

Ezekiel 33:1-11 and 2 Peter 3:1-9

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Date: 21 September 2025

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[0 : 00] And turn to Ezekiel 33. If you've got a Black Church Bible, it's page 720. And I want to speak to you from one verse.

! Ruben is at the ordination of Graham Collins in Christchurch, Heddington in Oxford this morning. And so I'm going to preach a one-off on one verse. Really on one question. Last week I was supposed to go to a meeting. And I couldn't go, so I sent someone in my place. And during the meeting I texted the person, how are you doing? How's the meeting? And they said, I'm losing the will to live.

You've been to meetings like that? And you've lost the will to live. And doctors tell us that actually when that happens in reality, to someone that's seriously ill, that's an incredibly dangerous thing. When somebody has that loss of morale, when they're unwell and they lose the will to live. There are people who've maybe had a terminal diagnosis and they've just given up hope.

[1 : 17] They make up in their minds, I'm not going to get better. They decide that the treatment they're receiving has got little prospect of success. They decide that life is not worth living.

They no longer have the will to live. They no longer expect to live. It's one of the great tragedies, isn't it, of the assisted suicide bill. That we are legalising people who say that they've not got the will to live.

And so they give it suicide. We live in a culture that is choosing death. Choosing death before birth. And choosing death at the end of life. But I think as we look at Ezekiel 33 and verse 11, I think we can see the same phenomena in people who maybe don't call themselves Christians.

Maybe they're not hostile to Christianity. Maybe they're not mocking or scornful people. They're not very full of themselves. But they've simply resigned themselves that the Christian message is not for them.

[2 : 31] That's what they've decided. They don't question the value of Christianity for people like you and me. But they think it doesn't apply to them. Maybe that's you this morning. And maybe you sit there and you think, I've committed too many sins.

Maybe you think, I've tried to believe in the past. And it's not worked out. Maybe you think it's too late to change. Perhaps as you hear the Bible explained week by week, you like being here, you like the people, but you just think, those things don't really apply to me.

They're for other people. There's an apathy. And there's a dull determination to endure the future, but no real hope. No expectation.

We're all growing old, aren't we? The truth is we're all dying. 70, 80, 90 years. But we'll all die. It's a cheery message, isn't it?

But that's the grim reality. The Apostle Paul calls death the last enemy. But the Bible teaches you and I there's something far worse than physical death.

[3 : 42] There is what Shakespeare's Hamlet called the dread of something after death. Something after death, the undiscovered country. The unspeakable reality, which the Bible calls hell.

And so many of the people around us in this city, what do they have to look forward to? They have to look forward to getting older and dying. And then going to hell forever.

And that's why this text from Ezekiel 33 verse 11 is so wonderful and so powerful. It speaks to people like that. It speaks to you and me. It marks a new stage in the ministry of Ezekiel.

And the prophet Ezekiel has been urging the people to turn around, turn back to God. He's been warning them God's judgment is going to come. And that judgment now has come in Ezekiel 33.

The warning has been fulfilled. Jerusalem, God's city in those days, has fallen to its enemies. An awful disaster has happened. And people are in the grip of hopelessness and pessimism.

[4 : 48] And if you look at Ezekiel 33 in verse 10, you'll see God's analysis of the situation. Can you see it? This is what you're set to say. And you son of man, that's the term God uses for Ezekiel, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said, Surely our transgressions, that means our rebellion, and our sins are upon us.

And we rot away because of them. How then can we live? It's a culture that's given up hope. They're despairing. They're saying it's too late. We're too far gone. We're too old to change. We're too late to have a new life. And God wants to shake them out of this paralysis. This paralysis of unbelief. And maybe you'll hear this morning, and you think, I'm not a Christian, and I'll never be a Christian. And I'll never have this everlasting life that people sing about. And God comes to you this morning with a great question. It's the question of Ezekiel 33 verse 11. Hear it. Why will you die? Why will you die?

[6 : 00] You don't need to die. He says you may live. You may be woken up to a new hope and a new life. And so let me read to you the verse.

Ezekiel 33 verse 11. I want to give you this morning five reasons for not dying.

Five reasons for not dying. Number one, the clarity of the warning. The clarity of God's warning. Warning is a stern word, isn't it?

And so children, I'll look up for a minute. When mum or dad give you a warning, what are they like? What do they do when they give you a warning?

