

Ezekiel 33:11

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[0 : 00] Let me see, guys, I'm turning to Exodus 33. I wouldn't agree with all of them, but one he spoke about was the need to preach in different ways.

He spoke about verses of the Bible that over the past 400 or 500 years have been used by God to bring people to saving faith. There are certain verses out there.

And he said one of the dangers in expository preaching, which is what I normally do, is taking you through a passage in a chunk, is that you do note those verses, but you don't kind of squeeze the juice out of the orange.

You don't spend time meditating on the great verses. And that's what I want to do a little bit on Sunday evenings for the next while, is to really look at some of these great verses of Scripture. I don't think you want to do that all the time, but I think it is right to do that. And I want to look at one of these verses tonight. It's something I've done at the lunchtime talks, and I've reworked it this week.

[1 : 22] So it's Ezekiel 33 in verse 11. So, where God tells Ezekiel, Say to them, 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? It's a great verse, isn't it? Why would you die? You're walking, I'm down Greenford Avenue.

You're on the pavement, and three lads come over the brow of the hill on BMXs, and they're racing one another, and one of them goes on the wrong side of the road.

And you turn to your friend, and you say, Oplod's got a death wish. They've got a death wish. You hear of people who come to the end of their lives, and they've lost the will to live.

They've ceased to care about their life, and they don't value it any longer, and they say, I just want to die. They've got a death wish. Perhaps someone hears the news, they've got a seriously life-threatening, even terminal disease.

[2 : 37] And the doctors watch, don't they, carefully, how a patient responds after that diagnosis. Because it is possible, when you hear that kind of news, for people just to give up on life, they assume that they will inevitably succumb, so what's the point in living?

They've got a death wish. And the people that Ezekiel is preaching to here were a bit like that. The Jews have been taken captive by Babylon, and they've been carried off into exile.

And Ezekiel has been patiently explaining to them again and again and again that this was right, this was God's punishment upon them for their disobedience and idolatry and sin. But up to Ezekiel 33, the people have not accepted it.

They've not been willing to listen. They refuse to accept it until now. And now for the first time in the whole book, the Jews accept that they have rebelled against the living God. And their guilt hits them like a sledgehammer.

And the darkness of their shame just overwhelms them. And they're under intense and painful conviction of their sin, and they can hardly bear it. Look at verse 10. You have said, surely our transgressions, that is our willful rebellion, and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them.

[4 : 00] How then can we live? We rot away because of our sins. The word is used in other places, isn't it? Of putrefying, of rotting and decaying meats.

That's how the people felt. They were convinced that they would perish forever because of their sin. How then can we live? What hope is there for people like us? After who we've been and what we've done?

It's as if they've got a death wish. And in verse 11, that is God's answer to that poignant question. And verse 11 is a stark and an urgent warning to guilty, despairing people. God says, say to them, as I live, declares the Lord your 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? I want us to notice six things, six brief things tonight about this warning that comes from God. [5 : 04] The first thing is the kindness of the warning. The word warning has negative connotations in our mind, doesn't it? I don't know if you've played word association, what you've come up with if I said warning.

It's probably a fairly negative thing. We put warnings, don't we, in the same category as threats. Warnings make us think of thrones. And shaking fingers. And angry voices. And of course that may well be the case. But against that rather negative and gloomy picture, we need to remember that a warning, for all its sternness, is normally a loving thing. That warning is motivated by a warm concern for the welfare of other people. So, children, your parents, if your parents never warn you about anything, there is something really wrong. A parent who never warns his child about danger shows a total lack of love and care and concern. We need to warn our children, don't we? Your mum and dad, they need to warn you sternly. [6 : 13] They warn you, don't they? Don't get into a car with a stranger under any circumstance. Don't run across the road. Don't play with matches. And a warning, it's often a scary thing.

It's often a stern thing. Warnings bring up subjects that are often hard to talk about. They're unpleasant to think about, but they are prompted by love and concern. And so, for a parent, it's for our children's good that we say things. It is to protect them and it is to make their lives better and happier than they would be otherwise. You read of shark attacks in Australia. And so, if you go to the coast of Australia and tell them there are these massive great signs warning swimmers of dangers. And when they were put up, those warnings, the council and the authorities were flooded with complaints. They had complaints about the graphic pictures that had been put up about sharks. [7 : 16] And that is the point. They were meant to be frightening. That is the whole point of the warning. To scare people away from a real and terrible danger. And it's not out of care and out of love and out of concern.

