

'Your life's true delight'

Pent 12A, Ezekiel 33:7-11/Rom 13:8-14/Matt 18:15-20

Pray...

⁷ "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, 'You wicked person, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ⁹ But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.

¹⁰ "Son of man, say to the Israelites, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"' ¹¹ Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'

We serve a holy, righteous and glorious God. He is amazing!

We're right to rejoice in the presence of our awesome God, but also to tremble with a deep seated reverence. That's what happens to me as I sit down to prepare a message for all of you. There is an accountability that comes with bringing a word from God to His people that can't be taken lightly.

So God forbid you hear a message or sermon telling you that Jesus died in order for you to have lots of money or a nice car or a big house or no sickness! (That's prosperity theology). It's false and not biblical. That's the message the world preaches to you every day. When the church preaches that, it's like you're eating the same meal – just brought by two different butlers.

I will be called to give an account of my ministry when Jesus returns. I know I can't say to God, "But Lord! Look at their big boats, look at all their money and superannuation, look at their houses and all the things I preached to them to seek with all their mind, heart, soul and strength!" It's ridiculous isn't it? If I do that, I can rightfully expect God to send me to hell because I preached and taught you to be idolaters instead of Christians.

There will be an accounting of world history. In that judgement I will be accountable for my service as a minister of the Gospel. You will be accountable. It's serious stuff!

That leads us into the seriousness but also the hope of joy encountered in Ezekiel 33 today. Seriousness because it's a matter of life and death! Ezekiel can't sit on the fence and be a spectator as the people waste away in their sins. The Prophet MUST speak to warn people because he is accountable for their blood (which is their life) if he doesn't speak out and warn them as God requires.

But if Ezekiel does speak out; he knows he won't be held accountable for anyone else's life or blood. It won't be all over his hands – even if they persist with their wicked way of life and die. Because, God says, they were warned, but didn't heed the warning. Their blood is on their own hands because they preferred spiritual blindness to the light and joy of the gospel.

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It's an act of love isn't it? To warn people who are entrenched in sin to wake up, to stop - and turn back to God. It's an act of love because you know that sin leads to death. Doesn't always feel like love though does it? It can be unpleasant for the person doing the warning and it's definitely unpleasant for the person receiving the warning – at least initially.

Do you enjoy people telling you that you're barking up the wrong tree? Are you filled with joy or are you filled with *different emotions* when someone warns you that you're not living as God calls you to live? For most of us there aren't many people we trust enough to speak into our lives so boldly. You need a pretty good relationship with an Aussie if you're going to point out their sins!

Confronting sin is difficult because sin blinds people. When you're blinded by sin – you think you're *really living*. No-one sins out of duty – you sin because you enjoy it! And so people may lash out when the rotten fruit and wickedness of sin is confronted. Because sin blinds people to the truth.

It's God's word that brings light and exposes the false joy of sin. It takes an act of God! It takes the living word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit for this to happen – and it lights up the room and exposes the works of darkness in such a way that people can see what's really going on. And it's not a pretty picture.

Let me give you an analogy I heard at the conference this past week: ***sin is like being on your face in the desert, in the heat of the day, trying to suck moisture out of dry and dirty sand (x2).*** But there's nothing there! So you suck and you suck and you end up with a mouth full of dirt and sand – and it tastes disgusting and makes you gag. Filling your mouth with dirty sand will only make you sick. It will choke the life out of you and make you vomit.

So there is a warning for you today. A warning to stop trying to suck moisture out of dirty desert sand. A warning from your exalted Lord and God calling you to wake up and turn away from:

- *[Sleeping around and]* all kinds of destructive behaviour of a sexual nature that defiles you and makes you unclean.
- Seeking your own personal pleasure everywhere – that is everywhere except for God.
- The sin of pride in your own goodness or works or right opinions.
- Spending every waking moment wanting things you don't have and being jealous of other people and their lives.
- Arguing over petty and trivial matters – because it's more important to win an argument instead of focussing on what really matters.
- Seeking glory and praise for yourself at any cost – maybe even putting others down or talking about them in the process.
- Excessive alcohol consumption or addictions that are weighing heavily in your life or on your marriage and relationships....It's dirty sand my friends...

