

Ezekiel 33:11

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[0 : 00] I want to speak from one verse, Ezekiel 33, verse 11. I 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? And I've got six points, which is not great on an evening tonight, but it is short. And the points are there on the sheet, so if that helps you, you can fill it in as we go. On Greenfield Avenue, just off the road where we live, it's a great slope isn't there, and the road surface is very, very good, which is unusual for eating.

And at the moment there's two guides who roller skate from the top of the hill in rush hour traffic down. And I was at the bottom of Greenfield Avenue by the shops, by the car up there, and as I came out, these guys came zooming past, I don't know, it must be 25 feet long if I were on roller skates. Guy turns to me and says, they've got a death wish.

They've got a death wish. And we know that expression, don't we? Somebody overtakes you in the car, they're going way too fast, you turn to the passenger and you say, they've got a death wish. We also know there's people that have got a, they've lost the will to live. And they don't care about their life.

They don't value it any longer, and tragically they seem to want to die. We know it comes up in the papers quite often, somebody who's got a serious life-threatening, maybe an even terminal illness, a degenerative disease.

And the doctor will be watching really closely to see how that patient responds after the diagnosis. Doctors are concerned, aren't they, about those who despair when they've had that kind of news.

[1 : 50] Patients who just give up on life, who automatically assume they'll just succumb to the inevitable. They've got a death wish. And the people that Ezekiel is preaching to in Ezekiel 33 are a bit like that.

The Jews have been taken captive by the Babylonians, they've been carried off into exile, and Ezekiel is being explained to them patiently over and over and over again.

That this was God's punishment upon them. The reason why they were in this state was because of their disobedience, because they'd walked away from God and they'd become idolatrous, and their sin. And up to this point in Ezekiel's ministry, they refused to listen.

It was as if they'd put their hands over their ears and sang at the top of their voices. But now for the first time in the whole book, the Jews accept the message. They accept that they have rebelled against the living God, and the guilt of that hits them like a sledgehammer.

The darkness of their shame overwhelms them, and they are under intense and painful conviction of sin, and they can hardly bear it. So just look at what they say, they say in verse 10, don't they, verse 30 through 3, Surely our transgressions, that means our rebellion, and our sins are upon us, they're laid upon us, and we rot away because of them.

[3 : 15] We rot away because of our sins. And the word is used in other parts of the Bible, it's kind of putrefying, rotting, decaying meat.

You know how a food bin gets in this weather? You think of that, and you open it up. There's maggots everywhere, aren't there? That's how these people are feeling. And they're convinced that they were going to perish forever because of their sin.

And they think, how then can we live? What hope is there for people like us, who've done what we've done? It's as if they've got a death wish.

And verse 11 is God's answer to that point in your question. It's stark, and it's an urgent warning to guilty, despairing people. The Ezekiel is told, 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? I want to say there are six things about the warning. Six things about the warning that comes from God to desperate people who feel a death wish.

[4 : 29] Number one, let's see the kindness of the warning. The kindness of the warning. I don't know what the word warning conjures up for you mentally.

When you hear the word warning, it's probably a fairly negative thing. That means I love a good warning. But we don't feel that free.

And we put warnings, don't we, in the same category as threats. And so, children, if you're warned, I'm giving you a warning, your parent says.

What do you think of? If you think of frowns, and shaking fingers, and angry voices. And often, that's going to be the case. But against that rather kind of negative and gloomy picture, we need to remember that a warning, for all its sternness, is normally a loving thing.

A warning is normally motivated by warm concern for the welfare of the other person. So, think of parents again. For example, there's something seriously wrong, seriously deficient, about a parent who doesn't ever warn their children about danger.

[5 : 38] If a parent never warns their children, it shows a total lack of love and care and concern on the part of the parents. And so we need, don't we, to warn our children sternly, don't get into the car with strangers under any circumstances.

Don't run across the road without looking. Don't play with matches. And often, that warning, it can feel kind of a scary thing. It's certainly a stern thing.

It can bring up subjects that are hard to talk about and unpleasant to think about. But because you love your children, you will warn them and you're prompted by love and concern.

