin of pride. Let's just start there." Now, most of us can at least admit in a general sort of a way that we sin, but we have a hard time getting specific, don't we? And, for all of us, there are sins that we don't even acknowledge to ourselves, and before your heart sings like, oh man, a sermon on sin. Yay. A sermon on sin. I've got good news about your sin. I come this morning to bring you good news about your sin, and about my sin. We are doing a sermon series called remake, where we've been looking for weeks at the story of the Valley of Dry Bones, where God brings all these dead bones back to life.

It shows that God remakes all things, and brings dead things, dead marriages, dead friendships, dead careers, dead hopes, dead self-esteem, dead nations, dead cultures, God brings dead things back to life. But, there's a crucial step that comes before that kind of resurrection, and the text we read today is what immediately precedes the Valley of Dry Bones story. God says to the Israelites, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful. He promises the Israelites that he will cleanse them from their sin, and the result will be this abundance and plentiful crops. These verses lead immediately then into the story where the Dry Bones come back to life. What it shows is that before anything can be remade, before any dead thing, dead marriage, dead hopes, dead whatever, before any dead thing can come back to life, the critical step is that we admit our sins that got the things dead in the first place.

The Bible calls that confession and repentance, and without confession and repentance, there can be no new life. The word sin, let's define it, in the Greek of the Bible, it was originally an archery term that meant to miss the bullseye, which we all do, right? I mean, I doubt any of us get to the end of our days, every day and review our day and go, "Yep, one more bullseye for Dudley today." Like, maybe the woman from my former church, maybe she does that, but the rest of us know that we miss the mark of God's intended best for us, for others, for the world. We tend to think of sin as this

thing I do, or maybe don't do that I should, but in the Bible, sin isn't just a thing I do. It's a condition I have, and it affects everything. I've shared with you that I used to have cataracts, which this film over your eyes. It made everything kind of blurry and hazy and distorted colors, or everything looked kind of yellowish until I had them removed.

That's what sin does. It's a condition I have that affects everything, how I treat my friends and spouse, how I use my time and money, how I behave sexually, how I think about politics, how I view people that are different than me, educationally or economically or racially or politically or even geographically sometimes. It affects how I see God and how I see myself. It's not just a thing I do. It's a condition I have, and it infects every part of my life. The Bible says the wages of sin is death, death of friendships, death of marriage, death of self-esteem, death of healthy sexuality, death of so many things. But, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and eternal life doesn't just mean after I die. It means we can live the eternal kind of life starting now and starting here. Yes. Amen.

So, what are your sins? Did someone just say a loss? Oh, we don't have time, else we going to be here all day. What are your sins? Call them to mind, especially that one, especially that one, that maybe nobody knows, because I got good news about your sin. The first bit of good news about your sin is that remaking begins with repentance. Repentance unleashes the power of Jesus in your life to make all things new, and to do the changes you want so badly in yourself and in the world. So many good things happen when we can confess and repent. We get remade for starters. You can't fix a problem you don't think you have, so the first step is saying to God, confess just means to agree with God. This is sin, and make me new, God.

When we admit our sin, we begin to be remade. Second, reconciliation between friends who are fighting, husbands and wives, bosses, and employees, racial reconciliation, political reconciliation always begins when we can admit our sins and how we've hurt the other person, and really admit it. Not say things like, "I'm sorry that in our last conversation, I got a little bit difficult and said some things that weren't very nice." Oh, far out. That's not real confession, right? "Yeah. I get passionate. I can't help it. I'm from New Jersey. I've actually had people say that in marriage counseling." I've actually heard, they go, "Yes, I, yes. I sometimes get passionate when we argue, but you know, I'm Italian. What can I do?" Lots of things. I'm Scotch-Irish. It has nothing to do with anything, right?

Not that kind of admit, but really admit saying, "You know, I do not treat you as a person made in God's image. I demeaned you. I shamed you. I am so sorry." When both sides can do that, you are well down the road to reconciliation. Reconciliation becomes a lot easier, and usually, that's all it takes. Then, when everyone does that, when lots of people do that, we get a third benefit and that's social healing, because there's more harmony between bosses and employees, parents and kids, people of different political parties, different races. If every Christian in America would just admit our sin, we would see social healing. Then, there's a fourth benefit, and that is freedom

from shame. It releases us from the imposter syndrome where we think I don't really trust that person really likes me, because if people only knew what's going on inside, they would surely reject me.

