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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Glory In The Gap"
Ezekiel 22

There are all kinds of people in our world today, as you know. And they do all kinds of things.

In a speech class, I learned that's a hasty generalization. But let me move from generalizing to being specific.

I'm told of the man who hit another car as he backed out of his parking place doing considerable damage to the car. He proceeded to get out of his car, take out his pen and piece of paper from his calendar book in his pocket – wrote a note to the owner of the care he hit – put the note under the windshield wiper and drove off in his car that wasn't damaged at all.

Finally, the owner of the car that was hit came out of the office building where he had been on business. As he looked at his car, he noticed the big dent in the rear fender. His heart sank. But then, as he was unlocking the door, he noticed the note under the windshield wiper. His heart started to revive. He opened the note and read it to himself, "As I write this note some 20 people are watching me. They think that I am leaving my name and phone number, but I'm not."

Henry Ward Beecher, a great preacher of the past came to church one Sunday and found several letters waiting for him. He opened one of the letters and found it contained this single word, "fool." Quietly with seriousness, he announced to his congregation what he had found.

"I have known many an instance of a man writing a letter and forgetting his name – but this is the only instance I have ever known of a man signing his name and forgetting to write the letter."

Yes, people do many different things in our world.

But what kind of person is the biblical God looking for today?

You knew that God was looking for people today, didn't you?

Notice the words from our chapter in Ezekiel this morning, as we continue exploring Ezekiel. Look with me at Ezekiel 22:30 – another of the famous verses in the Bible, as God speaks through Ezekiel, the prophet, priest, and watchman of Israel.

"I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before ME for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one."

In the decadent, idolatrous, immoral and rebellious time of Israel around 590 B.C., God found no one who had a genuine heart for God in the land of Israel who would intercede on behalf of Israel before God. Yes, there were a few righteous people in Jerusalem, but they evidently were spiritually complacent and didn't have a real passion for God. Such attitudes caused them not to stand up and be counted for righteousness sake, and then intercede on behalf of Jerusalem that people would turn to the Lord and follow HIM.

When God looked throughout Jerusalem, He found no one who would stand in the gap or breach between God and Israel and plead for God's forgiveness and grace on behalf of the rebellious and sinful people who lived there.

Even Jeremiah, who was in the city of Jerusalem at this time, did not find anyone either to stand in the gap for God on behalf of Israel. Note Jeremiah 5:1, as God speaks to Jeremiah:

"Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and look now and take note. And seek in her open squares, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, then I will pardon her."

Jeremiah in the city of Jerusalem around 590 B.C. found no one who would take a stand for God's justice and truth.

The people considered the prophets words about repentance and turning from their gross idolatry and immorality as WIND.

As I thought about God looking for a person to stand in the gap, in the breach before Him, and intercede to God on behalf of a rebellious people, I asked myself this question:

"In the history of Israel, has God ever found someone who would stand in the gap before God on behalf of His people?"

Abraham, physical father of Israel came to mind. He stood in the gap before God on behalf of his nephew, Lot who was living in Sodom.

The account is given in Genesis 18.

In that account God told Abraham that He was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the wickedness of the people there. Abraham asked the LORD if He would destroy the cities if there were 50 righteous there. **He added that certainly the Judge of all the earth would do justly.**

God replied that if he found 50 righteous in the city of Sodom he would not destroy the city.

Abraham continued, asking in humility, "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five will you destroy the whole city because of five?" God replied that He would not destroy the city if He found forty-five righteous there.

But Abraham continued and asked the Lord if there were only thirty in the city of Sodom would He spare the city. God replied that He would spare the city if He found thirty righteous there.

Abraham continued his questioning of His Lord. "Suppose there are twenty righteous there, would you spare the city?" The LORD answered that He would spare the city if twenty righteous were found there.

Then Abraham said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once: suppose ten are found there?' Meaning ten righteous in the city of Sodom. The Lord replied that He would not destroy the city if He found ten righteous people in the city of Sodom.

The sequel to the account is that the LORD didn't find ten righteous people in the city of Sodom. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. Lot and his two daughters escaped.

Abraham, was a man of God, and he was willing to stand in the gap before God on behalf of his nephew Lot. He went to bat for Lot. Abraham stood in the GAP!!

Moses, who was used by God, along with Aaron, to lead the nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, stood in the gap before God on behalf of His people.