And it's not children's good that we say these things. It's to protect them. It's to make their lives better and happier than they otherwise would be. I'm told that in Botany Bay in Australia, and they put up these massive great signs about shark attacks.

Danger of swimming in Botany Bay because of shark attacks. They put signs and people ignored them. So then they put up photographs of people who'd been attacked by sharks.

[6 : 45] Don't swim in the sea. Danger of shark attacks. They were flooded with complaints by people using the beach. And they had complaints. The pictures are too graphic.

Ruining my day at the beach. They're too frightening. That's the point. They were meant to be frightening. That's the whole point of the warnings.

To scare people away from a terrible and a real danger. And it was found out of concern, out of care, out of love. We don't want to ruin people's lives. We want to protect people's lives.

We want people's day at the beach to be happy and safe and fun. It's a loving thing to do, isn't it? And God issues this really stern and somber warning to these men and women and boys and girls who are overwhelmed by guilt.

He doesn't try to cheer them up with a few jokes or a couple of light-hearted anecdotes. Because that situation is serious. It's the eternal destiny of immortal souls.

[7 : 44] It's a sick. And the warning is not intended to make them feel worse about themselves. It's meant to help them. It's meant to save them. It's meant to rescue them. And it's meant to deal with their life because God wants them to live and not to die.

And to you this evening, if you are here, and you may be somebody who would say, I'm not a Christian. I don't know if I'm a Christian. God issues that same stern and frightening warning to you because you are in terrible danger.

It's the dangers of plunging into hell forever and forever. And God is saying to you through his word, he's saying, I'm not telling you this because I want to stress you out.

I'm not telling you this because I want to frighten you or I want to ruin your evening. I'm telling you this. God is telling you this because you're in terrible danger. And God wants you to heed the warning and avoid the danger.

That's the kindness of the warning. The second thing is the hopefulness of the warning. The hopefulness of the warning. A warning is always, by definition, a hopeful thing.

[8 : 55] Isn't it? And so warnings are given while there's still time to heed them. While there's still time to avoid the danger to pull back. So let's imagine you're driving around a mountainside road and there's a sheer cliff.

There's a drop-off at one side. And you will see lots and lots of signs warning drivers keeping well away from the edge of the road. Drive carefully.

Drive slowly. Beware of the cliff edge. But there won't be any warnings on the cliff halfway down the mountain.

All right. And the reason for that is if you kind of plunge over the edge of the cliff over the side of the mountain there's no point is there as you're flying down vertically a sign saying please drive carefully.

It's too late. At that stage once you've left the road once you're plummeting down the mountainside there's no point. There's no point seeing as you kind of fly past it please watch your speed or take care on the corners.

[10:05] It's no use to you. But it's while you're still going up the road isn't it? And there's no time to listen to the warning and to heed the warning. That's when you need to be warned about the danger.

And that is an encouraging thing it's a hopeful thing that tonight you are hearing this warning from God this evening. Turn from your ways God says to you for why will you die?

It's not too late this evening. It's not too late for you to find life and avoid judgement. The future is not sealed. As long as you're alive this warning is relevant to you.

You can still do something about it. It's not too late for you tonight to turn from your sin and to give your life to God. A few hours time it may be too late.

A week's time it may be too late but not tonight. It's not too late tonight. This moment is not too late. One day it will be.

[11:07] At the instance of your death or at the moment that Jesus Christ returns to this world there'll be no warnings then. The warning will no longer apply. There'll be no use to you any longer because you will have had you will have at that point if I can put it like this plan show over the edge to your never ending ruin.

And if we die without trusting the Lord Jesus as our saviour God will never again say these words to us turn from your evil ways and live while you die.

the truth of the Bible is if you go to your death without responding to this warning then the words that you will hear from the lips of God will be these words apart from me forever.

It's now it's in this life it's this evening at this moment that we need to pay attention to the warning now is the time today's the day to trust Jesus Christ the saviour.