Which means, we need to not just confess to God, but confess at least to one other trustworthy person who will handle our confession of sin well, and assure us of God's love and of their love, because that takes away the thought if they only knew, because now they do and they still love you. Just a hint, if someone confesses their sins to you, okay, "Oh, ick, you disgust me is not an appropriate response. It's, "I love you. God loves you, and he wants to make you new and free you from this sin." The admission of sin brings so many good things, and of all people of all people on the planet, Christians should be the most willing, the most able, the most frequent confessors of our sins, our flaws and our mistakes, because here's another bit of good news, and it comes from Romans Chapter eight.

I have found that no version of the Bible accurately translates the Greek, so I have taken it upon myself to laboriously word for word, translate the Greek for you of Romans 8:1. There is now therefore, no, none, nada, zilch, zero, zip, big fat goose egg, not even a millimeter of condemnation for those who are in Christ, Jesus, our Lord. That is the Dudley standard version. That is what the Greek actually says. I, candle in universal darkness, have translated it correctly. See what I do for you people? No condemnation, none, no condemnation. That's the good news about your sin. Not because we worked really hard to get God's approval, but because he loves us so much, is so frantic about us, that he came himself in the person of Jesus, died to pay the price for our sins that we know needs to be paid or there no justice in the world, and was raised from the dead, so now we are free, forgiven, spotless, pure in his sight, if we accept Jesus as our savior and Lord.

What that means is we repent and hope. In this text, God says, I'll sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will put my spirit in you, and move you to follow my decrees, and be careful to keep my laws." God says, "Just admit it. Just admit it. That's all I'm asking you to do, is admit it, and my Holy Spirit will fill you and motivate you to want to live a different way." The Bible says it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. It's not fear that we're going to be punished. That doesn't get you real repentance, right? That gets you fake repentance. "Oh God, I'm sorry. I screwed up. Oh, I'm terrible. Please, please, don't hurt me. Please don't fry me or fricassee me. Right? And, I'll always be good for forever and ever and ever, amen." That's not, that's not repentance. That's trying to get out of consequences. That's every politician that has ever been caught doing something terrible, right?

It's the same script. They call a press conference. Wife and kids are standing there. The politicians, "I take full responsibility. I am so sorry." Full responsibility, my left foot. That is your spin doctor saying that you need to fake a little contrition, and if you could manage a tear or two, it will really help your poll numbers. That's not repentance. Real confession and repentance is when we know the goodness of God, and so we repent

and hope, knowing that he is eager to forgive, restore and help us live a different life, which means that of all people, Christians should be the most able and willing to confess our flaws and sins and mistakes. Christians should be known as much for our repentance as for our righteousness. Righteousness doesn't mean self-righteous. It just means rightly related to God, each other and the world. We should be as known for as much as our repentance as for our righteousness. Question, are we? How many non-Christians do you think in America say, "Man, the thing I really love about Christians is they're so good at admitting their mistakes and sins.

Zero.

Zero. Yes, exactly. None, none. That's because we are more formed by culture than the gospel, and culture says, hide your flaws, hide your sins. So, we're always virtue signaling. Look at me. I believe all the right things. I vote all the right ways. I do all the right things. Tell me I'm good. Tell me I'm good. Or, we play the, well, I may have my faults, but at least I'm not like Bill here, like moral train wreck right here. Right? Okay. We're not grading on a curve. The standard is God's intended best. Not Bill. God knows, and we know every sin, even the ones we call small, cause damage. Sometimes, we'll even call our sins virtues, because we can kind of convince ourselves of anything, right? Nobody ever thinks that they treat their coworkers badly, even when they do. They say, "Oh, I just, I like, I challenge my employees," and sometimes that's true and sometimes that's even good.

