

God has No Pleasure in the Sinner's Death

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn please to Ezekiel, Chapter 33. Our Text actually, if I were to read it in its entirety, would be verses 1-20. However, I shall begin with verse 7 and shall conclude with verse 11, a shorter portion of the entire portion that I would recommend that you read as early as possible.

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

It is interesting to note the development of Ezekiel's ministry. First he was sent to warn the people to flee from the impending judgment. It is an unalterable law that sin will surely come into judgment. It is a fallacy of the human mind to think that one can sin and escape from the consequences of it. Israel had cherished that fallacy, and God had sent Ezekiel to the people to warn them to flee from the wrath to come. Then when it was clear that they the people would not turn at the close of chapter 24, Ezekiel was instructed to remain silent until the catastrophe had occurred for then and only then would his people be prepared to listen and to obey.

It is interesting to note that after the destruction of Jerusalem the people came to him, and they came with this message, “What good will it do for us to turn? What good will it do us now? It's too late.” But my friend, it is never too late. It is never too late for anyone who has sinned to return to the Lord. The catastrophe had come; Jerusalem had been overthrown; the people said it's far past the time of turning, but the message that the Holy Spirit gave to the Prophet was even after the catastrophe, “Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die.” In other words this is the unchangeable, eternal principle that depends not upon circumstances, nor does there come a time when it is not applicable to the penitent heart. “Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways for why will ye die, O house of Israel.”

Now the first thing I see in this text is that wicked men are to be warned of judgment. If you will consider verses 1-6, there will be no question in your mind but what we have here a parable given to the prophet concerning his responsibility to warn the wicked. First, there is a time of peril to a besieged city. “Son of man, speak to the children of thy people and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land if the people of the land take a man of their coasts and set him for their watchman,” when I bring a time of peril (Eze. 33:2). The Lord you know does do just that. God has set a peril to the besieged city, and God has set a peril to the sinful heart. It is a delusion that men cherish, that they can take fire into their bosom and not be burned, but such is not the case at all. And therefore we recognize that every rebel against God is before the Lord as a besieged city. Your unsaved loved ones stand in that relationship. Your neighbor and friends are to be viewed by you as open, avowed, persistent rebels against God. And with such rebels God is in constant contest. And thus the analogy is a sword brought against the city. And God is working continuously, as we've seen in other services, in other ministries on these Sunday evenings, in behalf of the penitence of the unsaved, causing all of the circumstances that converge upon life to be directed toward this one end, of producing repentance in the heart.

Now He has said, “Choose from among you a watchman, a watchman.” Now in this case it is not the sinner that has chosen the watchman, but the very God who is the one avenging His justice and righteousness has sent His own to the sinner as the watchman to warn them of the wrath to come. There is to be a warning trumpet sounded, a warning message given. “If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people” (Eze. 33:3).

You are living next to unsaved ones that are as the besieged city. Your work with them. You have them related to you by ties of blood and family. And because of the fact that you are there acquainted with God's attitude toward sin and God's judgment upon sinners, you are thus constituted as the watchman upon the wall. For us to have unsaved loved ones, neighbors, friends, and fellow employees, fellow students, that we meet in such a way as to have contact with us, and yet we fail to let them know that they are standing under the sword of God's just anger with sinners, constitutes dereliction of duty as flagrant and as disastrous as though we were the watchman upon the wall that refused to blow the trumpet when he saw the invading armies creeping up stealthily by night. This is your relationship.

