Ezekiel 16

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[0:00] What do you think of your own sin? How does it make you feel?

When we've been coasting for too long.
And we're going to be looking at Ezekiel 16 this evening. Which is a passage that if you don't know it's there, almost surprises you with its language.
It does not hold back. And often that is what we need. In our darkest and lowest moments.
Let me just, as you turn there to Ezekiel 16, just sort of set the scene. Ezekiel was a prophet in Israel, but he was, well he wasn't in Israel, he was in Babylon. Because this was after the exile, or during the exile.
[1:16] When God's people, Israel, had been kicked out of the land for their repeated failings. Time and time and time again, they had not heeded the warnings of God.

And eventually, they reached the end of the line and God said, there's nothing's enough. And he sent them forth from his land. The temple was destroyed.
And God's people found themselves in Babylon, in the world superpower of the day. And Ezekiel receives his prophecies while they are there.
And in many ways, what we read in Ezekiel 16 is almost a parable of what Israel has been like for the last few hundred years.
And it's a parable of how they have failed to love God as they ought. Ezekiel 16 shows us what our sin does to our relationship with God.
[2:29] And it is brutal. It is, if you've got it open there, it is a very long chapter.

I was debating whether to sort of skip bits. But I think it is better we read the whole thing. We won't read the whole thing at once. But that you hear more of it from God's word than you do from me. Because it's safe to say that he says it better than I do.
There might be some of you here today who are sticking strong in the faith. And in that, I rejoice. We should all rejoice.
Take this passage as a warning. But I suspect there are many, and I think I can include myself in this, who have, for a while, just been going with the flow.
Who have been coasting along, like Israel had been, for year after year after year, thinking, it's all right. God's gracious. God forgives my sins.
[3:36] What is there to worry about? Ezekiel 16 acts as a sort of defibrillator to spiritually numb souls.

The spiritually dead souls. Kicks us back into life. Let's just read. We'll just read the first five verses. I'm just going to read a little section at a time.
Explain briefly what is being said. And then, at the end, we'll just close with a few points of application. So let's start. Ezekiel 16, verses 1 to 5.
Again, the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations. And say, thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem.
Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites. Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth on the day you were born, your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths.
[4:45] No eye pitied you to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field. For you were abhorred on the day that you were born.

As you can probably guess from the subheadings in your Bible, whatever version it might be, it'll portray the same picture.
This is an account of God's faithless bride, of the Lord's faithless people, of the adultery of God's people.

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And we see that account personified in the portrayal of Jerusalem. So you see that there in verse 2, Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations.
Basically tell God's people just how badly they've messed up. And so as we'll see through this passage, that the picture just builds and builds and builds of the ugliness of sin.
[5:54] But it opens up before that, right? Before Israel even could sin, to show them where they had come from in the beginning. The first five verses answer the questions, what were you before the Lord took you in?

And the answer is quite clearly, absolutely nothing. Verse 5, No, I pitied you to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you. But you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred on the day that you were born.
The message is pretty clear. If you'd been left on your own from day one, if you did not have God's help, you would be absolutely nowhere.
It doesn't matter what you think you can achieve on your own power. Without God, we are hopeless and helpless. We are despised and rejected.
Just move on to verses 6 to 14. And when I passed by you, the Lord says, and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, live.
[7:08] I said to you in your blood, live. I made you flourish like a plant of the field, and you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment.

Your breasts were formed and your hair had grown, yet you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness.
I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil.
I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk, and I adorned you with the ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck.
And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver. And your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth.
[8:15] You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty.

For it was perfect through the splendor of the Lord. It's a beautiful image, right? This helpless, worthless, abhorred, abandoned Jerusalem.
And then the Lord comes and gives her life. Gives her hope. Brings the lowly lost into the royal household.
Adorns her with splendor and majesty that she did not deserve. He enters into a covenant with her and makes her his own. It's a wonderful picture of salvation, right?
Of the church. Of a people hopeless and abandoned that God makes beautiful.
[9:33] Saving us from ourselves, saving us from the world around. You were nothing but the Lord. And you see what he does in those verses we just read.