But sometimes that's the story we tell ourselves to cover over the fact that we're bullies. Sometimes, "I'm just, I'm a super hard worker with a good work ethic." Sometimes, what that means is, "I neglect my friends, faith, and family to get ahead, and I'll do anything to get ahead." Not always, but sometimes. Never have I ever had someone say to me, "Pastor, I read in the Bible, all the places God tells us to care for the poor, the immigrant, the marginalized. So," pastor, I just need to confess to you my utter indifference toward those people. Never have I ever heard that confession, but if we don't confess them, and admit that their sins, instead of pretending their virtues, then we don't get freedom from them. Now, about now some of you might be thinking, "Yeah, I don't know Scott."

I, every time I think about my sins, every time I confess my sins, I feel worse, not better. That means you did it wrong. That means you did it wrong. So, here's how we do it right. Right? We pray, Holy Spirit, show me my sin. Pray this for 10 minutes every day, this week, and then leave space for those thoughts that maybe aren't your thoughts, that come from God. Show me my sin. Psalm 1:39 is a great sort of model for how to do this. It starts out, Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. Before word is on my tongue, you Lord, know it completely. It's beautiful. It's great poetry. It goes on that way for 19 verses, and then suddenly this thing happens where the Psalm, it says, if only you, God, would slay the wicked. I have nothing but hatred for them.

Then, the next verse, Search me God and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any wicked way within me. I don't know. Maybe that last verse there, where you said you hated everyone, and then lead me in the everlasting way. It's really weird. Lord, you have searched me, and you know me. I hate you people. Search my heart, oh God. But this is like, when you're driving down the freeway, singing the Christian music, right, and someone cuts you off. Right? We've all done this. Jesus. I love you. I love you. I, you jerk. I hate you. I hate you. I love you Jesus. I love you. Right? That's what's going on here, and I wonder if the Psalmist, when he got finished writing out this little Psalm, if he looked at the whole thing and thought maybe I should take those verses about hating folks out. They don't seem to fit. Then maybe he thought, no, that is an accurate record of my heart.

See, in prayer, funny things happen when we listen to God and he reveals our sin to us. Sometimes it just erupts in the middle of prayer, and that's God saying to your sin. Then, so pray, Holy Spirit, help me see my sin. Show me my sin. Root it out in me. Help me live the eternal kind of life. For those sins that we do over and over and over and over again, we pray this over and over and over again, because God's grace is not inexhaustible. You cannot outsin the grace of God. We prayed over and over, and I do believe, over time, the Holy Spirit helps us live a different way. Maybe we need some counseling along the way too, but you just keep repenting and asking the Holy Spirit to help you live differently. Also, help the Holy Spirit to have you accurately identify sin, because sometimes we feel guilty over things that aren't actually sin.

It's just a cultural expectation we didn't meet. Pastor Tim Keller compares our conscience to smoke alarms. You know how those things are never set right? Sometimes, you light a match outside, a mile and a half away, and the thing starts beeping. Then, other times, the whole house can be filled with smoke, and not a peep. I, sometimes, our consciences go off, and you know, we feel guilty over something, and it's really just a cultural expectation that we didn't meet. God goes, that's not sin. Then, other times, we can shatter the 10 Commandments in spectacular fashion, and our conscience goes, "All good, bro. No worries." So, Holy Spirit, show me my sin as you define it," and then the Holy Spirit will do two things. First, teach you to hate your sin. Not hate yourself. Not feel shame. You are not your sin. Hate your sin.

That's where we get to this last verse in the text that I read this morning, the weird verse, right? God says, I will save you from all your uncleanness. Then you will remember your evil ways in wicked deeds. And you will love yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. And you go like, wait, I thought I brought freedom from shame. That's shaming. Here's what's going on. Remember just verses before God says, I'm going to forgive you and cleanse you. And the sentence is not. You will love yourselves period. You will load yourself for your sins. It's God saying, you need to hate your sin because then you won't do it anymore. If you can see the damage it's doing to you and others, then you will hate it and you won't do it anymore. He said, don't minimize your sin. You need to learn to hate your sin. Not hate yourself, hate your sin.