I recall hearing years ago about a Christian man that had a hunting companion, a business man, friend, who was unsaved. The business man respected the Christian, but in all the years they'd gone duck hunting together, all the hours they'd spent sitting in the blind waiting for the flight to come over, all the time they had spent in the boat retrieving the ducks they had shot, and traveling to and from their hunting grounds never once had the Christian spoken to the unsaved man about his soul. And then there came a heart attack, and the man was in the hospital and the doctors gave him only days to live, and the Christian went to him and said, "Harry, I want you to know that I am a Christian. I've told you that and you've known it. Out of respect for you I've never tried to force my religion down your throat, but now you are dying. And now I'd like to have you know that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to escape and I'd like to tell you about my Jesus." And the sick man looked up and said, "No, it's too late. There was many a time as we sat together in the car driving up to the hunting grounds that I wished you'd talk to me about the Lord. There were many times when we sat there on the duck blind that I wished that you'd talk to me, but I figure if He didn't mean enough to you then to tell me about Him, when we were as close as we were, that He doesn't mean enough now for me to want to get acquainted with Him. I just don't think it's important any more. And I don't think there's anything you could say now that would make any difference to me." The watchman had been upon the wall, and had refused to lift the trumpet to his lips in the time when the warning could have been heeded. This is what we have here, the responsibility of the individual that is placed by God in the presence of the besieged sinner to warn him of the wrath to come.

Now when the alarm is despised the matter rests upon the hands of the ones that have been warned. "When he hears the sound and taketh not warning if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head" (Eze. 33:4). This is only right and just and fair. And it's perfectly clear that every time you witness to some unsaved person your witness will have one of two affects. It will either be a savor of death unto death, or a savor of life unto life.

As I had the privilege of going into tribes where they said missionaries had never come before, I realized that my presence and the ones that were to follow and establish work there was not of unmixed blessing, for as the Gospel would be preached in that place, warning men of justice and judgment to come and presenting to them the good news of salvation, that to some their state of sin would now become a state of transgression. And their guilt would be doubly greater in the eyes of God. Previously they were sinners and now they were sinners who had despised proffered grace and mercy. It's always that way. It's ever that way. And every time you open your lips to speak to someone concerning the fact that there is a Savior who in dying love gave Himself for them, you realize that only one of two issues can result, They will either open the heart to receive that Christ, or they will harden their hearts to reject that Christ. In the one case their condition will be infinitely better; in the other case equally worse. And we are also stricken with this thought, that it will be a far large portion who harden their hearts against light than will respond to the light. Nevertheless, we are those who have been set as watchmen upon the wall. We know that the judgment will come.

Just as for 120 years Noah proclaimed judgment and the people mocked and scoffed and laughed and hooted and thought that this crazy old religious fanatic was certainly out of his mind, that is until the day that the ark was sealed and the floods came, the rain fell and then it was too late. And we know that they will treat us as they treated Noah. They will despise us as they despised Isaiah; ignore us as they ignored Jeremiah; and they will reject us as they rejected Ezekiel. Yea, if it were possible they would kill us as they killed Christ. It is no easy task to which you've been called as a witness for Jesus Christ.

Perhaps something of this is in the very word, witness. I remind myself every time I use it. For the word witness is in the English such an innocuous word. It does of course have reference to the legal court, to tell what we've seen and known and experienced. But in the language in which our Bible came in the Greek, in the New Testament, we find that the word witness is

a much stronger word. *Martiros*. Do you know that that means? Martyr. And the word gained this quality of sacrifice and of blood because these were witnesses who stood, even to the place of death and let it be understood that there is no reason for you to expect that your witness for the Lord Jesus will be received with any greater alacrity and welcome than it was on the part of the prophets that have preceded us. And yet we know it is by the foolishness of preaching, of warning, of entreating, of exhorting that men are to be saved.

I ask you, do you actually believe that the men and women that roam the streets of New York, that live like bees in a hive in our apartment buildings and crowd like beetles in the ground in our subways, that this multitude of humanity of which we are but a speck, a little part, are lost without Christ? Do you believe it? If you do, then you recognize that you have been placed here not by accident; from whence have you come. Some of you were born in New York. A few of you may have been brought here by your parents as children. But most of you are here because of some adult choice. I submit to you that that choice can never be viewed simply and solely as an economic advantage, or an educational opportunity, or a social privilege. Your presence here as a child of God has infinitely more significance than this. It may have been economics. It may have been education. It may have been some social privilege that induced you to come, but it was a far greater motivation on the heart of God than that, for God was determined to have watchmen upon the wall. And He was determined to have you as one of those watchmen.