We don't want to ruin people's lives. We want to protect people's lives. We want people's lives, we want people's days on the beach to be happy and safe. In fact, it's a loving thing to warn. And God issues this stern and somber warning to men and women and boys and girls who are overwhelmed with guilt. And he doesn't try to cheer them up with a few jokes or a couple of light-hearted anecdotes. Their situation is serious. The eternal destiny of their immortal souls is at stake. And so here is a warning not to make them feel worse about themselves. It's meant to help them. It's meant to save them and it's meant to rescue them. And it's meant to deal with their plight because God wants them to live and not to die. And so tonight, if you are here and you know that you've not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and you don't love him and you don't follow him, God issues to you the same stern and frightening warning because you are in terrible danger. [8 : 32] And you are in danger of plunging into hell forever and forever. And God is saying to you through his words, live.

Why would you die? And I'm not telling you this because I want to stress you out, because I want to frighten you or because I want to ruin your evening. I'm telling you this because God says you are in terrible danger. And God wants you to heed this warning and avoid the danger. The kindness of the warning. Number two, the hopefulness of the warning. The hopefulness of the warning. A warning is always, by nature, a hopeful thing. Warnings are given while there's still time to heed them. To avoid the danger, to take action. So imagine you're driving up one of those mountain, mountains in France or Switzerland and there's a sheer cliff on one side. And you see loads and loads of signs, don't you? You see warnings. Drivers, keep well away from the edge. Drive slowly, drive carefully. There won't be any warning signs halfway down the cliff.

[9 : 42] And the reason for that is because if you drive off the edge of that mountain and you are plunging down the cliff over the side, there's no point in warning you to intercept.

It's too late. At that stage, once you leave the road, once you're plummeting to your death, there's no point. There's no point saying to you, you probably want to watch his speed as you go around. Or take care on that corner. There's no use to you. While you're still on the road, while you're still driving on that mountain, of course, there's time, isn't there? Time to listen, time to heed the warning.

That's when you need to be warned about the danger. Same here, it's encouraging, it's a hostile thing tonight. That you are hearing this warning from God this evening.

God says that you turn from your ways, why will you die? And it's not too late for you tonight to find life. To avoid judgment, the future is not sealed.

[10 : 47] And as long as you are alive, this warning is still relevant to you. You can do something about it. It's not too late for you tonight. If you're to turn from your sin and to give your life to God, well it may be too late.

It might have been a couple of hours, a couple of weeks, a couple of months. But this moment, the warning's not too late. One day, it will be at the instant of your death or the moment Jesus Christ will return to this world, the warnings will no longer apply.

It'll be of no use any longer because you will have at that point plunged over the edge to your never-ending ruin. And if we die without trusting Jesus Christ as our Saviour, God will never again say to you the words, turn from your evil ways and live.

Why will you die? And if you go to your death without responding to this warning, then all you will hear from the lips of God will be, depart from me forever.

It's now, it's in this life, it's this evening, this moment, that we need to pay attention to this warning. Now is the time to trust Jesus Christ as Saviour.

[12 : 00] Let's go back to the illustration of the driver going up the mountain. Imagine someone doesn't pay any attention to the signs and they think it'll be alright.

And they don't pay any attention to the sign of the warning of a hairpin bend that is coming up. They take the corner too fast. They crash into the barrier and into space. And as the nose of the car begins to dip down and they see the sheer chasm before them and they're approaching death, at that moment isn't it, there's this horrendous realisation, surely, that they'd give anything just to go back in time a few seconds.

To go back to safety on the road, to be able to heed the warning. And so that happens tonight at this very moment. But as we sit here this evening, what is it, every couple of seconds, there are fellows entering the world of eternity.

And they've ignored God's warning all their lives. And only now do they realise it's too late. And they go to their everlasting fate and they would give anything to sit where you've said.

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

[13 : 27] It's not too late. Turn back from your evil ways, for why would you die? The hopefulness of the warning. Number three, the clarity of the warning. The clarity of the warning.

Some warnings are rather cryptic, aren't they? I don't know about you, I've got a PC, a computer, and it's forever warning me about things. Forever warning me about, if I don't do this, my computer will be at risk.

I pay not the blindness bit of attention to it. They'll just click on the X and say, I'll look at it later, I don't know if you're like that. But there are, when you try to understand what they're warning you of, I can't understand it.

There are warnings that are really difficult to understand. But no one can be left in any doubt about this warning. Look what it says, it says turn back.

Turn back from your evil ways and live. So why will you die? He says leave your old way of life behind.

[14 : 31] Start a new life. Stop living for yourself. And start living and trusting in God and living for him. Change direction, do a U-turn. The smallest child that's here tonight can understand this, can't they?

You might not believe the warning. You might not like the warning. But you do understand the warning tonight, don't you? You cannot claim tonight that it's too hard for you to understand.

It says that you are having for eternal ruin unless you turn from your ways. But 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 really simple. It's to get off that throne and allow Jesus Christ to sit on that throne and bow your knee to him and give your life to him and say Lord your will be done.

You are in charge. And the warning has been sounded clearly. So what will you do about it? As God says to Ezekiel, the blood of the man or the woman or the boy or the girl who hears the warning and doesn't respond, their blood will be on their own head.

[15 : 46] Look at verse 5. He heard the sound of the trumpet and he did not take warning and so his blood shall be upon himself.

But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. The clarity of the warning, the kindness, the hopefulness, the clarity. Number 4, can you see the motivation behind the warning?

The motivation behind the warning. I wonder what your view of God is. Do you think of God as a stern and frowning tyrant that ruins your fun?

He's got a sword in one hand and a thunderbolt in the other and he's just itching to strike you down. That's what Richard Dawkins thinks. Makes no bums about it.

His view of the God of the Old Testament, he says he's a bloodthirsty tyrant. Vengeful, cruel, angry, sadistic. Dawkins has never really read the Old Testament. He's skimmed over this verse, hasn't he?

[16 : 52] Where God says, doesn't he look at verse 11, we need to see this. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from his way and live.

People say, don't they, surely God couldn't care less whether someone lives or dies. Out of the green mass of all the millions and millions and millions and millions of people who have lived and are living and will live, could God really care for one individual?

Do you really care about an individual? If you hear of somebody who is murdered on the streets of South Africa tonight, will that stop you sleeping? Are you that bothered?

do you feel a great sense of loss over someone who is murdered in Syria? Do you feel a great sense of loss or pain?

Will you lose sleep tonight over that? No, you won't. No, you won't. If that's the case, why did God care about you or me?

[18 : 14] The God of the Bible takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He takes no pleasure in the eternal punishment of the wicked.

He will execute that punishment, make no mistake about it, but it brings God no pleasure to do that. What does delight God? Well, let's see, what does delight God?

In this verse, he says this, when a man or a woman or a boy or a girl turn from their evil ways, and when they repent of their sins, when they ask for forgiveness, when they stumblingly say, I'm terribly sorry, that thrills God's heart.

And that brings him pleasure and joy. Do you remember how Jesus put it? He says, there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 righteous persons who think they don't need repentance. And God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked.

How do we know that? Because if God did take pleasure in the wicked, then we would be destroyed and we a thousand times over. And if God took pleasure in the death of the wicked, you and I would not be sitting here tonight, we would be in hell, being punished.

[19 : 28] And the fact is, there is a world around us full of wicked people that continue to exist, and God takes no pleasure in the death of evil people.

That's what Ezekiel is saying, and that is a powerful reason to turn from your evil right ways, because God does not want you to perish. Peter, in chapter 3, verse 9, says God is patient with you.

Doesn't want anyone to perish, but wanting all to come to salvation, in spite of all you've done, in spite of the way that you're living your life at this very moment, in spite of all your disobedience, in spite of all your rebellion, in spite of all your rejection of God, in spite of all your trampling over his laws, and all of your ignoring him through your life, and living life as if you are God, and he is not, and living as if God actually does matter one little bit, in spite of that, God wants you tonight to turn from your evil ways and be saved.

The motivation behind the warning number five, the credibility of the warning, the credibility of the warning, the warning, maybe you find it really hard to believe, I've just said that this holy and

awesome king of the university takes no pleasure in wicked creatures, rebellious creatures, he takes no pleasure in that.

Maybe you find heartily that God takes delight when he doesn't have to execute punishment. God says that is true and he emphasises that is true in our verse. Now, everything that God says is true, okay, everything without exception, in this book that you've got on your lap, every single syllable comes from the mouth of God.

[21 : 17] It's absolutely true, but sometimes God wants to make sure that you understand that and he emphasises the words to reinforce them, to impress them on your mind. And so can you see what he does in verse 11? He says, as I live, declares the Lord.

