

# Ezekiel 33:1-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] And so the verse I want to look at today is verse 11. Say to them, as I live to praise 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 would you die, O house of Israel?

We know the phrase, don't we, a death wish. We know people sometimes lose the will to live. They don't care about their life. They don't value it any longer, and they want to die.

Perhaps somebody hears the news from a doctor that they have a serious life-threatening, even terminal illness, and the doctors watch closely, don't they, to how the patient responds after that diagnosis.

Doctors are concerned rightly about despair, that when people get that news, patients can just give up on life. They assume they will inevitably succumb, and so they give up hope.

Literally a death wish. And the people that Ezekiel was preaching to in the passage that I just read were a bit like that. The Jews, the people of Caius of Babylon, they carried them off into their exile, they were far from home, they couldn't get back.

[ 1 : 11 ] And Ezekiel has impatiently explained to them over and over again, that the reason why that was happening was because it was God's punishment upon them for their disobedience, for them rejecting God, for their idolatry and their sin.

But up to this point in Ezekiel's ministry, the people he's preaching to, they've just refused to hear that. They've refused to accept that until now. And now for the third time in the book of Ezekiel, the Jews accept that they've rebelled against the living God.

And their guilt hits them like a sledgehammer. And the darkness of their shame is overwhelming. And they are under intense and painful conviction.

And they can hardly bear it. Just look at what it says in verse 10, it says, doesn't it? We rot away, our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them.

The word is used in other places in the Bible of a kind of putrefying, rotting, decaying meat. And that is how the people felt.

[ 2 : 18 ] They were convinced they were going to perish forever because of their sin. They realised that they'd done wrong against God. And so they said, how can we live? What hope is there for people like us that know we've done wrong?

How then can we live? And verse 11 is God's answer to that question. Verse 11 is a stark and an urgent warning to these despairing people.

Say to them, as I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of it. But the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back to your evil ways. For why will you die, O house of Israel?

And I want us to know these six things from this warning. This warning that comes from God to a desperate people. A people that seem to have a death wish. Instead of giving a hope.

First of all, let's see the kindness of the warning. The word warning has got negative connotations, doesn't it? In our minds. I don't know. If I say to you, warning, what image comes up in your head?

[ 3 : 20 ] It's a fairly negative thing. We've got warnings, don't we, in the same category as threats. Warnings make us think of frowns. And shooting fingers.

And angry voices. And of course, that one lady decays. There's a rather negative and gloomy picture. But we need to remember that a warning, a stern warning is often a loving thing.

Normally a loving thing. It's motivated by a warm concern for the welfare of another person. So, think of parents. And there's something that really seems to be wrong with a parent who never, ever warns his children.

It shows a total lack of love and care and concern. We need to warn our kids, sternly, don't we? Don't get into a car with strangers. Under any, any circumstances. Don't run across the road. Don't play with matches. And a warning is often a scary thing and a stern thing. Warnings bring up subjects that are often hard to talk about.

[ 4 : 25 ] That are unpleasant to think about. But they're prompted by love and concern. It's hard to tell them it's good that we warn them. To protect them. To make their lives better and happier.

The stories of the councils in Australia that put up signs in Bosley Bay, warning of sharks. There were photos of shark attacks on the beach.

And the council were inundated with complaints by people who walked their dogs on the beaches. They had complaints because of the graphic pictures that were there about sharks. And people said they are frightening.

They are scary pictures. The council responded to several answer points. They're meant to. It's the whole point of warning people away of a terrible and real danger. And it's done out of care and done out of love.

We don't want to ruin people's lives. We want to protect people's lives. They wanted people's day at the beach to be happy and safe.

[ 5 : 27 ] In fact, it was a loving thing to warn people. Don't get in the water with the sharks. And God issues for you a stern and sombre warning to people who are overwhelmed with guilt.

He doesn't tune up with sweet jokes. He doesn't tell them funny anecdotes. He says, And this warning is not to make you feel worse about yourself.

It's meant to help. It's meant to save. It's meant to rescue. It's meant to deal with their fights.