And I would have you view yourself, therefore, as placed here by a divine strategy and for a divine purpose that is not fulfilled by your work. My friend if you feel that because you sit behind a typewriter for eight hours a day, doing some acceptable, perhaps even Christian work that you have therefore fulfilled your responsibility to God in putting you here in the midst of one of the world's greatest congregations of men and women and boys and girls. I have to take umbrage with you. In love I take umbrage with you. You have not fulfilled your responsibility by simply satisfying your employer. You have a higher calling. You were put here by the Sovereign God as a watchman upon the wall to warn a besieged city of its impending doom, upon whom justice will speedily be executed. There is no reason to think that you will receive any warmer welcome than the prophets and witnesses that have preceded you.

He didn't say that you would be thanked by those you came to warn. He didn't say that you would be appreciated by those you served. But He said that if you warned them and they refused to turn, their blood would be upon their hands, but if you didn't warn them He would require their blood at your hands. This is an eternal principle. It has no reference to dispensations. It's not law or grace. It is a matter of responsibility of light to those without it, truth to those not possessing. Prophets are spokesmen for God, and they are provided by God to warn the wicked. "O thou son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel." Could I change it. O thou child of God, I have set thee a watchman unto the city of New York. Therefore thou shalt hear the word at My Mouth and warn them from Me. "When I say unto the wicked, oh wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. I, (said the Sovereign God,) have set thee."

He didn't say, "Would you be so kind as possibly to give me an hour or two on Saturday afternoon." He didn't say, "If it should fit into your schedule when you might be able to squeeze out of the 168 hours 15 or 20 minutes a week." There is no option. There is no alternative offered. There is no escape presented. It is the same One that says, "I have set thee a watchman." Who later said, "Ye are my witnesses. Ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (Act. 1:8). He didn't say now, We'd like to have a conference and if any of you feel that you could possibly find it in your heart to surrender to Me, I would like to have some witnesses. This is not what Jesus Christ said. He said, "After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, ye shall be witnesses. Ye shall be witnesses." For anyone to have made the testimony that they have experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and to find their hearts devoid of interest in the lost, and bereft of a concern for the unsaved and indifferent to the plight of these in eternal peril is a conundrum, more than that a contradiction that defies explanation. I do not see how anyone can be filled with the Holy Ghost without being filled with a compassion for sheep without a Shepherd. How anyone can have a burden for people out in Japan and down in South America, and in the Islands of the Seas, and not be concerned about the Japanese in New York City, and the South Americans in New York City, and the people that come from Vietnam that live in New York City, is beyond my comprehension. I cannot find it in my heart to find a geographical burden, for "He is the Lord of the harvest," and the world

is the field (Luk. 10:2). That same Holy Ghost burdens one for some he's never seen, burdens them for those they can see. And thus He has provided you to be a witness in that apartment building you are living in. Why are you living there? You moved. Why did you move? Why did you move to the place where you are living? Well, it was the only place we could find an apartment. But why was it the only place you could find an apartment? Why didn't God open an apartment somewhere else? I believe, as much as I believe in God on a Throne, that you are living there because God put you there. And it's for you to find out why you are there, And those to whom you can witness, from this vantage point.

We must see it, beloved. This is past the time of playing. This is past the time of just impartial consideration. We've come to the time now when we must recognize that we are where we are because of Sovereign prerogative and we are in the situation in which we find ourselves with eternal responsibility.

And Jesus said unto them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day that repentance unto remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem and (hear it) ye are witnesses of these things" (Luk. 24:46-48).

Listen to the argument that God gives. "If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked, he shall die in his iniquity but his blood will I require at thine hand." Do you see what this means? Do you see what this means? Can you put yourself in this situation? "His blood will I require at thine hand."