I passed you by. I said to you, live. I made you flourish. I spread the corner of my garment over you. I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant.
I clothed you. I wrapped you. I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. I was the one who made you beautiful.
You were beautiful. Surely, you live a life of ceaseless gratitude. Unending thankfulness of praise and wonder at what the Lord has done.
Surely, you make his name great. You proclaim his goodness and his glory.
[10:39] His deeds to everyone you see. To everyone who will listen, you make known the ways of the Lord who takes the helpless and makes them beautiful.

Then we come to verse 15. But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby.
Your beauty became his. You took some of your garments, the garments that God had given you, and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore.

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The like has never been seen, nor ever shall be. You took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given to you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore.
And you took your embroidered garments to cover them and set my oil and my incense before them. Also my bread that I gave you, I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey, you set before them for a pleasing aroma.
[12:05] And so it was, declares the Lord. And you took your sons and your daughters whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured.

Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by the fire to them? And in all your abominations and your whorings, you did not remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.
It doesn't hold back, it's punches, right? But there's a lot of, there's a lot of problems in here. But the root, the root cause of it all is verse 22.
You did not remember. You did not remember. The days of your youth.
She forgot where she had been, what she had been on her own, what she would be without what the Lord had given her. On her own, Jerusalem is nothing cast aside out on the open field.
[13:26] She is adorned with beauty and splendor from the Lord, but she takes it for herself and offers it to the world. Think of what it means, right, to be in a covenant relationship.

That covenant that the Lord entered with Jerusalem there in verse 8. It is an all-out commitment between two parties.
Think of it in her own marriage. Marriages, right? The minimum expectation is faithfulness. What does Jerusalem do?
She hoards herself off to any passerby. It is a grim image. She takes the good gifts she has been given and offers them to the world because she forgot what the Lord had done for her.
What we've seen so far, on our own, we are nothing. Everything we have is given to us by the Lord. That was the case for Jerusalem too, but she took what she had been given and she assumed it was her own and she hoared herself off to any passerby.
[14:57] It is a very bleak picture but things just get worse. Verse 23, And after all your wickedness, woe, woe to you, declares the Lord.

You built yourself a vaulted chamber and made yourself a lofty place in every square. At the head of every street, you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, offering yourself to any passerby and multiplying your whoring.
You played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbor, multiplying your whoring to provoke me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out my hand against you and diminished your allotted portion and delivered you to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines who were ashamed of your lewd behavior.
You played the whore also with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied. Yes, you played the whore with them and still you were not satisfied. You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea and even in this you were not satisfied.
How sick is your heart, declares the Lord. Because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street and making your lofty place in every square.
[16:20] you weren't like a prostitute because you scorned payment. Adulterous wife who receives strangers instead of her husband.

Men give gifts to all prostitutes but you gave your gifts to all your lovers. Bribing them to come to you from every side with your whores. So you were different from other women in your whores.
No one solicited you to play the whore and you gave payment while no payment was given to you. Therefore, you were different.
I think verse 32 captures what is going on here. The language around builds up this frightful image of what sin does to our relationship with God.
But ultimately, it is the act of an adulterous wife who receives strangers instead of her husband.
And again, the message here is pretty clear.
[17:37] to God's sinful people is saying, don't pretend that you were lured away. Don't pretend that you couldn't help it.

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That you were tempted into this against your own will. Don't pretend you were dragged kicking and screaming. You knew what you were doing.
How often is that the case with our own sin? We list excuse after excuse after excuse.
But we knew what we were doing. We knew fine well. Verse 34 again. You were different from other women in your whorings.
No one solicited you to play the whore. And you gave payment while no payment was given to you. Therefore you're different. Worse than a prostitute.
[18:43] That is the picture of the bride of the Lord. That is the picture of the Lord's bride.

Worse than a prostitute. every bitter thought that we have. Every moment of anger. Every selfish deed.
Every time we don't put others first. Every time we don't love the Lord with all our heart. Every lustful thought act of jealousy.
None of it is forced onto us. we know what we do and we do so willingly. Ask yourself in a normal week how often do you actively try and be faithful to God?
I remember being faithful to God is very different from having faith in God. How many moments do you actively turn away from sin in order to be faithful to your heavenly father.
[20:02] And we are part of a much bigger body as well. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are one body. We are one bride. The sins of each one of us should worry and disgust us as much as our own.

We are God's people. But so often as James says we give ourselves to the world. We live as friends of the world. We are an adulterous people.
Let's keep reading verse 35. Therefore O prostitute hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers and with all your abominable idols and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them therefore behold I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure all those you loved and all those you hated I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness and I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy and I will give you into their hands and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places they shall strip and leave you naked and bare back to where you were they shall bring up a crowd against you they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords and they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women
I will make you stop playing the whore and you shall also give payment no more so will I satisfy my wrath on you and my jealousy shall depart from you I will be calm and will no more be angry because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged me with all these things therefore behold I have returned your deeds upon your head declares the Lord have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations there is a punishment that fits the crime Jerusalem has been picked up from nothing has been adorned with splendor and majesty and has gone off offering herself to every passerby and when you paint it so vividly it is hard to argue with the justice that is coming right the
Lord is wrathful we see in verse 42 he is angry and rightly so a loving husband who has given everything to his undeserving wife and with what has he been repaid love thankfulness praise faithfulness no she's taken all the gifts that he's given and she's walked out the door and spread her legs to every man who passes by on the street it is a vile picture but it is a true representation of what we do when we sin and so the punishment that is pronounced in those verses we just read this hardly surprising you can't disagree with it you can't say that's not fair she doesn't deserve that that is why James still says in that passage we read earlier in the
[24:03] New Testament you adulterous people can't say we don't deserve the punishment that we have accrued for ourselves let me just read through to verse 58 verse 44 behold everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you like mother like daughter you are the daughter of your mother who loathes her husband and her children and you are the sister of your sisters who loathes their husbands and their children your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite and your elder sister is Samaria who lived with her daughters to the north of you and your younger sister who lived to the south of you as Sodom with her daughters not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their illuminations within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways as I live declares the Lord your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and

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your daughters have done behold this was the guilt of your sister

Sodom she and her daughter had pride excess of food and prosperous ease that did not aid the poor and the needy they were haughty and did an abomination before me so I removed them when I saw it Samaria has not committed half your sins you have committed more abominations than they and have made your sisters appear righteous by all abominations that you have committed bear your disgrace you also for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters because of your sins in which you acted more abominations than they they are more in the right than you so be ashamed you also and bear your disgrace for you have made your sister appear righteous I will restore their fortunes both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters I will restore your own fortunes in their midst that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done becoming a consolation to as for your sister
Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state and Samaria and her Dothal shall return to their former state and you and your daughter shall return to your former state was not your sister Sodom a byword in your youth in the day in your mouth in the day of your pride before your wickedness was uncovered now you have become an object of approach for the daughters Syria and all those around her and for the daughters of the Philistines those all around who despise you you bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations declares the Lord just summarize the story so far Jerusalem in her youth rejected and abandoned left alone in a field surrounded by blood despised by the world but the Lord picked her up from her misery and adorned her with unimaginable beauty and splendor and honor through no merit of her own in fact in spite of who she is the Lord made her the most beautiful of all and he entered into a covenant with her the Lord of heaven and earth committed himself devoted himself to undeserving
Jerusalem but Jerusalem saw all that she had saw what she had been made saw that she was beautiful and she took her beauty to the world she offered herself to anyone who came knocking she didn't try and fight them off instead of returning the Lord's favor with faithfulness she whored herself to any other passerby and so quite rightly she deserved punishment and we find in that last little section we read that Jerusalem's sins were even worse than the world's because Jerusalem should have known where her beauty came from Jerusalem should have known that she was in a covenant relationship with her
God and yet in spite of that she acts more abominably than the world she willfully scorns the goodness of God seeking favor with those who despise her and so verse 58 seems a fitting conclusion doesn't it you bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations to the Lord seems like a good place to stop seems like the fair result but it doesn't stop there let's just read the last few verses for thus says the Lord God I will deal with you as you have done you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant yet
[29:51] I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters both your elder and your younger and I give them to you as daughters but not on account of the covenant with you I will establish my covenant with you and you shall know that I am the Lord that you may remember and be confounded and never open your mouth again because of your shame when I atone for you all that you have done declares the Lord Ezekiel 16 is 58 long verses of the ugliness of Jerusalem because of how beautiful she was made and what she did with it of her faithlessness and the punishment that justly deserves it built a picture we can barely stomach of the most unimaginably unfaithful spouse and then at the end when we are most disgusted

God turns around and says I'll cover the cost I will atone for you all that you have done the one who has been so wronged against turns and says I've got your back that is grace on the most epic scale vividly portrayed that is the grace that we need let me just finish off with a few little things for us a few little pointers of application number one we need to remember right the root of Jerusalem's problems was her forgetfulness I say forgetfulness this isn't some innocent slip of the mind this is a deliberate failure to regularly recall what the
Lord has done remember what the Lord has done lest you cease to give him the praise and the faithfulness that he deserves it's one of the reasons right that communion is such an important part of our Christian life a time when we collectively as Christ's bride remember what he has done for us remember where we were before he picked us up out of the mire remember the price that he has paid remember the punishment that we deserved we must remember what the Lord has done for us and make a point of it like make a point of remembering through the week make it a part of your

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routine to meditate on what the Lord has done for you because only when we remember do we live faithfully
Jerusalem did not remember do not make the same mistake secondly don't don't just have faith be faithful we often speak of faith unrightly so but as James says in the same epistle we were reading from earlier even the demons believe do not let your faith stop at a mere knowing true faith will always be backed up by faithfulness right faithfulness is an action it is something you go out of your way to do remember what it means to be in a covenant relationship with your God think of the pain it causes the damage that breaking that covenant does think of the pain it causes in human relationships how much more so with our holy
God who has done so much for us being faithful is something we do it is an action it requires us to be on guard we are sinful people in a sinful world and the devil is always in the pearl!
[35:02] trip us up we must be actively seeking to be faithful to our God number three repent with humility it is a sad fact of our fallen state that we will at times be faithless we will be adulterous people but remember remember remember what that faithlessness does to our relationship with God remember this image in Ezekiel 16 of the adulterous bride our sin is no small matter it is not something you can brush off and think sorry about that Lord I'll try again better next time there's a grievous thing there's an act of gross adultery it is shameful

I cannot brush it off lightly and carry on our merry way thinking it's no big deal but repent and repent with humility be honest before God about the seriousness of our failings that means acknowledging to him that you understand something of the seriousness of what you've done we live far too much for our own comfort even when it's a conversation just between me and the Lord it is uncomfortable to uncover your sinfulness we don't like to dwell on the gravity of it it is an uncomfortable experience but it is the only way of true reconciliation again just think of it between people how does it work when we're wronged and we hopefully we forgive one another but we do so when we see genuine repentance when we see genuine sorrow about what has been done what we have here in Ezekiel 16 is an image of the wife of a loving adoring husband going out and prostrating!
herself well worse than prostrating herself giving herself away think about what that looks like and imagine if when that wife is confronted with her sin she simply goes sorry about that guess I should try better and expect everything to carry on as if nothing happened an insincere act of repentance is as bad as the sin itself because it shows complete disregard for the damage that's been done so when we sin we must repent with humility again that's what James said in that passage we read earlier addressed to the adulterous people he says be wretched and mourn and weep humble yourselves before God there's an uncomfortable experience when you know you are so far in the wrong and feel sick to your own stomach at what you've done you just want to hide away from it don't you but if we are to restore our relationship with
God if we are to hate sin for what it is if we are to hate sin the way he hates it that is how we must feel about it and humility is how we must come before God with it just finally praise God right those first 58 verses should make us shudder at our own sinfulness but then the tables turn and we are left not balking at our own sin but marveling at God's grace that that is where we are left it is a long chapter thanks for sticking with it through me most of it is spent illustrating the grotesque nature of our faithlessness outlining the very just punishment for it and then at the end of it the loving husband who has been so badly mistreated throughout hurt and wounded turns to his faithless bride and says
I'll take that punishment for you the centerpiece of this story is not me and my sin it is God and his grace do not take our sin lightly but know that it is covered when we repent humbly we need no longer dwell on it we need no longer feel guilt for it because God has covered the cost on the cross the words that sprung to my own mind when I was reading through this chapter was the opposite of what Christ said on the cross you read it and think my God why haven't you forsaken me this is not about me I want you to leave here tonight hating your sin being ashamed of it but most of all
[41:08] I want you to leave here with a heart overflowing with thankfulness at what the Lord has done for you that in spite of all that we collectively as the bride of Christ have done against our loving husband he still turns to us and says I will bear your penalty I will atone for your sins I will remain faithful to you always what love what grace what a God let's pray together

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