

## **The Heart of Spiritual Renewal**

### **Ezekiel 33**

Good morning, everyone. Turn in your bibles to the Old Testament Prophetic book of Ezekiel, Chapter 33. Today we are going to build off of last week's message which touched on the divine work of spiritual renewal.

Many of you have been followers of Christ for some time. Others, maybe, this is a whole new world for you. But for every Christ follower there came a time when you were made alive to the things of God. Perhaps you had been aware of spiritual things before, but somehow you were made alive to the reality of your sin, your need for God, and such. Before, these things just didn't interest you much or have your attention.

But something happened, something changed, and through a work of God's Spirit you became interested and you began seeking, and changes began to happen. First in your attitude towards God. Then maybe in your attitude towards yourself. You knew something was within your reach that would bring life into every aspect of your life. It was what was missing.

When you discovered that God loved you and sent His Son to pay for your sin, that HE offered you a new life, you grabbed on to it. And when you did, it was like grabbing a ski rope that was attached to a moving boat. The ride began. What I'm describing is conversion. It's an exciting time.

You celebrate it by baptism. You have an unquenchable thirst for fellowship with other Christians, reading and learning things from the bible. Worship becomes something it had never been before.

Then after some time passes of this fantastic ride of what seems like smooth sailing you start facing water hazards. Floating logs, other skiers. Sharp turns. Waves. And some of those hazards are just a part of life and some are actually setups by a devious villain that wants to take you out. He used to be your master, only you didn't know it. And he, his name is Satan. He is angry that you have left his kingdom for the new kingdom. And there are eventually some falls and spills.

And sometimes the boat is circling you with the rope but you just don't grab it again. You decide you just going to swim around right where you are for a while. Well, time goes by and you are in need of something called spiritual renewal.

The children of Israel were living in exile in Babylon. They are swimming around in the consequences of their sin and rebellion against God. They fell into Satan's many traps and they fell hard.

Last week we learned about God's vision for their future. In spite of all that had happened, God still had a future hope for them. In the 2nd section of Ezekiel, God showed Ezekiel what is going to happen 5 years later when Babylon would deliver the final blow to Jerusalem and the land of Judah. And in the process Ezekiel despairs. So God gave him this word of encouragement in 11:17-21

Chapter 33 brings us in the books 4<sup>th</sup> movement: God's messages concerning their future hope.

Slide: Original Date chart

Now the dating of Chapter 33 is in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiachin's exile (That's 12 years after the 2<sup>nd</sup> deportation. That makes the year of this prophetic message 586 B.C. So what does that mean? What happened in 587 the year before? The prophecies of 2<sup>nd</sup> section of the book have been fulfilled. Jerusalem has fallen. More exiles have arrived. They have lived 5 more years in the consequences of their sins. Has their obstinacy lessened? Has these five years of Ezekiel's messages and the pain of their consequences made them any more ready to hear God? We will see. But before that becomes clear and God begins talking to the Exiles about the future He has something to say to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 33:1-9

So what is this about?

Well, 7 years have passed since God called Ezekiel to be His prophet to the exiles. And the first message was for Ezekiel himself. He gave him this metaphor of a watchmen to underscore 2 things about his ministry:

- 1) He was responsible and accountable to deliver God's messages regardless of how he was received.
- 2) The response of the exiles was out of his hand.

God was reminding Ezekiel that he had a responsibility and it was a very important one. God was about to do a great work of spiritual renewal in the exiles. Their whole future and God's plans for bringing them back to the land depended on what God was up to.

And God had sovereignly and specifically chosen Ezekiel as an instrument to that end.

Similarly, every Christian needs to be reminded from time and time that we have a vitally important message from God that has been entrusted to us. We have the responsibility to advance God's message of the Gospel. God is going to do great things through us and we can't take it lightly. A lot rides on our obedience and diligence.

So that is the preface.

Ezekiel 33:10 "Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus you have spoken, saying, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?"' 11 "Say to them, 'As I live !' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'

12 "And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, 'The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.' 13 "When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered ; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. 14 "But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, 15 if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live ; he shall not die. 16 "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.

Now the best way to unpack this passage is to ask the question, "What is God looking for from them?" He is describing here the righteousness that He hopes to restore them to.