Extend it now. Come to the place when you are on the right hand as one who has trusted in the Lord Jesus, and others are on the left. Can you see the man who has worked with you that lives by you, that you've seen, that sells you your groceries, cuts your meat and delivers your paper, coming before the Great White Throne, his name not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, the record of his sin given, and then to go off into the left hand, and then to have him say, "You ate the food that I cooked, you read the paper that I delivered, you rode the taxi and the train that I drove, you wore the shoes that I sold, but you never told me that I had an ever dying soul, that God loved me, that God wanted me, that God had invited me to come to Him, that God had blessings to give me for time and life to give me for eternity, you never told me that. You didn't care for my soul." Do you see it? His blood will I require at thine hand. "If thou warned the wicked, if he does not turn he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul." It'll kill you dear heart. It will absolutely slay your ego. It will so break down your pride that it will never heal again. But this is exactly what must happen, and it is what Christ meant when He said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die" (Joh. 12:24). When you go to the man that has been selling you meat or groceries for all these years, having prepared your heart in prayer, and you say to him, "Friend, God has convicted me of my gross dereliction. You have served me well and you've been friend to me, but I have never spoken to you about my Savior's dying love, and I've never told you that I believe that you are in momentary jeopardy of eternal loss; Forgive me for my carelessness, and be assured that nothing would give me greater joy than that my Lord should become yours." And he will say, "But I'm Jewish." And you'll say, "And so was He, and you ought to love Him all the more." "But I'm Catholic." "Ah, but in one sense so are we. For He died for all the world. Let not this stand in the way of your opening your heart to the lovely Lord Jesus." But you will have taken His Blood from off your hands. But it will slay you to do it, slay you. But slain you must be, that they may be spared from being slain.

We understand that this warning is not going to have the same response from all. I was greatly intimidated in the years past when I read the books of personal workers who told me of the success they had in witnessing. And I found that I had no such success. They spoke to the elevator operator. If this were your last trip would it be up or down? And the elevator operator burst out sobbing and wanted to know about Christ. When I said it she thought I was fresh. She wasn't the least interesting it. And I found out then there wasn't any pattern that I could find. And when I was trying to imitate somebody it never worked. But when the Spirit of God had found my heart, and been able to give me His love, and I could go in a situation, not just to the stranger on the bus (This I think is too cowardly. I think it isn't right to confine your witnessing to people you've never known and will never see again. Oh do it, but don't restrict it to that.) It's the people you know and you ought to get acquainted with them. You ought to get acquainted with them. I think sometimes we Christians have become so separated from the world that we've lost contact with sinners. You know there are some things you can do as a Christian without compromising your testimony. I presume some of you are interested in politics. You know it would be a good thing if Christians were interested a

little bit in Government except once every four years. Everybody gets excited from now until November, and most Christians who have been excited for about five months then go back to another four years of sleep. It might be a bit profitable if some of you were to take a little interest in the Party of your choice for it is Party Government that we have, and you were to do some leg work and sign some envelopes and urge people to get out and vote. You know it might just give you contact with some unsaved people, that you haven't met. Do you think of that?

And if you have a hobby of photography, it might be well for you to find it out there's a photographic club somewhere; and it maybe that you are interested in bird watching. Well it might just be that you'd find a bird watcher now and then for Jesus Christ. And it might be that you're interested also in photography. It could well be you know, that a couple of trips to the photographic club in your community where you carry some pictures that you've worked on could be the means of touching some. I would suggest to you that you recognize that before there can be conversion there has to be contact. Oh what a marvelous missionary opportunity we have. Anyone that has a home, has a glorious opportunity of ministry. For you can invite Foreign Students that are lonely to come to your home to enjoy hospitality and to share something of their country, their culture, their life. And you can share with them the One of Whom it was said, "We bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord" (Luk. 2:10-11).