Because God wants these people to live and not to die. And so you this lunchtime, if you are here and you are not a Christian, God issues you this same stern warning and frightening warning.

Because he says, you are in terrible danger. I've plunged you into hell forever. And forever. And God is saying to you through his words, I'm not telling you this to stress you out.

I'm not telling you this to frighten you. I'm not telling you this to ruin everything. I'm telling you this God is telling you that you are in terrible danger. And God wants you to heed the warning and avoid the danger.

[ 6 : 42 ] The kindness of the warning. Secondly, the hopefulness of the warning. The hopefulness of the warning. A warning, by definition, is always a hopeful thing, isn't it?

Warnings are given while their time is healed. And to avoid the danger to take action. Let's imagine you're driving up a winding mountainside.

And there's a kind of sheer cliff on one side of the mountain. And there's lots and lots of signs out there. As you go up the hill and as you come down the hill, by the side of the roadside, warning dangers, keep well away from the edge of the road.

Drive slowly. Drive carefully. There will not be any warning signs on the cliff halfway down, will there? And the reason for that is because if you're plunging down over the cliffside, there's no point. It's too late. At that stage, once you leave the road, once you're plummeting to your death, there's no point telling you to watch your feet. Take the corner carefully. No use.

[ 7 : 46 ] It's why you're on the road. It's why you've got time to listen. That you're warned. That is when you need to be warned about the danger. And that's the thing you can hear, isn't it?

It's an encouraging thing. It's a hopeful thing. It's a hopeful thing that you are here this lunchtime. To hear this warning from God. To turn from your ways. To turn from your sin and give your life to God. In a few hours, it may be too late. In a few weeks, it may be too late. But this moment, this moment, it's not too late. One day it will be, won't it?

At the instant of your death, or when Jesus Christ returns to this world, this warning will no longer apply. It will be no use then. You will have, at that point, plunged over the edge to your never-ending ruins.

We die without Christ as our Saviour. God will never again say these words to you. Turn from your evil ways and live. Why will you die?

[ 9 : 17 ] You go to your death without responding to this warning. All that you will hear from God are these terrible words, depart from me forever. But at this lunchtime, at this moment, you need to pay attention to the warning.

Now is the time to trust Jesus Christ. If we go back to the illustration of a driver on the mountain, imagine someone doesn't pay attention to the warning.

They drive, they take the corner too fast. And they crash the barrier into the air. And as the nose of the car begins to dip down, he sees the sheilet chasm before him.

He's approaching death. At that horrible moment that we don't even like to think about, there's a realization, isn't it? That that man would give anything. He goes back a few seconds. Back up the road to heed the warning.

And that happens at this very moment. As we sit here, there are men and women and boys and girls that enter into the world of eternity.

[10:21] And they've ignored God's warnings all their lives. And only now do they realize that it's too late. And as they go to their everlasting faith, they would give anything to search where you are sitting now.

And to heed the warning. To have it offered to them one more time, but it's too late. But it's not too late for you. And if you can hear these words of warning, it means it's not too late for you to respond.

Turn back, God says to you. Turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die? The hopefulness of warning.

And then the clarity of the warning. Number three. There are some warnings that are rather cryptic, aren't they? They are hard to understand. And these warnings, you can't blame anyone for not doing anything about them, because you don't understand that.

So my computer, I don't know what your computer is right, my computer is constantly flashing up, warning, you are unprotected. from an anti-virus.

[11:23] And I try and read the message, but now, I just click on the little red X button to shut it down, and I ignore it. So I can't understand what they're talking about. You see, an error has occurred, that message comes up.

You read it, unless you're kind of a catty person, you've got the foggiest clue what it's talking about. And some warnings are really hard to understand. But you can't say that about this warning, can you?

No one can be left in any doubt what they are to do. It is an amazing verse. Can you see it? Just look at the second part of verse 11. It says, The wicked turn from his way and live.

Turn back. Turn back from your evil days, evil ways, for why would you die, O house in Israel?

Leave your old way of life behind. It's not a new life.