Are they full of smiles? What do they do? Do they shake their head? Do they do something? Do they shake their finger? So your mum or dad say, don't touch the barbecue.

[7 : 18] Don't touch the barbecue. Do they say it with a smile on their face? Do they look stern? When your mum says, don't touch the barbecue or don't touch the oven, is she being really nasty?

No. When your mum says, don't touch the boiling hot fire, is she being really cruel? No, she's not, is it? Your mum or your dad, they're acting in love and kindness.

They don't want to see you children going near the grill. They don't want to see you getting burnt on the barbecue. They don't want to see you having to go to hospital because you've burnt your hand or disfigured.

The warning is given to help you, isn't it? It's a good thing. You're not ending.

Thank you.

[8 : 51] Thank you.

Thank you.

And so what every city did was build a great big high tower, a watchtower on the edge of the wall, and it would be the job of one man to be the watch.

He'd go to the watchtower every day and he'd look out for raiders, for enemies, for armies. And if he saw anyone, he would blow the trumpet.

And all the people who were working outside the walled city would come flooding in, they'd shut the gates and they were safe. And so his task was to sound the alarm.

[10 : 25] There's an enemy coming, and if people listened to him, they were safe, and if they didn't listen to him, it was their own fault. And God is saying to Ezekiel, God's prophet, God's preacher, you're the watchman.

And I want you to tell people they're going to die, and judgment is coming, and they will go to hell. And so I am asking you to warn so that they will not die.

And so they will not die. Why will you die? That's the warning. Why will you die means that you don't need to die.

God is not a sadist. God isn't reminding you that you're going to die so that he can gloat and laugh and rub it in. God is not laughing at us.

God is not a sadist. Thank you.

[11 : 49] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[14 : 19] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[16 : 49] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[19 : 19] Because God does not have pleasure in people dying.

He told me in your word that you have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. And when we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray for the salvation of men and women and boys and girls.

We pray, for something that gives him pleasure to do. It's a remarkable thing. The security of God's pleasure.

Number four, the simplicity of God's command. So simple, isn't it? Can you see the command? It's mentioned three times there, just in case you can't get it.

Turn. Turn. Turn. Turn. Someone was once asked, how do you feel about growing old? And he said, well, I prefer it to the alternative.

[21 : 11] And we might feel there isn't much of an alternative. Our bodies will die. And everything else is a part of us. But the good news is this, that God has provided an alternative.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish.

There's the word again. But have everlasting life. And so how can you find this everlasting life? How can you live this morning and not die? It's very simply, God's command in this very simple verse, it is turn.

And I think you all know what that means. It means this, you're going in the wrong direction, and you turn around, and you go in the opposite direction.

And so if you are someone here this morning that would describe themselves as someone who's not a Christian, what God says to you is this, you must turn. You must turn your whole life around. You must change your whole attitude.

[22 : 28] You must change your belief, your view of the world. You must change your emotions, change your desires. You may not have read the Bible, you've turned towards the Bible.

You may have known very, very little of prayer, and you turn towards prayer, because God is saying, you have to stop praying. You haven't worshipped God, and God says, you must turn to worship me, the living God.

You are to turn from your sin and rebellion, and living with yourself in charge, to turn to God, seeking to live with him in charge. You've not been trusting Christ, and you are to turn to trust in Christ.

That's all you have to do. Turn, turn, turn, turn around. Turn away from your sin, and turn to Christ. Turn and live.

And you may say, Paul, that's a really silly thing to say, because I can't turn. You might say, I can't turn myself. I cannot change myself inside.

[23 : 39] I can't turn. And I want to say to you, don't worry about that. Forget about that. Once, when Jesus was on earth, he said something that seemed utterly ridiculous.

Jesus met a paralysed man, and he said to the paralysed man, get up and walk. Just suppose that paralysed man had said, started arguing and said, what do you mean walk?

I can't walk. I'm lying here completely paralysed. I can't move. I can't move. And he couldn't. And yet Jesus said, didn't he, get up and walk.

Jesus told him to do something he could not do. So what did he do? What did he do? He did it. As soon as he heard the words, he tried to get up, and he found that he could walk.

Because when Jesus spoke the word, there was a transfer of power and ability. And in the very command of Jesus Christ, the command gave the ability to obey it.