Yes, you must recognize that the Prophet wasn't to sit in his living room and wait for the people to come to be warned. And he never was intended to set up a pulpit and wait for the pews to be filled with those who are to be warned. There isn't in the possibility in the middle of the 20th Century with all the competition for time any man who is faithful to the Word of God in a Pastoral ministry year after year that can preach to unsaved people Sunday morning or Sunday night unless his people are out witnessing to the unsaved, and praying for the unsaved, and influencing the unsaved to come. When unsaved come to church they are brought to Christ. How long has it been since you have had influence enough with one unsaved person to get them to sit with you somewhere, over a cup of coffee or a dinner in your home, and let you talk with them about the things of the Lord; how long has it been. You're a watchman, and a watchman was to be out in the midst of the people. Read Isaiah, and see what he did to gain the attention of the people. Read Jeremiah and see what he did to gain the attention of the people. Read Ezekiel and see what God did, told him to do to gain the attention of the people. Talk about spectacular. My, seeing Isaiah stand in the Court, in the presence of the King, or in the court of the King, for these months bare footed and in rags, and you begin to understand that God had object lessons as well as voices.

It behooves us to recognize therefore that as prophets we have been sent to the people, and the Lord will teach us exactly how we are to extend and express the prophetic ministry the Lord has given to us. You say, this isn't for me. Well then if it isn't for you, the fullness of the Holy Spirit isn't for you, And the indwelling presence of Christ isn't for you. Now wait a minute. If witnessing isn't for you, then the fullness of the Spirit isn't for you; And the indwelling presence of Christ isn't for you; and salvation isn't for you. But if salvation is for you, if the fullness of Christ is for you, and the fullness of the Spirit is for you, then witnessing is for you. "For ye shall be witnesses, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

You say, well I do this work. One of the hardest tasks I have is to prove to myself that the administrative work that I perform in the office and the study, that I perform in preparation for messages is not my witness. It is my responsibility as a teacher given to the church. But as a member of the Body of Christ, I have as much responsibility to witness to the unsaved as any of you do. And I can not explain it away by saying, "Well I preach four or five times a week." This doesn't take the fact that the witness is someone who tells what he's seen and known and experienced to someone for whom he had opportunity. The Lord spoke to the multitude, but He also spoke to the woman by the well. In fact, you'll find that far greater results came from His individual contact than from most of His public ministry. And every one of us is sent to be witnesses.

Now the Scripture declares, that "Wicked men must turn or die." The reason is that sin carries the penalty of death. Ezekiel was who declared for God in Chapter 18, verse 4, "The soul that sinneth it shall surely die." Now I would like to suggest to you that sin ought to be punished by death, that punishment by death is reasonable, that it is exactly what such crime deserves. For in the first place, sin ought to be punished by death because of the excellency of the soul it deforms. Here is a human spirit created for fellowship with God, the vessel to be filled with the presence of God, and when the one who inhabits that vessel defiles it by turning it into the vehicle and vessel of sin, such a crime ought to be punished by death. Sin ought to be punished

by death because of the excellency of the holiness which it obliterates. Here you were made for God, and here God gave you the capacity to appreciate Himself, and here God gave you a desire to be like Him, and yet every warning of conscience and every entreaty of the Spirit and every rebuke of the Word is ignored and therefore I say because of the holiness which it obliterates in the human spirit. Sin ought to be punished with death because of the excellency of the law which it violates. The law is just and holy and good, and the means by which God would protect you from the deprivations of others and protect others from your own criminal heart, and consequently because of this law being violated with impunity sin ought to be punished with death.

Then I suggest that sin ought to be punished with death because of the excellency of the Glory which it despises, the Glory of God as it is revealed in the creation that He has made, and the Word that He has given, and in the Son that has come. For every time, at least in an enlightened land where the Gospel has been preached the sinner continues in his crime he is treading under his feet the Blood of the everlasting Covenant and despising the Glory of God. Sin ought to be punished with death because of the excellency of the Holiness of God which it spurns. Here it has obliterated holiness in the human heart and ignores and spurns the holiness of God. Is this not crime sufficient to be punished by death?

Sin ought to be punished with death because of the excellency of the grace and the mercy that it treads beneath its coarse, unfeeling feet. What is sin? What is this crime of which we speak in these terms? Sin is moral gangsterism; it is utter selfishness; it is the committal of the will to self-pleasing and puts the individual at war with every good purpose of God. And thus it is true that "the soul that sinneth it shall die" (Eze. 18:20).