Stop living for yourself. Stop living for yourself and trust in God. Change directions. Do a U-turn.

The youngest child can understand it.

[12:30] You might not believe the warning. You might not like the warning. But you can understand the warning. You cannot claim that it's too hard to understand today.

What is good to teach us is that you and I are heading for everlasting ruin. At the moment, you are the king of your life. You are on the throne of your heart. And what you need to do is get off that throne and put Jesus Christ there.

And bow your knee to him and give your life to him and say to him, Lord, I've been going my way, but I know I need to go your way. And your will be done.

And the warning has been found in you clearly. What are you going to do about it? God says to Ezekiel, doesn't he, that the blood of the man or the woman who cures the warning and does not respond, their blood will be on their own head.

He cures the sound of the trumpet verse 5 and did not take his warning and his blood will be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life the clarity of the warning, the kindness of the warning, the hopefulness of the warning, the clarity of the warning.

[13:48] And fourthly, the motivation behind the warning. The motivation behind the warning. I wonder what your view of God is. A tragic thing there are people who go to churches who come to lunchtime and talk like this, and they think of God as a stern, frowning tyrant.

He's got a sword in one hand and a thunderbolt in the other. And he's just itching to strike someone down. I have the view of someone like Richard Dawkins.

Richard Dawkins makes no bones about it. His view of the Old Testament, God is a bloodthirsty tyrant who is a vengeful and angry and cruel and sadistic freak.

Why is Richard Dawkins hasn't actually read the Old Testament? He certainly hasn't read this passage, has he? He certainly seems to have skinned over this verse, where God says in this verse, Can you see this?

I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked may turn from his way and live. People say, surely, God couldn't care less whether someone lives or dies.

[ 15 : 02 ] Out of the mass of all the millions and billions who've ever lived or ever will live, does God really care? Does God really notice what happens to any one individual in the borough of Ealing?

Do you really care about one individual? if you hear of one person who's killed, say, in South Africa, are you that bothered?

Does it feel a great sense of loss or pain? Are we going to lose sleep tonight over one person maybe who's lost their life in a drive-by shooting in Chicago?

Well, no, we won't, will we? And if that's the case, why should God care about little old you and little old me? But the God of the Bible, the God of the Bible takes no pleasure in the eternal punishment of the wicked.

He will execute that punishment, make no mistake about that, but it brings him no pleasure to do so. But what does delight God is what this verse says, is when a man or woman or a boy or girl turn from their evil ways and when they repent of their sins and they ask God for forgiveness, that thrills God's heart, that brings him pleasure and joy.

[ 16 : 31 ] Do you remember how Jesus put it? He said, there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 so-called righteous people who need no repentance. God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked.

How do we know that? We know that because if God did take pleasure in the wicked then we would have been destroyed a thousand times over long before now. If God took pleasure in the death of the wicked you and I wouldn't be sitting here.

We would be in hell being punished at this moment and the fact there is a world around us that is full of wicked people that continues to exist proves that God takes no pleasure in the death of evil people.

And what is you going to say? That is a powerful reason for turn from your evil ways because God does not want you to perish. Peter says in 2 Peter 3 verse 9 God is patient with you.

Not wanting anyone to perish but wanting all to come to salvation. In spite of all that you've done. In spite of the way that you're living your life at this very moment. In spite of all your disobedience.

[ 17 : 46 ] In spite of all your rebellion. In spite of all your rejection of God. Of your trampling over his laws. Of you ignoring him and ignoring his son.

Living in your life as if you are God. And God still wants you to turn from your evil ways and be saved.

The motivation behind the warning. Fifthly the credibility of the warning. you find it hard to believe that the holy and majestic and awesome king of the universe takes pleasure in wicked creatures turning to him in repentance and being saved from his judgment.

You find it hard to believe that God takes delight when he doesn't have to execute justice. We need to believe it. Because God says it is true. And he emphasizes that it is true in our verse.

Now everything that God says is true without exception. Every single syllable that comes from the mouth of God is absolutely true. But sometimes God emphasizes words to reinforce it, to impress them on our minds all the more.