So back to the other station driving up the mountain I think somebody doesn't pay any attention to the signs and they just think well it'll be alright they don't pay any attention to the warning to the sign of a hairpin bend that's coming up and they take the corner too fast and they crash through the barrier into space and as the nose of the car begins to dip down and they see the sheer chasm and they're approaching death at that moment there is a horrendous realisation and surely that person that driver they'd give anything wouldn't they just to be back a few seconds before to be able to heed the warning and that happens tonight as we sit here souls enter the world of eternity we don't often talk about this but they've ignored God's warning all their lives and now they realise that it's too late it's too late it's too late and they go to their everlasting fate and they would give anything to sit where you sit tonight and heed this warning to have the warning offered to them one more time but it's too late but it's not too late for you but if you can hear these words of warning it means it's not too late for you to respond turn back

[13:35] God says to you turn back from your evil ways for why will you die the hopefulness of the warning thirdly the clarity of the warning some warnings are rather cryptic they're hard to understand and you can't blame anyone for not doing anything about them about the warning or paying attention and so computer screen warnings are like that aren't they you turn your computer on and something has happened and you get a message don't you an error has occurred and they say you need to report it to Microsoft or something like that and you've not got the foggiest clue what's happened and some warnings are like that aren't they there's technical warnings that are really hard to understand but you cannot say that about this warning no one can be left in any doubt about what they have to do so can you look at the verse again turn back turn back from your evil ways and live for why will you die it's really simple isn't it it's leave your old way of life behind and start a new way of life think about what we were talking about this morning stop living for yourself and start living and trusting in

God change direction do a YouTube the youngest child's I can understand it the youngest child can grasp it now you might not believe the warning you might not accept the warning you might not like the warning but you do understand the warning don't you you can't claim tonight it's too hard for me to understand it's really clear isn't it that unless we turn from our ways we have everlasting ruin so we live naturally as the king of our lives I'm on the throne of my heart I do what I want and what I need to do is I need to get off that throne and I need to put Jesus Christ there and I bow the knee to him and I give my life to him and I say your will be done and the warnings being sounded clearly what are you going to do about it it's up to you 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 look at verse 5 he heard the sound of the trumpet but he didn't take warning his blood shall be upon himself but if he'd taken warning he would save his own life the clarity of the warning the kindness of the warning the hopefulness of the warning fourthly the motivation behind the warning the motivation behind the warning I wonder what your view of God is do you think that God is a stern frowning tyrant with a sword in one hand and a thunderbolt in the other that he's just itching to strike someone down that's the view of Richard Dawkins he makes no bones about it his view of the

Old Testament God he says is that God is a blood thirsty tyrant who is a vengeful and angry cruel and sadistic freak I don't think Dawkins has read the Old Testament he's skimmed over this verse because God says in no uncertain terms just look at it with me he says I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live you might say surely God couldn't care less whether someone lives or dies think of all the millions and millions and millions of people the billions of people who have ever lived and who ever were alive today and ever will live does God really care about one little individual let me ask you do you really care about one individual if you hear that somebody's been killed in

Nicaragua are you bothered are you bothered does it feel to you a really great sense of loss or pain I wouldn't lose sleep tonight because somebody's been killed on the streets of Nicaragua but that's the case why does God care about one little boy or girl in West East or man or woman why does God care about you little you and little me well the God of the Bible takes no pleasure in the eternal punishment of the wicked God will execute that punishment make no mistake about that but it brings him no pleasure to do so but what does delight God what brings God pleasure well this verse says it is when a man or a woman or a boy or a girl turn from their evil ways and when they repent of their sins and they ask God for forgiveness and that thrills

[19:14] God's heart and that brings him pleasure and joy do you remember how Jesus put it he said there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine so-called righteous persons who need no repentance God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked how do we know that well if God took pleasure in the death of the wicked then you and I would have been destroyed a thousand times over long before now and if God did actually take pleasure in the death of the wicked then you wouldn't be sitting here we would be in hell being punished and the fact that there is a world around us that is full of wicked people and yet it continues to exist proves that God takes no pleasure in the death of evil people that's what I see you're saying and that is a powerful reason to turn from your evil ways because God does not want you to perish 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 of your disobedience in spite of your rebellion in spite of your continual rejection of God all your trampling over his laws all your ignoring him living your life as if you are