#### **STEP #1: Brokenness over our sinful condition, WE LOOK UP**

By the time Ezekiel is ready to prophesy concerning the God's future plans, the exiles had begun to reach a point of remorse and brokenness. Praise God! Some had been exiled and living there in Babylon for nearly 18 years, others 12. Some had just arrived barely surviving the third and final judgment on Jerusalem. And they had experienced terrible, terrible things.

The weight of their sin was really being felt and they were beginning to look up! Listen again to what God says the exiles are beginning to say and think.

"Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?"

This statement reveals a change. This is not a description of obstinacy and rebellion, but of sadness and remorse. And God can work with that.

What I want you to notice first about this statement is that their sin did not bring a happy state. This is not a statement of how cool and fun indulging in sin is. A sinful condition becomes a crushing weight that saps away life when it promised to give life. King David's reflective descriptively reveals as much in Psalm 32:1-4.

Once you have tasted the good gift of being at peace with God and being lifted from the dark hole in which we once lived we so easily forget that there is no life in that sinful condition yet it beckons us back like an old friend that misses the good old times. There is no living apart from being at peace and abiding in a reconciled condition.

Looking to God for help in our brokenness is actually a description of righteousness. It is a great sign of hope. It's the first step back towards life. There is no renewal apart from brokenness and owning our sin. It is an attitude and mindset and state of prayer actually that must come upon us before God can work powerfully inside us.

The bible teaches that a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. When we look to Him in our brokenness we're confessing "We know we need God's help." It's what God's looking for. But it's not all He's looking for.

## **STEP #2: Repentance from sin: WE TURN BACK**

Listen to the way God says this. *"I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?"*

It's clear as day here that God doesn't want to deal out retribution and judgment. He wants to dole out mercy and forgiveness. Here is the quandary God is in - Every parent has felt it.

Most parents love their children and want to bless them, and help them. They want to be in harmony with them. But sometimes their behavior puts us in a spot where our wisdom requires discipline. Not condemnation. Ignoring bad behavior doesn't make it go away and doesn't actually make your children love you more. In fact, they disrespect you more when you're a weasel and have a backbone that just caves in.

God is Holy and He is unchanging. So He cannot just turn the other way. What was bringing these exiles to their knees was God allowing them to be crushed by the consequences of their sin. He takes no pleasure in it. But He does take pleasure in what His judgment produces: Repentance.

And repentance is full and complete with mere words. Repentance is an attitude and a confession that leads to actions.

14 "But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, 15 if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live ; he shall not die. 16 "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.

## **Step #3: Walking in Righteousness: WE STAY THE COURSE**

This passage emphasizes two important dimensions to the LIFE we can have in relationship with God. First is the wicked repenting from the wickedness and turning toward righteous standing with God. Allowing Him to lift us out of our sinful condition and wipe away the guilt and shame.

But the second part is staying the course. He wants to see the repentance stick. There is no life in going back and forth. He emphasizes that the sins of the wicked are no more once they repent. But the deeds of the righteous do not make up for a departure to wickedness. Life is in repentance, YES. But even more so LIFE is in the abiding with God.

13 "When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered ; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die.

The life gained through spiritual renewal can be lost again and we can go right back into the pit. Repentance must stick. We must stay the course.

Many of us get it wrong when we stop with merely confessing and beginning to stop some particularly spiritual crime. But if we don't begin to walk in a new way of daily living we will fall back into the rut.

So taking on ministry roles, beginning to evangelize, fellowship with other believers, etc. These new patterns and disciplines drive that former life further and further into the distance. And new realities and patterns and habits set in.

Stepping forward and taking on new challenges are important for our faith to grow and thrive. Pretty soon the sins which had so much appeal lose their sparkle and shine; and become an ugly monster that we no longer want any part of. That is NEW LIFE.

Conclusion:

The reason that God, the Father, could hold out life and forgiveness to these exiles, we learned last week, was because He had already committed Himself to send His Son to die on the cross. Life comes through Jesus and renewal comes by revisiting His cross.

Righteous standing comes by faith in Jesus Christ and it stays by faith in Jesus Christ. And the joy it all comes by abiding in Jesus Christ.

The ongoing, day-to-day walk in relationship with God.

So are you treading water in cesspool? While God is circling you with a rope to grab on to? Are you weary enough yet with what you're doing, where you're at, to grab God's rope and let Him pull you up on your feet again?

In your Brokenness LOOK UP!

From SIN: Turn Back

In your righteousness: Stay the course.