[ 19 : 01 ] When Jesus says, verily, verily, truly, truly, I say to you, he's not saying everything else I say is a lie, he's saying no, you need to listen to this. And so God wants to impress this on our minds.

And he does that by swearing out. Oh, look at verse 11, he says, as I live declares the Lord. As I live declares the Lord, I have no pleasure on the death of the wicked.

It's interesting that God begins the verse in that way. It's almost as if God is saying to his equal fears, I know you're going to find it hard to believe. I know you're going to find it tricky, so let me make it unmistakably clear.

It is as impractic as it possibly can be, isn't it? As I live, declares the Lord. It's almost as if God goes into court and stands behind himself as judge and swears on us that he does not delight in your judgment but in your salvation.

That's what he wants. What does he swear by? He swears by himself. As I live. In the Testament, there's nothing greater than God can swear by.

[ 20 : 07 ] The only thing he can swear by is by himself. His own life, his own being, his own attributes, his own honour. In other words, there is one thing, if there's one thing in the universe that

we cannot doubt, it is this, that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

He swears by himself. The credibility of that warning, the kindness, the hopefulness, the clarity, the motivation, the credibility, and then lastly, certainly, the appeal of the warning.

When someone pleads earnestly with us, it has a powerful effect, doesn't it? It ought to have a powerful effect upon us. Whatever we think of the merits of the person, of the case that speaks pleading, when somebody is pleading earnestly, it's hard to refuse.

Take a hard-hearted man or woman to stop, not to stop and pay attention and to seriously consider. Pleading moves us. It touches us in our hearts.

And so as we finish, just notice in verse 11, it is God pleading with you. The awesome, glorious creator of the universe. The infinite, eternal, unchangeable God.

[ 21 : 34 ] The one who is enthroned on the circle of the earth, the one who is from everlasting to everlasting, the one who calls stars into being, who holds the planets and the galaxies in their place. Here he is pleading with rebellious wicked sinners who deserve to die, who deserve to be in hell forever, and God holds out his hands to them and he's saying, come back, turn back.

Turn back from your evil ways. Why would you die? Or a house of Israel. And so, if you're not a Christian this length time, God is pleading with you.

He's pleading with you, who means ambassador, turn back, turn back. Listen, God says, pay attention, consider. Why would you die? You don't need to die.

You don't need to go to hell. And if you are determined not to repent and you set yourself on going to hell, you will have to go to hell walking right path of pleading invitation.

You don't have to push God aside to get there. He now stretched arms pleading with you, saying, turn back, turn back, why would you die? Why would you die? And then as Ezekiel says, if you refuse that, your blood will be on your own head.

[ 22 : 49 ] You have no one to blame for eternity but yourself. Because you sat here and you heard the invitation and you heard God pleading and you chose to ignore the warning.

And of course, it's only because of the Lord Jesus. It's only because of him that God finished you this warning, isn't it? Because a car from the cross of Jesus, these words are cruel and meaningless and empty.

Imagine us going into one of London's hospitals and you go round the wards of all the terminally ill patients and they're saying, why will you die? Why will you die? There's no choice but to die.

There's no alternative other than death. But because of Jesus, there is an alternative to death for the sinner who turned to his sin because Jesus died on the cross. But our punishment and our death can be transferred to him and his perfect obedience and his life can be transferred to us.

And the cross makes sense. Jesus' sacrifice makes sense of this gracious warning and invitation from God. And so Jesus says to every sinner from the cross, why will you die?

[ 23 : 55 ] You don't need to die. If you'll turn to your wicked ways, I will save you instead of how you can have heaven. And on the day of judgment, if we refuse to heed this warning, God will say to us, why did you not trust my son?

As your Savior, I gave my son to save every and any sinner who will turn from their sins and you wouldn't trust him. You will surely die.

We are aware today of all days, aren't we? We don't know what lies ahead. This could be the last time this warning ever comes to you. We don't know how many times God will hold out his hands to us and plead with us, turn back.

Turn back. Turn your evil ways. God, for why will you die? Why will you die that? Why will you die that? Thank you.