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These things have the appearance of life and self-satisfaction to corrupted hearts – but these things are not living!

- This is how to waste your life, not live it.
- This is the place where sin robs you of all your joy in Christ.
- In fact, the quest for these things above God, above Jesus Christ and all He has to offer, in the ultimate scheme of things will never satisfy and delight your soul.
- They will send you into an unending spiral of despair. It's sucking on dry sand.

I love how the Israelites expressed themselves in Ezekiel 33 today.

"Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"

The implication here is that they've been trying to live by filling their mouths with sand and it's killing them. They have no life in them! The weight of their circumstances is massive. What had the appearance of life is now crushing them so that they're craving, yearning, thirsting for something that will satisfy their deepest heart's desire.

"We're DEAD, we have no life left in us so tell us "HOW THEN CAN WE LIVE?"

Listen to the words of Psalm 36.

⁵ *Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.*

⁶ *Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.*

You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

⁷ *How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

⁸ *They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.*

⁹ *For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.*

Verse 8, ⁸ *They feast on the abundance of your house; **you give them drink from your river of delights.***

No more sucking and choking and vomiting on dirty sand – God has a river of delights! And if God has a river of delights you can bet it's a massive river with a powerful flow. This will be no trickle or gentle stream; God's river of delights will stretch beyond the limits of your imagination. God gives you drink from the flow of His heavenly delights.

- A flow that continually fills you with the power and life of the Holy Spirit,
- that cleanses and purifies your heart and your deepest desires
- This river will awaken and produce in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Delightful fruit of the Holy Spirit that you will be bursting to share with the people you know who are still choking and coughing and vomiting up dirty desert sand.

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Drinking from God's wide, deep, fresh and pure river of delights means drinking deeply of the work of the cross of Christ. The crosses power that is not only sufficient to kill the power of sin in you each day of your life, but also qualifies you to share in a royal inheritance kept for all of God's children in God's glorious kingdom of light. **[flowed over Erika @ 10am]**

Colossians 1:21ff says,

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

The river of delights has been poured in your life by God. Notice that – you didn't decide to find the river and drink from it. The Psalm says that *"...they feast on the abundance of your house, YOU give them drink from your river of delights."* The river that brings the reconciliation,

- That frees you from every accusation,
- That reconciles you (mends the relationship and saves from God's wrath) and makes you holy in the sight of God. And all this is from God for you!

But then Paul says that you need to continue and persevere in what you have received and not turn your back on it. [PAUSE]

¹¹ Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'

The people of Israel had turned their backs on God. But the awful flavour and bitterness of the false promises of sin led them to cry out *"How then can we live?"* The answer to that question for Israel and for you today is to turn away and stop trying to suck something out of dirty sand that it can't give you. Only God can give you what you really need.

Prosperity (money/ wealth) won't give you eternal joy in the house of the Lord. Any church that preaches that will be accountable for what they've taught. That's between them and God.

There's no life in eating sand, expressed in lust for human glory, conflicts and chaos, sensual pleasures of your flesh and all the addictions that people suffer through – and maybe you're suffering under today. Be warned that these things will rob you of your joy and ultimately demand your life.

That's not true of God's river of delights in Psalm 36. Its pure and cleansing flow will give you life and bring joy to you that will glorify God above all things and satisfy the deepest longings of your heart in Christ.

- Expressed in joyful obedience.

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- Expressed in hearts pounding for ministry that would move mountains to see others rejoicing in Jesus Christ. Because you want them to know the fullness of what you have received.

Glorifying God with your life and seeking your greatest joy go together hand in hand as God gives you drink from His River of Delights. Nothing else will do.

So God has spoken. Will you turn from your ways and live? Will you come and drink from God's River and stop trying to suck on sand? Is God you life's true delight? May God grant that it be so. Amen.