Exodus 32 gives us the historical account.

In this chapter of Exodus, Moses is about to come down from Mt. Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments from God. God told Moses that the people have corrupted themselves by building a molten calf and are worshipping it. The LORD tells Moses that He would destroy this obstinate people and He would make of Moses a great nation (Exodus 32:7-10).

What did Moses do?

Exodus 32:11-14 gives us the account.

Moses entreated the LORD his God and said, "O, LORD, why does You anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians

speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth. Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

How did the LORD respond to Moses standing in the gap before HIM on behalf of His rebellious people?

Exodus 32:14 gives us the answer.

"So the LORD changed His mind (or was sorry) about the harm which He said He would do to His people."

God heard Moses cry, and didn't destroy His people Moses stood in the GAP!

Esther is another Old Testament character who stood in the gap before God for her people, as God used her as the Kings' Queen to go to the king, her husband, and appeal to him to save her people from wicked Hamaan. He action saved her people and the line of the Savior.

In Israel's history at this time of Ezekiel around 600 B.C. God in His search found no one to stand in the gap for HIM. Most of the people in the land of Israel had turned from the true and living God to worship idols. Even the righteous were so complacent spiritually that no one would step forward and seek God on their behalf. There was no one to go to God on behalf of the people.

Is God still searching for individuals to stand in the gap before God on behalf of others?

Definitely!

Note in the New Testament.

The apostle Paul was one who stood in the gap before God for others. Read Paul's prayers in his different letters.

He prayed that people would have the knowledge of God, be filled with the fruit of righteousness, and experience God's power in their lives. Paul believed that others like the Ephesians and Thessalonians could stand in the gap for him as he asked for prayer to be bold to speak the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In fact, the ultimate example of one who stood in the gap before God for people is Jesus Christ.

He is the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ (I Timothy 2).

He became the substitute for your sin and mine.

Not only did Christ stand in the gap before God for His salvation for us, Jesus intercedes to His heavenly Father on our behalf. He is the GREAT PRAYER WARRIOR FOR US as depicted in John 17. Here Christ asks that the Heavenly Father would keep believers from the evil one, and would sanctify them with His WORD. Christ also asked His heavenly Father that believers in Christ would demonstrate the oneness of the Godhead in their relationships with one another – meaning individually, in our families, and in our church family.

God's plan has not changed for our day!! God is still looking for individuals to stand in the gap for Him on behalf of others. That is really what being a witness for Christ is all about as Christ told the disciples in Acts 1:8, that they were to be witnesses of Him throughout the world.

So what's God looking for in people who will stand in the gap before Him on behalf of others?

1. God is looking for someone to stand in the gap who will respond to Jesus Christ in faith (Genesis 15: 5-6; Luke 19:1-10).

Ezekiel 22:17 reads that the word of the LORD came unto Ezekiel saying, then verses 18-19.

"Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze, tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem.'"

At this time God viewed Israel in the land as metal to be refined (in the siege of Jerusalem), but the nation came out as dross – worthless.

That was true because the people had rejected the LORD and were living in gross idolatry and immorality (cf. Ezekiel 22:1-12).

God found no saving faith in the people of Israel at this time. They were sinners needing to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord. Apart from repentance, captivity by Babylon was inevitable.

Of course, the opposite of that, was to turn to the Lord and accept Him as Savior.

Of course, in the Old Testament time, Christ had not come yet, but still God honored faith in those who turned to Him and accepted the revelation of Himself that He gave them such as Abraham (Genesis 15:5-6), along with Moses and others.

That's why, when Christ came on the scene, He said to Zaccheus, who believed in the Lord, that He had come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

Jesus Christ is now the basis of our faith. His death, burial, and bodily resurrection provides us the basis of salvation in Christ. We believe the Christ died, was buried and rose again for us to have His eternal forgiveness and life.

If you have accepted Christ as personal Savior, you have been found by the LORD. You are now in His family, and can live for Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now you can stand in the gap before God on behalf of others. But there is more for that is just the beginning. To stand in the gap before God on behalf of people

2. God is looking for a believer to stand in the gap who is living a clean life (Leviticus 19:2; I Peter 1:15-16).

In our text in Ezekiel 22:23-24, God told Ezekiel, "Son of man, say to her (to Israel), 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.'" (God had withheld rain from the land of Israel, a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 11:16-17, as in the days of Elijah).

Then in Ezekiel 22:25ff, Ezekiel tells the people. . .

**The prophets were giving the wrong message (cf. 22:28), and had treated the widows wrongly taking their money. They were full of greed and covetousness.

**The priests had broken God's law and profaned God's holy things in the temple, and had not taught the difference between clean and unclean (22:26).

**The princes have shed innocent blood to get dishonest gain (22:27).

**The people had committed robbery, and taken advantage of the poor.

The land needed to be cleansed physically, and the people needed a spiritual cleansing. The rebellious and wayward needed to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord. The righteous needed a revival in their hearts.

God was saying, yes, you need to turn to me in faith, but that means you must live before me with a clean life, a life that is intent on living holy before ME and others.

For us today who know the Lord as personal Savior, we are to walk in the light as He is in the light, so that we can have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son will cleanse us from all sin (I John 1:7).

If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us as the Psalmist says (Psalm 66:18).

There is no experiencing God's blessing if a believer harbors a bad attitude or an unforgiving spirit.

That's why I John 1:9 is the believer's bar of soap. "If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Yes, as we read God's Word, we let it convict us of that which needs to be changed in our lives for His glory. We breathe out the old attitudes, habits, and words, and breathe in God's life-changing forgiveness based upon the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

This means keeping short accounts with God in our relationship with HIM. It means keeping short accounts with others, as we ask their forgiveness if an offense is made, so that God will forgive us when we confess our sin to Him.

That is true for us individually.

That is true for husband and wife, for Peter tells us in I Peter 3:7 that husbands are to live in understanding with their wives granting her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

If a person is going to stand in the gap before God on behalf of others, that individual must be know Jesus Christ as personal Savior and be living a clean life before the Lord in His power.

Of course this doesn't mean the believer won't be tempted, and perhaps yield at times, but to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's convicting work in one's life is the key, confess one's sin, and in the Lord's power go forth to do God's will.

God wanted Israel to live holy lives because He was holy (Leviticus 19:2), and He wants us to do the same in the power of the Holy Spirit (I Peter 1:15-16).

There is another ingredient that God looks for in the person who will stand in the gap for Him.

3. God is looking for a believer to stand in the gap who has a passion to know Him and to obey His Word (Genesis 18:25; Exodus 32:22-14; John 8:29; Philippians 3:10-11).

The text in Ezekiel 22:26 told us that the priests violated God's law. They profaned or desecrated God's holy things, the temple. They made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they had not taught the different between the clean and the unclean. They broke God Sabbath covenant. There was also deceit and dishonesty (22:27).

Certainly this is a picture of our day. There is no concept in the public arena about what is right and what is wrong. There is no concept of moral purity. There is no concept of truthfulness and honesty.

When God looked for someone to stand in the gap for Him in Ezekiel's day, He found no person who really had a passion to know Him and to obey His word.

****Think of Abraham.** He said to God as he appealed to Him regarding saving Sodom, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right, or deal justly?"

Abraham was appealing to God's gracious yet holy character. Abraham had a passion to know God and do the right.

****Think of Moses.** Moses appealed to God's power as he interceded for Israel before God – "You brought Israel out of Egypt with your powerful hand." Moses appealed to God's name to vindicate Himself as He told God that He had made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel that God would bless them forever.

Moses obviously had a passion for God and His Word.

The Apostle Paul penned that he might know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.

Paul prayed for those who came to know Christ under His ministry.

Christ, of course, set the ultimate example of passion for His heavenly Father and obedience to His word. His words tell us so "I do always those things that please my Father (John 8:29). "I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

But there is one more ingredient that God is looking for in the life of the believer who stands in the gap before God on behalf of people.

4. God is looking for a believer to stand in the gap who has compassion for people regardless of who they are (Proverbs 28:27; James 1:27; Matthew 9:36).

Notice Ezekiel 22:28-29.

The prophets continue to speak lies. There is robbery in the land. The poor and the needy are oppressed. There was no justice.

Proverbs 17:5 says that "He who mocks the poor reproaches His maker."

The Proverbs 28:27 reads, "He who gives to the poor shall never want."

Due to Israel adopting greed and covetousness, the nation had lost touch with the needs of others.

Certainly some can take advantage of their situation, but God knows if a person has lost his compassion for those in poverty materially and for those in poverty spiritually, that person will not be able to stand in the gap for God on behalf of others.