It's almost as if God begins this verse saying, I know you're going to find this hard to believe tonight, I know you'll find it difficult to believe tonight. So let me make it unmistakably clear, and emphatic, as emphatic as I possibly can be, as I live, declares the Lord.

It's almost as if, in Ezekiel 33 verse 11, God goes into court and stands behind himself as judge, and he swears an oath that he does not delight in your judgment, but in your salvation.

And what does he swear by? He says, I swear by myself as I live. And the New Testament tells you there's nothing greater that God can swear on. The only thing that God can swear by is himself, his own life, his own being, his own attributes, his own honour.

In other words, if there's one thing in the world that you cannot doubt, it is this, that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He swears by himself to tell you that.

[22 : 40] The credibility of the warning, and the kindness of the warning, and the hopefulness of the warning, and the clarity of the warning, and the motivation of the warning, and then lastly, the appeal of the warning.

The appeal of the warning. when somebody pleads with you, it has a powerful effect on you, doesn't it? At least it should. Whatever we may think of the merits of the case that is being pleaded, if somebody is pleading earnestly with us, it takes a really hard-hearted man or woman or boy or girl to stop and to send them away and not to pay attention.

pleading moves us, pleading touches us in our hearts. You children know that, don't you? You know what it's like to plead?

You know what it's like when you want something from your mum and dad and they say no and you plead with them and you say please, please, please. And you might not think it, but your parents are moved by that.

But can you see in verse 11, it is the most remarkable thing, it is God pleading with you. The awesome, glorious creator of the universe, the one who is enthroned on the circle of the earth, the one who is from everlasting to everlasting, the one who is infinite and eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice and goodness and truth.

[24 : 10] The one who called the stars into being, the one who holds the planets and the galaxies on the courses, the one who maintains gravity with his downwards gentle pressure, pleads with rebellious wicked sinners who deserve to die and who deserve to be in hell forever and he holds on his hands to them and he says to them, turn back, turn back.

He says, turn back from your evil ways and live for why would you die for house of Israel? And if you are somebody who knows they're not a Christian tonight, who's not following the Lord Jesus Christ and not believing in him, God pleads with you tonight.

He pleads with you through the preaching of his word, turn back, turn back. He says, why will you die? Answer that question, why will you die tonight?

Listen, God says, pay attention, consider, you don't need to die tonight. You don't need to go to hell. And if you've determined not to repent and you've set yourself on going to hell, you will have to go to hell, walking right past God's pleading.

And all of God's invitations, if I can put it like this, you will have to push God aside. His outstretched arms pleading with you, saying, turn back, turn back, why will you die?

[25 : 55] And if you go to hell, you will have to push past him and say, I'm going anyway. As Ezekiel says, your blood will be on your own head. And you'll have no one to blame for all eternity but yourself.

Because you sat here, and you heard the invitation, and you heard God's pleading words, and you chose to ignore them, the appeal of the warning. And of course, it's only because the Lord Jesus Christ, that God can issue this warning.

And make these pleas, because apart from the cross of Jesus, these words would be cruel, and meaningless, and empty. Imagine, it's like you go into a London hospital, and you go into the cancer ward, where people are terminally ill, and you say to them, why will you die?

Why will you die? They've no choice about to die. There's no alternative other than death, but because of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is an alternative death to death for the sinner who turns from his sins.

Because Jesus died on the cross, and our punishment, our death can be transferred to him, and his perfect obedience and life can be transferred to us.

[27 : 11] The cross makes sense. It makes sense of this offer, Jesus' sacrifice, makes sense of this gracious warning, and this invitation. And so Jesus says to every sinner from his cross tonight, and in his resurrection, and in his ascension, and seated in heaven tonight, he says, why, oh why, will you die?

You don't need to die. You will turn from your wicked ways. I will save you, and instead of hell, you can know heaven. And on the day of judgment, if you refuse to heed this warning, God will say to you what?

He will say to you, why didn't you trust my son? I gave you my son, to save every and any sinner who will turn from their sins, and you would not trust him, and you will surely die.

Don't ignore this warning. Could be the last time you hear this warning, couldn't it? And you don't know, and neither do I, what's the store this week. we don't know how many times God will hold out his hands and plead with us, turn, turn, turn from your evil ways, for why will you die your house of Israel?

Let's pray.