

February 28, 2016  
Ezekiel 33:7-20

Lent 3C  
Ezekiel's Lenten Message

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.*

Ezekiel's Lenten message to us is the same as John the Baptist's Advent message. It's the same message that Christ speaks as well. It's a simple one. Repent and you will live. Ezekiel for 24 chapters and then some has been speaking words of the law. Words that are harsh to hearer's ear. Words that are troublesome. Words that can cause despair. Words that can bring a people to repentance. So here we stand this morning listening to Ezekiel and hearing a message of repentance. Really a message responding to Israel's question: "How then can we live?"

As we read from Ezekiel 33 we see that the people are finally coming to grips with the harshness of what he's been preaching for the first 24-32 chapters of the book. The people are finally seeing their sin. They have said: *"Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?"* They come to the grips with their sin...they are falling deeper into despair. They have finally identified their sin.

Are you where the Israelites are in this reading? Have you come to grips with your sin? Do you see that your sin is killing you? Do you even see that in your life you are actually sinning? Many people don't actually like to call sin, sin. In the Moody Monthly the question is asked what is sin? And here is a list of man calls sin and what God calls sin.

Man calls it an *accident*; God calls it an abomination.

Man calls it a blunder; God calls it blindness.

Man calls it a defect; God calls it a disease.

Man calls it a chance; God calls it a choice.

Man calls it an error; God calls it an enmity.

Man calls it a fascination; God calls it a fatality.

Man calls it an infirmity; God calls it an iniquity.

Man calls it a luxury; God calls it a leprosy.

Man calls it a liberty; God calls it lawlessness.

Man calls it a trifle; God calls it a tragedy.

Man calls it a mistake; God calls it a madness.

Man calls it a weakness; God calls it willfulness.<sup>1</sup>

It seems as though man doesn't like to be told that they are sinners. They like to call it anything else except sin, something that they do that is contrary to God's command. You and I we don't like being told we are poor, miserable sinners. We don't even like confessing it. It makes us

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<sup>1</sup> Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1283). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

feel uncomfortable. We'd rather call it an accident or error or weakness. Not abomination, enmity, and willfulness. You see our sin is willful, we do it out of rebellion against each other and ultimately rebellion against God. Israel was doing the same thing...something has changed for them.

The people of Israel living in Babylon are finally getting it. They are finally recognizing their troubled condition. They are finally coming to repentance, but aren't quite there yet. Horace Hummel puts it this way: "Their answer is obviously rhetorical, assuming the negative answer that survival is impossible." These people are utterly hopeless. After being pounded with the law, they sense that there is no way that they can live. They sense that there is nothing that they can do to live. And they are exactly right, there is nothing they can do to live.

Have you been at the pit of despair? Have you had that feeling of utter hopelessness? Have you ever been buried by your sin and realize there is nothing that you can do to dig out from under it? For the more you dig, the more the sin covers you. Have you been there? Have you been so troubled by your sin that you are convinced you will die? Perhaps you are there now? Perhaps Satan is grabbing you in your weakness, in your time of despair and hopelessness and pulling you even further down to the point where he might actually take your faith as you are crumbling under the weight of your sin.

Maybe you are expecting the same answer as Israel was... "there's no chance you will live. You've reached the end of your road. You are going to die."

That's not the answer that the Lord God gives to the people living in Babylon. Ezekiel is given this message to speak to the children of Israel: *"As I live declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from His way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"*

This is powerful...The Lord doesn't take pleasure in the death of the wicked. As Israel has reached despair, He's calling them to repentance, to turn from their evil ways and receive the message of the Gospel. The message of forgiveness. In this amazing text from Ezekiel, Horace Hummel comments: "The possibility of repentance and life is highlighted more than that of apostasy and death, in answer to the people's sense of hopelessness." Ezekiel clearly passes on the message of the Lord God. The righteous person will die if he turns to injustice, but yet, those that are wicked turn away from their sin will live. Ezekiel is speaking God's Word of repentance...for repentance is not just saying "I'm Sorry," but it's actually turning their whole lives away from sin. Martin Luther once said, "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance." Repentance is turning from your life of sin. Ezekiel speaks God's Word and makes this clear. *"Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live."* Repentance leads to life and we know that this life of repentance comes to us

from the Holy Spirit. We speak in the meaning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> article: "I Believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him." Repentance is only an act that comes to us by faith, faith in Christ. Faith in the living God.

One can clearly see that Israel is living in despair...because they realize that there is nothing they can do to learn their life around. They are crying "help" as they are being buried in their sin...really as it continues to cave underneath them. Repentance then is a cry for help. It's a cry of faith.

Repentance brings about forgiveness in the fact that we do have a living Lord. Horace Hummel writes in his commentary these beautiful words. "He begins his rejoinder in the strongest possible way, by an oath based on his own life to counter their life of despair. And the Christian will not neglect to add that the God of Israel ultimately did back up that oath by sacrificing his own Son on the cross for the life of the world." God did not desire the death of a sinner, but in order to be saved, the sinner had to die, and God made Jesus to be sin for us. Hummel continues to write: "It is even proper to affirm that in the death of God the Son, "God Himself is dead," as the hymn has it—yet of course, he also rose from the dead on the third day."

When you turn from your wicked ways you will live, just as the Lord lives. When you turn from your wicked ways, you will hear those words of forgiveness.

As we look back at our text before us today, you see that the wicked, the unbelievers will die because of their unrighteous deeds. That's true. The only one we can blame for the death of the unbeliever is the unbeliever themselves. They failed to do their good works for Christ. Yet Believers, inherit life because of the merits of Christ, whose grace empowers good works to flow out of their lives.

My dear fellow redeemed you live because of Christ. You live because your names are written in the Lamb's book of life. You live because Christ lives in you. You live because Christ chose you at your baptism to be one of His redeemed children of God. When God looks at you, He sees His Son, He does not see the Old Adam, the poor miserable sinner that you are.

Even this text could cause you despair as you look at it and see...well I have to do something to earn life. We have to do what is just and right. Indeed that is true, and we can do that because Christ lives in us. And yes, there will be times that we fall, when we do transgress and sin. It's part of who we are as fallen human creatures. Know that Christ is working in you and as you repent, you are given those great words of absolution. When you say, "I am a poor miserable sinner." When you are at the pit of despair...your Risen Lord Jesus Christ comes to you and grabs you out of your pit and says through the mouth of his watchman, "your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When you say, "I am a poor miserable sinner," when you are at the pit of despair, your living Lord comes to you and grabs you out of your pit and through the watchman places into your mouth His body and blood for your forgiveness.

It's indeed the Lord that goes down into your pit of despair and brings you up and gives life. It's indeed the Lord that receives sinners like you and me and makes our sins white like snow through his blood and bitter passion.

Know that your living Lord grants you healing as he provided healing for those living in Babylon.

As we will sing in our closing hymn:

Ev'ry wound that pains or grieves me

By Your wounds, Lord, is made whole;

When I'm faint, Your cross revives me,

Granting new life to my soul.

Yes, Your comfort renders sweet

Ev'ry bitter cup I meet;

For Your all-atoning passion

Has procured my soul's salvation.

As we continue our journey through this season of Lent, as we continue to repent of our sin, know that it is through the Lord's all-atoning passion that you have salvation.

In Jesus Name, our Lenten King who brings us up out of our sin and despair. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, or Lenten King. Amen.*