James put it very practically, when he wrote, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is to visit the orphans, the fatherless and widows in their distress, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

What moved Abraham to stand in the gap for his nephew Lot? His love for Lot and his family.

What moved Moses to entreat God to save the nation Israel? Moses' compassion for his people.

What moved Paul to pray for the churches that God helped Him establish. His love for the people of God.

What moved Paul to minister to those needing Christ? His love for his people so they would come to know the Savior personally. That's why Paul penned in Romans 10:1 that his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was that they might be saved.

What moved the Savior to suffer for us and be hung on Calvary's cross, the worst way to die? His compassion for people.

What did Christ say in Matthew 9:36?

'Seeing the people, He felt compassion (moved in His inner being) for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.'

Yes, Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved or have His forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Him (John 3:16-18).

But then in the Matthew passage, our Lord continued talking to His disciples:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Jesus is telling His disciples and us to be people who will stand in the gap and be an answer to our own prayers, while praying that others will get God's vision, and show compassion on others who need to know the Lord personally.

Think about where we can stand in the gap for the Lord on behalf of others.

1. Individually.

Who are you praying for that has a need as a believer?

Who are you praying for that needs to come to know Christ personally?

Who are you praying for that needs to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Do you need to be praying for opportunities to share God's love and grace?

2. Family.

I trust that husbands and wives pray for each other.

I trust that Dads are praying for your children that they will come to know Christ, and if they have accepted the Lord, that you continue to pray that they will have discernment and be strong in the Lord and the power of His might – having a love for God's Word.

Are there single mom's you know of that you should be praying for and encouraging?

Grand parents, I trust that you are praying for your grand children that they will come to know Christ, grow to be men and women of God.

3. Our Church Family.

Be praying for the different needs that we are aware of.

Be praying that we will not become complacent and rest on our laurels.

Be praying that we will continue to grow in Christ and remain united around Him seeking His will in all that we think, do, and say.

Be praying that we will be a missional church, not a maintenance church.

4. Neighborhood

Be praying for those around you in your neighborhood, and in the neighborhood around the church. If they don't know the Lord pray that they will come to know Christ personally. If they know the Lord, pray that they will grow in Him. Are there children in your neighborhood you can invite to Sunday School?

BLESS YOUR NEIGHBORS

≡ **B -Body - health, protection, food, energy.**

≡ **L -Labor - employment, job satisfaction, adequate income, good work environment.**

≡ **E -Emotional - inner peace, joy, wisdom, insight, patience.**

≡ **S -Social - healthy relationships between spouses, parents, children, friends; reconciliation; love.**

≡ **S -Spiritual - repentance, salvation, obedience, gratitude, spiritual growth, enlightenment.**

5. Our Nation.

We can stand in the gap for our country before God.

Israel had forfeited her privilege. There was no one to build up the wall of physical and spiritual protection. God found no one to stand in the breach for Him on behalf of the nation.

As a result God was bringing his final judgment on Israel and Jerusalem through Nebuchadnezzar's invasion in 586 B.C. Israel, though, would still have future because of God's mercy and grace.

Today, God is still showing His mercy on this great country, giving people an opportunity to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God, I believe, is staying His judgment for the moment because believers in Christ are standing in the gap for the Lord on behalf of this nation, which was founded on Judeo-Christian principles. I trust that you are one of those who prays daily for a spiritual awakening in this great land.

John Knox impacted all of Britain by his prayers. It was said that Queen Mary feared John Knox's prayers more than the armies of Scotland.

Let's keep beseeching God on behalf of our country, that our leaders will wake up to the reality of His righteousness and truth.

Wesley Duewel tells about praying for the outcome of World War II. He became burdened for a specific situation.

A German merchant ship that had been converted into a battle ship was sinking many merchant ships with great loss of life. On December 12, 1939, he felt greatly burdened to pray to ask God to intervene. The next day the radio news announced that the German ship had been chased into a harbor of Uruguay. After several days, the ship was brought outside the harbor and scuttled. There was no loss of life except the commander who decided to go down with the ship.

Wesley said that others may have been praying too, but God answered his prayer specifically. Wesley stood in the gap for God on behalf of others.

Let's stand in the gap for Jesus this week on behalf of other so His eternal kingdom will be furthered through us!!