Then, the second thing the Holy Spirit will do is help us experience the love, grace and forgiveness of Jesus. If confession and repentance is not followed, if not immediately, at least in a little bit of time with the experience of grace of Jesus, then you're not listening to Jesus. You're listening to Satan, who the Bible calls the accuser. Jesus says, I love you. I do not condemn you. Now, let's go do some cool things together. When I was growing up, I would occasionally hear people say, "When you die, on Judgment Day, there'll be a movie of your entire life that will be played on this big screen, and all the sins you've done, and every filthy thought, every disgusting, vile thing in your head or in your heart, it will all be up there projected on this giant screen and everyone is going to see it.

Your mother will be there. Anyone told that as a kid, or did I just have a weird Sunday school teacher? I mean, it's just like Trump traumatizing. That's not how it goes, because see, every movie gets edited before it goes to the screen, and the editor takes out all the scenes that make the movie worse. Sometimes, you'll get a director's cut of a movie, and they're three hours longer, because it puts all those scenes back. They're always worse than the actual edited version because it's got all the bad scenes in it. There will be no director's cut of your life. It'll only be the good things. If we know Jesus, God says, I will remember their sin no more. Only the good stuff. Now, God doesn't always spare us the consequences of our sin, and there are consequences, but there is no consequence so dire that it can disrupt God's plan for your life.

Sometimes, God will even use our sin for good, like the addict, recovered addict who can help another addict recover, because he knows what it's like. A woman I know is a chaplain in a hospital, and she tells a story of a man who was CEO of this big company. He was dying of cancer. CEO of this big company, hugely successful, but he had neglected his friends and his family. He had huge rage and anger issues. He had used people for his own ends, so he was dying with a lot of broken relationships. One day, my friend read to him the story out of the Bible, where, about the workers in the vineyard, where the workers who came at the end of the day got paid the same as the workers who had worked all day long.

When she finished, he was furious and he said, "That's not fair. The workers that only worked one hour got paid the same as the workers that worked all day. That's not fair. What a stupid story." My friend said, "It's not fair, and do you know what it means?" He said, "It means it's a stupid story," and she said, "Okay, well, just think about it for a while." A couple of days later they were talking, and the man said, "About that story. I've been thinking," and she said, "Well, what do you think it means now?" He said, "I think it means that it's never too late," and she said, "It is never too late for the grace of Jesus. Do you want that grace that forgives all your sins?" He said, "I do," and he became, he made Jesus, his leader and his forgiver.

The next day, he confessed his sins to his wife and kids. Not, "I'm sorry I was a little difficult for my whole life," but "I used you. I neglected you. You had to put up with my toxic rage. I missed so many good things because of it. Will you forgive me?" They

were reconciled. He did the same thing with his friends, and then he spent the last few months of his life with friends and family, laughing together, reminiscing, telling them how much he loved them. He lived these amazing last couple of months. His cancer was not cured, but the greater miracle happened. He admitted his sin, and his family was remade, and friendships were remade, and he was remade, and his marriage was remade. Dry Bones came back to life even as he died, because he experienced the grace of God that outruns our sin all the time, and never stops outrunning our sin.

So, this week, ask the Holy Spirit, "In hope, show me my sin. Do a ruthless self-inventory. Show me my sin. Cut through my defenses, where I'm calling something good that you call evil, tell me. Where I'm calling something evil that you call good, show me. Motivate me to live differently in Jesus. Help me experience your absolutely inexhaustible resource of grace and love that makes Dry Bones live again. So, Jesus, we pray. This is our prayer. Lord, search me, oh God." Lord, you have searched me, and you know me. You know when I sit. You know when I rise. Before word is on my lips, you know what I'm going to say, so search me Oh God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any wicked way within me, and help me live a different way, and lead me in your everlasting life. We pray this, in your name, Jesus. Amen.

---

**Discussion Questions:** Read Ezekiel 36:24-31

---

*Read & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:**

- Icebreaker: If you HAD to give up one of your senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting) which would it be and why?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions** – *Together read Ezekiel 36:24-3 and discuss the following:*

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions** – *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

- On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being excellent, how well are you able to admit your sins to yourself and God? What helps you do that and what hinders you from it?
- What are the benefits of admitting our sins to God? How about admitting our sins to others?

**Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?



- Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:**

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.