God and the true and living God doesn't matter a bit in spite of all of that God wants you tonight to turn from your evil ways and be saved and that's the motivation behind the warning fifthly the credibility of the warning the credibility of the warning maybe you find it hard to believe what I've just said that the holy and awesome king of the universe takes pleasure in wicked creatures rebellious creatures turning to him in repentance and being saved from his judgment do you find that hard to believe that God takes delight when he doesn't have to execute punishment we need to believe it because God says that's true and he emphasizes it in our verse everything everything that God says is true and without exception every syllable that comes from the mouth of God is absolutely true but sometimes

God uses language to emphasize and to reinforce it's like bold font or italics or colored font to impress them on our minds all the more he does that here he swears an oath can you see that he

says as I live as I live declares the Lord God I have no pleasure in 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 the people who are listening to the sermon from Ezekiel I know that you're going to find it hard to believe I know that you're going to really struggle to actually believe this so I want to make it unmistakably clear I want to make it in as I possibly can as I live declares the Lord it's almost as if God goes into court and he stands behind himself as judge and he swears on oath 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 the new testament says there's nothing greater that

God can swear by the only thing that he can swear by is by himself his own life his own being his own attributes his own honour in other words if there's one thing in the universe that we cannot possibly doubt it is this it is that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked he swears it by himself the credibility of that warning the kindness the hopefulness the clarity the motivation the credibility of the warning and lastly the appeal of the warning when someone pleads with us earnestly I mean there's a powerful effect on us or at least it ought to and whatever we might think of a marriage or a case that's being pleaded if somebody's really pleading earnestly it's a hard hearted man or woman that won't stop and pay attention and won't seriously consider what's being asked pleading moves us it touches us in our hearts and here is

God and he's pleading with men and women and with boys and girls 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 pulled the stars into being the one who holds the planets and galaxies on their courses is pleading with rebellious wicked sinners who deserve to die who deserve to be in hell forever and he holds at his hands to them and he's saying turn back turn back from your evil ways why will you die for the house of Israel and if you are not a Christian this morning this evening and then God is pleading with you in this verse and he's pleading with you through me his ambassador turn back turn back why would you die listen

[25 : 01] God says listen pay attention consider all that you've heard and all that you know why will you die you don't need to die tonight you don't need to go to hell if you're determined not to repent and you set yourself on going to hell you're going to have to go to hell walking right past God pleading with you all of God's invitations you will have to push his invitations aside his outstretched arms pleading with you saying turn back turn back why will you die why will you die and if you choose to go to hell you will have to push past him pleading with you Ezekiel says well your own blood will be on your own head and you'll have no one to blame for all eternity but yourself because he sat here and you heard the invitation and you heard God's pleading words and you chose to ignore the appeal of the warning of course it's only because the

Lord Jesus that God can issue this warning and make those pleas because apart from the cross of the Lord Jesus these words are cruel and emptiness and meaningless so imagine tonight I go to one of the London hospitals around the wards I go to the terminal patients and I say to them why would you die why would you die you've got no choice but to die there's no alternative other than death but because of the Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done there is an alternative to death for the sinner who turns from his sin because Jesus died on the cross our punishment our death can be transferred to him and his perfect obedience his life can be put to our account and put to us the cross makes sense and Jesus sacrifice makes sense of this gracious warning this invitation from God and so

Jesus says to every sinner at the cross why will you die you don't need to die that if you'll turn from your wicked ways I will save you and instead of hell you can of heaven and on the day of judgment if we refuse to heed this warning God will say just why didn't you trust my son as your saviour I gave my son to save every and any sinner who will turn from their sins and you would not trust him who will surely die and don't ignore this warning for all of you know it will be the last time you hear it and we don't know any of us what is in school for us in the next hour let alone the next week and we don't know how many times God will hold out his hands and plead with us turn back turn back from your evil ways for why will you die or have sin as wrong let's pray heavenly father we praise you and we thank you that you are the inviting

God and you are the warning God and you are the pleading God and we thank you that you do not take no pleasure in the death of the wicked but your desire is that we might turn from our wicked ways and live and we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ that by his death we might know life that by him taking the curse we might know blessing and so we pray that tonight if we hear your voice

we would not harden our hearts in Jesus name Amen