[24 : 56] The command gave the ability to do it. Or on an even more ridiculous occasion, Jesus went to a tomb, where there was a man who'd been dead for three days, whose name was Lazarus, and he called out at the tomb, Lazarus, come out.

It's a stupid thing to do. But Lazarus came out. Because there was life-giving power in the command of Jesus Christ.

There was life-giving power in the command of Christ. The paralyzed man, he didn't start worrying and say, wait a minute, what have I learned about human inability?

What is theoretically possible here? He didn't do that. He heard the call of Christ and he obeyed.

And he found that he had power that he never had before.

He found that he had an ability that he'd never had before. And God says to you this morning, turn.

And if you listen to that call of Christ and try to turn, he will help you.

[26 : 10] I'm not sure I'd seen this as clearly as I have this week, that there is power power in that command. There is power in the preaching of Jesus Christ.

It is not hopeless. The hymn says, he speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive.

And so if you hear this morning and you turn, you will live.

he's provided a way to live. Simplicity of God's command, the clarity of God's warning, the wonder of God's pleasure, the security of God's pledge, the simplicity of God's command.

And then lastly, this, the pathos of God's pleading. the pathos of God's pleading.

I think in your mind's eye about someone that you love. I think about somebody that you really

respect. And that person comes to you and they say, I've called you by, by name.

[27 : 15] I'm, I want to have a serious talk with you and you sit down together and they, they put their hand on your shoulder. And they, they look at you with tears on their, in their eyes and they say to you, you know how much I love you, don't you?

And I've got something really important that I want to tell you. You would listen at that point. I hope you would listen. And we take seriously, don't we, when someone pleads with us.

When somebody pleads with us. It's an amazing thing, isn't it? It seems, strange to say, but it's true.

God pleads with us this morning.

That's what he's doing in the text, isn't he? He is pleading with you. His condescension, his greatness, his glory, his compassion, God is not proud.

God does not say to you about the message of the gospel, take it or leave it, it's up to you. He pleads with us. Think of the prodigal son and the older brother.

[28 : 28] The older brother is so angry with his father, isn't he? The older son is really angry that the younger brother who'd squandered all this kind of inheritance, that his dad had thrown a party for him when he came home.

The older brother was really angry. What does the father do? Do you remember? The father goes out and he pleads with his oldest son.

He said, Son, you're always with me. All that I have is yours. What's right? What's the right thing to do? Let's rejoice and be glad and come on in to the party and he pleaded, he pleaded with his older son.

That's what he's doing in this text in Ezekiel 33 verse 11. He's pleading with you. It's what we might do with our children, isn't it?

We might say to our children, listen, I don't want you to do that. I don't want you to do that. They do it again and then you say, listen, why are you doing this?

[29 : 43] Why are you doing this? And here's the king and he gets down from his throne and he asks the rebel to come and be forgiven. Here's the father, that father he sees, doesn't it?

The prodigal son who's been in the far country, he sees him coming towards him. Do you remember what the father does? He hitches up what he's wearing and he runs. He runs through the village.

While he was a great way off, the father saw him and ran and fell on his neck and kissed the rebellious brother. It's the father asking the prodigal to come home.

It's the amazing grace of God. You mustn't misunderstand me. God is not soft. God is not weak. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that doesn't mean that in the end he'll let people off.

He will not. He will not. He cannot do that. If you will not turn, you must die. You will die. But this morning, God is asking you to turn.

[30 : 56] In fact, God is pleading with you to turn. And God is asking you, why will you die? Why do you want to die?

How do you answer that? Do you want to die? Do you want to go to hell? Do you want to be separated from all the good things of this life?

From people? From God forever? Do you want to spend an eternity in torment? Is that what you want? Would you rather die than trust Jesus?

Surely not. And God offers life. He offers forgiveness. He offers himself. And he urges you to receive it. So why will you die?

Suppose you don't believe. How will you face God on the day of judgment? He will say to you, I came to you that Sunday morning in that church building.

[32 : 02] that funny preacher. And I urged you. I sent my servant to urge you to believe. To turn and to live.

What will you say to him? God pleads with you this morning. He says to you, as I live, declares to the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

But that the wicked turn from its way and live. Turn back. Turn back from your evil ways. For why will you die?

O house of Israel. Let's bow our heads and pray together.