Now I'd like to have you consider with me for just a moment certain plain truths concerning this death of which the Scripture speaks. First, *it is not the death of the body*. For that is inevitable whether one sins in a violent and open sense or not, and even those that have come to Christ do not escape from the death of the body. So we're not speaking about this, "Why will ye die" (Eze. 18:31). We're not talking about the physical death, the separation of the soul from the body. Nor are we speaking of it as being dead in trespasses and sins. It's not a state of sinfulness. Already such a state is there. And so when it says, Why will ye die, it is not speaking of that state of sinfulness; that has already become a fact. Nor does it mean annihilation. As much as there would be some who would try to teach us that when a man dies like a dog all consciousness is extinguished, the Word of God does not teach it. And therefore it isn't to be thought for a moment that it is this. Not at all. What is it? It's the very opposite of the life that is here lived. A person is alive; he's conscious; he's living now in a state where his soul, his body is in contact with society. This death will be a place where his soul, his intellect will be in contact with another society. It is death. It's the separation of the soul from the body, but not a separation of consciousness from the soul. It's the very opposite to blessedness. It is misery. When it speaks of death in this context, it speaks of unmitigated, ceaseless, changeless misery, and grief. It's the very opposite to light which is the fruit of the presence of God - darkness, misery and darkness. We can speak of hell as the moral madhouse of the universe, and those who go there are the morally insane and therefore it will mean that to be dead in this sense will mean that one is forever incarcerated where egocentric people, individuals with amoral consciousness are persisting in their insanity. It's to be eternally cut off from God, from all comfort, from all hope in Him. It is as the Scripture says, "The wages of sin which is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Now our Text declares that "God has no pleasure in the sinners death." Why? For just a moment would you view briefly these thoughts. God does have pleasure in the saints death. Did you know that? Listen to what we read in Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints." Isn't it strange? Why should it be? What gives us grief, gives God pleasure. Well, someone has said about the little baby, the little boy that died, said, "It was the rose in full bloom, and time for God to pick it, and take it for Himself, that the fragrance might be there in His presence where it might be fully enjoyed." And so it is. God says He has pleasure in the death of the saints.

Paul spoke of it in these words, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better" (Php. 1:23). This death which God finds pleasant and which Paul says is better is the death of the body, for "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8). God does have pleasure in the death of the saints, but God declares "that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked." God is a moral Being, and it is contrary to the nature of a moral being to delight in suffering for its own sake, and therefore it is unthinkable that God would have any pleasure in seeing people

in the kind of an existence as we have described which characterizes the place to which the wicked dead must go. God's very character forbids that He should have pleasure in the death of the wicked. He is good, infinitely benevolent, and desiring the greatest happiness and blessedness of all of His creatures. The only reason that God can acquiesce to the death of the sinners is that it is necessary to establish a greater good. Even when God views the death of the sinners, as a great loss to avoid, which He's used every proper means love and wisdom could devise to deliver them from, He still has to do it with great yearning.

Remember what you have in Matthew 23:37, when our Lord Jesus sat on the brow of the hill, and looked down over Jerusalem, and these words have come down to us, that were uttered then and heard by men and recorded for us but they've been in the heart of Eternal God from even before the foundation of the world. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not."

Can you not hear it? "As I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Everything that God could do in wisdom and love is done; all has been spurned; there is nothing more that He can do. And yet His heart breaks as He sees men plunge on to their ruin. God has to feel this way, because this death is the state in which from that time which they die God can wisely show them no favor. Think of it, no favor. God who made all things for their pleasure, gave everything in the Lord Jesus, and has been so patient, so loving, so gracious, so long-suffering, but when the wicked die in rebellion there isn't anything more that the heart of God which broke out of love for men can do for them. No wonder He has no pleasure in their death. Mercy has had its day. As long as they were in that period of probation, He delighted to show mercy. But now He can show it no longer. "As I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "The Lord is not slack concerning His promises," said Peter, "as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). May God let some of His love and yearning and longing come into my heart, and yours.

But someone might ask me, "Why does not God prevent the death of the wicked? If He feels this way about it, if He has no pleasure in their death, if He is not willing for them to perish, why doesn't He prevent it?" Well the answer is this. In the wisdom of God it is wiser and better to make man as he is than never to have made him at all or to have made him in any other way. I want you to understand this. All the suffering the world has experienced all the grief and misery of an eternal hell, all the anguish of all the lost of all the ages, taken into account, it was better for God to have made man as he is, capable of so great a doom, than never to have made him at all. Great sin would have been committed by God, for He does not commit sin, had He had not made man. It was infinitely better that He make him and even with all of the loss that could be sustained in the making, than that he never should have been made. This is true and affirmed by the very character of God, for everything He does He does in wisdom, and in love. God acts in that totality of His Being, in all of His actions. Having made man thus, in His moral image and likeness which included the power of choice, God can do wisely nothing more than to allow the impenitent to experience the consequence of their moral choice. What God cannot do wisely He can't do without sinning. God could not wisely have done more for the sinner's salvation than He has. He has done all that infinite wisdom and infinite love could devise. He has left nothing unturned, undone. No stone unturned that might have brought men to Himself. God cannot save men without their concurrence. They never could be holy without their full consent to repent and turn from their wicked way, and so we have to recognize that the reason God permits men to perish is because there is nothing else that wisdom and love can do to avoid it. Our Text declares that men die of their own wills. "Why will ye die?" Why are ye determined to die? The sinner deliberately wills his own death, by deliberately choosing the course that will result in it. He wills to die who wills the means of death. The man who reaches out to take the poison, wills his death by the act of taking and drinking or eating. So absolute is this territory of the human will that wicked men may die in their sins and be eternally lost even though God desires their repentance. What then in the fifth place, what must a man do if he is to live? What must men do if they are to live?

Now listen. It's possible for all to live. There is no need for any to perish. The death of Christ is adequate so that if every man who has ever lived on the face of the earth represented a world with as many men as this has had in it, the death of Christ would have been adequate. There is no limit to the potentiality of God's grace in the death of Jesus Christ. The potential in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was adequate for as many worlds as this world has known men. This is a truth that's been agreed to by the theologians down across the ages. Deliverance from death is within the reach of any who will repent and believe the

Gospel. The Message has gone out, the Word has been sounded. "Whosoever will may come, and take of the Water of Life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The entreaty is, Repent and believe. The sinner cannot save himself. We know that, but he can choose whether or not he will be saved. There we have it. God has given His word that He wants sinners to turn and live. Since He could affirm it by no other He affirms it by Himself: "As I live." Where can He go for a higher ground of affirmation than this? The question the people ask in verse 10 was, "Thus if our transgressions and our sin be upon us and we pine away, how should we then live? What can we do?" The answer is, "And they said, even if we turn will we live, even if we come back will God forgive us?" And God answers through the Prophet to the prophet, "Yes, as certainly as I live." Truly repentant, believing hearts will live also. "Whosoever will may come and take of the Water of Life freely."

Listen to it. He affirms it twice. He entreats them. He commands them. "Turn ye." That's enough. But love moves a step further. "Turn ye." There it is the second time. "Turn ye. Turn ye for why will ye die?" Turning includes both repentance and faith. A complete change of mind, a complete change in the purpose of the will, and a complete commitment of life to the promises of God as they've been made by Him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and Thou shalt be saved" (Act. 16:31). God entreats men to turn and live. This of course reveals the imminent danger in which men stand. This reveals the condition in which they find themselves. It reveals God's wonderful compassion, and love. But it also reveals that the final response has to come from the citadel of a man's soul. It also emphasizes the difficulty of getting men and women to come to Christ. "Turn ye, turn ye for why will ye die!"

And God is still pleading with the lost ones tonight. He's pleading with you if you are here without Christ. Incalculable is the loss that you will suffer, And the loss that God will suffer. Think of the beauty. Think of the blessedness. Think of the glory that will be the portion of those who come to Jesus Christ. Think of the baseness. Think of the grief. Think of the misery that will come to those without Him. Think of what the Lord God has done. He has robbed heaven of its riches in giving His Son. Think of what Christ has done. He's poured out His soul unto death. God has raided His Son from the dead and attested by it that the way of salvation is freely and fully provided. And now the Word of love, the Word of entreaty has gone out. "Turn ye. Turn ye, for why will ye die?"

W. A. Ogden wrote a song I'd like to sing it, but I can't.

I have a message from the Lord. Hallelujah!
The message unto you I'll give;
'Tis recorded in His Word. Hallelujah!
It is only that you "look and live."

I've a message full of love. Hallelujah!
A message, O my friend, for you;
'Tis a message from above, Hallelujah!
Jesus said it, and I know 'tis true.

Life is offered unto you. Hallelujah!
Eternal life thy soul shall have,
If you only look to Him, Hallelujah!
Look to Jesus Who alone can save.

(Refrain)
Look and live, my brother, live,
Look to Jesus now and live;
'Tis recorded in His Word, Hallelujah!
It is only that you look and live.

“As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn and live. Turn ye. Turn ye, for why will ye die?”

Let us bow in prayer.

Our Father, we are before Thee tonight, a company of eternally bound men and women. We are either here as those who have been trusted and called and commissioned by Thee to warn, or those that stand in great need and are dependent upon that warning and need it. One or the other. We are either watchmen upon the wall or we are those in the city waiting for destruction. We would ask tonight therefore for Thy double blessing. Probably most of the people here have a profession of faith in Christ, and the watchmen brought to this city somehow in Thy providence to be set here on the wall to warn men to flee from the wrath to come. And there is the blood of men and women upon our hands. We do not know whose blood it is, but Thou dost know and Thou dost know where Thou wilt put us and whom Thou wouldst have us warn. Oh may we take seriously the fact that our Risen Head said, “Ye shall be My witnesses.” We know that He knew exactly the ones to whom we should witness, and if we failed Him and we failed them surely their blood will be required at our hands. But then, our Father, as we pray for those who know and love Thee, we pray for those that are still outside the fold of grace, of the ones to whom this message of entreaty and longing and appeal is directed. And perhaps even while we pray there is someone that’s come in by invitation or by accident that’s one of these, standing in the place of the shadow of death without God, without hope, without Christ. And Lord we cannot close this service without warning them and entreating them to flee from the wrath to come. Father, for Jesus sake move upon any that are here without Christ to receive Him tonight, as Lord and as Savior - to turn and live.

With our heads bowed and eyes closed are there those here that would say by your upraised hand, Yes, I am one of those to whom God is speaking. I know I stand in the place of death, but tonight I want to turn and live. Would you put your hand up, and by it invite prayer? God bless you, I see you dear friend. Another, anyone, anywhere? Yes, I see it. Anyone else? What will you do about it? “Turn ye.” This you can do. Will you turn tonight from your sin, turn from your uncleanness and come to Him. Oh I ask for opportunity to talk with you and to pray with you. Instead of going out, remain behind and give me an opportunity to open the Word and to pray with you. I wonder tonight if there is anyone here who would say, I’m a Christian but God has convicted me that I’ve been derelict and careless and indifferent to the lost about me. I’ve been trying to escape from my responsibility to be a watchman and a witness, by service and activity in the church, but God has spoken to my heart, and I am going to ask Him to lead me out into witness to those who He would reach through me. I haven’t witnessed and I acknowledge it to the Lord, but tonight I’m asking Him to give me His courage and strength and the witness He has for me as a watchman set on the wall here in New York. Would you raise your hand? Yes, God bless you. I see it. I see it. Shall we stand for prayer.

Thou hast spoken, our Father, and we have heard Thy voice. Now we go to walk in the light of what Thou hast said. Go Thou with us. Continue to speak, and may this week be one where we not only find ourselves speaking to Thee, but speaking to others as Thou dost entreat them through us. Oh we long to be channels only, blessed Jesus, far Thy wondrous grace and power, flowing through us. Thou to use us every day and every hour. Make this a glorious reality in our lives for Thy Name sake. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, July 31, 1960 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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