

## A Vision for the Future

Passages: Ezekiel 36:24–38

John 13:31–35

The ALP caucus meets tomorrow to choose between two leaders: Julia Gillard or Kevin Rudd. We might have our own personal favourites. We might like Ms. Gillard because she is a hard worker and has been able to pass many new pieces of legislation through the House of Representatives. We might like Kevin Rudd because we feel he was wrongly dismissed from leadership, or because he speaks Mandarin!

But, in the end, tomorrow's vote is for one reason—It has to do with a vision for the future! Which of these two persons is best qualified to take our nation forward? Which of them has the integrity, leadership and moral attributes to keep our nation on a good path? **And**...which of them can keep the ALP from being demolished in the next election? As I said, tomorrow's vote is all about a vision for the future. Let the past be forgotten—the real question is, Where are we now headed? What does the future hold for us?

Approximately 600 years before Christ, the prophet Ezekiel was asking the same questions: Where are we headed? What's the future hold for us? You see, his nation of Israel had been besieged by the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar —Ezekiel was one of many intelligent, upper class men who were taken captive to Babylon. As he pondered his situation in a foreign land, God gave him an amazing vision for the future—this is what we read in chapter 36.

Turn to Ezekiel 36:24–38.

In these verses, God promises to do four things: It's a vision for the future!

1. V 24—God promises to gather Ezekiel and the rest of the exiles and take them all back to their land...the land of Israel. Not only that, but down in verses 34 and 35, God promises to turn the land of Israel into a new Garden of Eden!

2. V 25—God promises to cleanse them from their sins and help them get rid of all their false idols...the things that have led them astray.
3. Vv 26–27 —God promises to give them a new heart and to put His Spirit within them. They will be new people, empowered by God to follow His ways and obey His commands.
4. Vv 36–38 – God promises to show His glory through Israel and multiply her numbers. The nations will be so amazed at God’s favour on Israel that foreigners will come and join themselves to her until God’s people are “as numerous as sheep”!

These four promises were God’s vision for the future of Israel! And they would all be potentially fulfilled by Jesus Christ, some 600 years later.

But I want you to imagine Ezekiel, somewhere in the pagan city of Babylon. Imagine him-- his nation had been invaded; its cities had been destroyed; the wealth of Israel had been stolen; the leaders of his nation were now slaves to king Nebuchadnezzar; everything he trusted in was gone; the people were in despair; nothing was the way it once was. No doubt, Ezekiel was in a state of shock...a state of deep grief! So, tell me: Would it be easy for Ezekiel to believe in this vision for the future? I don’t think so! That’s why God spends another 12 chapters elaborating on this future vision just to help Ezekiel believe that God always has a **good future** planned for His people ...a future that is always **better** than anything we have known in the past!

Indeed, here is one of the most amazing truths of the Scriptures. To put it simply, **Ezekiel had to die to the things of the past in order to accept God’s resurrection of the future.** He had to let go of his grief; let go of his pain; let go of his idealised memories. Only then would he be able to look forward in the belief that **God is good!**

The same is true for us!

Last Sunday was Stewart and Virginia’s final Sunday with us. The day was beautiful, filled with loving testimonies about the great pastoral

work that this couple did for our church. Of course, there were many tears of sadness and tears of grief as people considered the fact that Stewart and Virginia would no longer be with us. One week has gone by, and there are many of us who still feel the pain of seeing Stewart and Virginia leave us for their retirement. In fact, you may be feeling a little bit like Ezekiel—you may be wondering what God is doing; even doubting that He has good things in store for us!

I have one question: **Can we die to the things of the past in order to accept God's resurrection of the future?** Can we believe that God has good things in store for our church despite the pain that we might be feeling?

Let me take you back to the vision that God gave to Ezekiel. You see, I believe that the four promises that God gave to Ezekiel are also offered to us today as a vision for our future... **through Jesus Christ!**

1. Through Jesus, God promises **to make us fruitful**, even beyond what we can imagine; that our church might be like the Garden of Eden. Through Jesus, there is the sense that we are being established in a land that is blessed with the bounty of rich fellowship with God; a place overflowing with love and joy as He gathers us together as His children. Jesus wants this promise to be more and more fulfilled in us! Do we believe this?
2. Through Jesus, God also promises **to keep cleansing us from every sin**; to cast away every false idol that might lead us astray; to rebuke the things in our lives that hinder the flow of God's holiness. Jesus wants this promise to become a reality in us! Do we believe this?
3. Through Jesus, God promises **to continually give us new hearts** and to overwhelm us with His Spirit that we might be renewed people, empowered by God to consistently follow His ways and obey His commands. Jesus wants this promise to be increasingly fulfilled in us! Do we believe this?

4. Through Jesus, God promises **to radiate His glory in us**. As we reflect His glory, the different people around us (from every nation, race, tribe and tongue) will be so amazed at God's favour on this church that they will come and join us. In time, we will be "as numerous as sheep"! Jesus wants this promise to be fulfilled in us! Do we believe it?

I believe that this is God's vision for the future. In fact, I believe it is always his vision for His church—to look beyond the things that feel like death, to the glory of His resurrection! And although this vision may seem to be far beyond any realm of present possibility, it is my prayer that we will look past the grief of our present situation and grasp a glimpse of the **good things** God has prepared for us in the future. Fortunately, we don't have to depend on Kevin or Julia to fulfil this vision for us. We have Jesus who lead us forward into His future plans and purposes.

Let me leave you with the words of St. Paul in Ephesians 1:18–19 <sup>18</sup> "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe."