

# Sunday August 15, 2021

## Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

### Welcome & Prayer

Once again we find ourselves socially distanced from each other because of COVID. But the reality is that we can be spiritually close to each other as together we draw near to the Lord. The writer to the Hebrews says *"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Let's Pray. *Father, we want to come to you this morning to say thank you and to honour you. You are my God, and I will praise you! You are my God, and I will exalt You! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. We are often so busy that we forget to take the time to sit quietly and remember your love and faithfulness. We forget to say thank you for all the good things you provide in our lives, and yet you continue to love, support and bless us. We cry out that "life's not fair" but forget that you have been through it all before, and that you will give us the strength that we need. Help us to rejoice that you are near, that you walk with us, that we grow and learn and that your love is constant.*

*We want to thank you for life, for food that you provide, and for the love of family and friends. Thank you for the beauty of creation, for the joy that it gives us, for the wonder of the sea and sky and for the expanse of space that draws us beyond the definitions of our selves. Thank you for the blessings that you shower over us, despite our foolish ways and sinful pride. Forgive us when we forget and ignore you. Thank you Father for your unconditional and everlasting love. Help us to grow more and more to be like you. Guide & teach us in all that we say & do & help us to listen with open hearts today as we come before you. Amen*

### Song – Almighty Maker

[Almighty Maker \[Sovereign Grace Music\] - YouTube](#)

<p>Who but the Lord set the bound'ries of light Hung the stars in the night? Who but the Lord drew the face on the moon Made the planets to move? Who but the Lord tells the clouds when to pour Thunder to roar? Amazing are Your works</p>	<p>Chorus. Almighty Maker, You command heaven &amp; earth By the power of your word Be praised for ever Almighty Maker All creation sings of You Glory fills all that you do Be praised forever, ever &amp; evermore</p>
<p>Who but the Lord could have dreamed of the plan That would save fallen man? Who but the Lord washes rebels with blood Making mercy a flood? Who but the Lord could give life through a cross Rescuing us? Amazing are Your ways</p>	<p>Bridge All things are from You All things are through You O God the great I am All things are for You All things are to You O god the great I am (Chorus)</p>

## Bible Reading – Ezekiel 16:1-14 (NIV)

Before we look at God's word today, can I point out that it is a very difficult read. And many will be troubled by its contents. So you may choose not to continue with our service. We are preaching on this because we believe that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If you would like to talk to anyone as a result of today's service please give Jo Barlow, Stephen Taylor or Jon Brown a call.

*16 The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices <sup>3</sup> and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. <sup>4</sup> On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. <sup>5</sup> No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. <sup>6</sup> "Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" <sup>7</sup> I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed & entered puberty. Your breasts had formed & your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked.*

*<sup>8</sup> "Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine. <sup>9</sup> "I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. <sup>10</sup> I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put sandals of fine leather on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. <sup>11</sup> I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, <sup>12</sup> and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. <sup>13</sup> So you were adorned with gold & silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric & embroidered cloth. Your food was honey, olive oil & the finest flour. You became very beautiful & rose to be a queen. <sup>14</sup> And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.*

## Announcements

**COVID Restrictions.** It has been a difficult week with all of us being in lockdown. And a stressful one wondering what our future holds. But for all of God's people we don't face these difficulties on our own. We have God's word, His Son and Spirit available to us 24/7 to lean upon. And we have God's people, the church to encourage us and strengthen us in our times of need. Please make the most of both these good gifts from our heavenly Father. Spend time with your Lord in prayer and bible reading each day. And please reach out to your fellow brothers and sisters wherever you can. The tendency at these times to bunker down and deal with these things on our own. The challenge we face is to face the future together. So what would that practically look like for you today?

**Focus for August - Outreach.** It all seemed pretty clear when Stephen was planning the year. In June let's encourage people to have be hospitable and so build relationship for the future. And then we can read a book on Evangelism, thinking through how we reach our friends and family. In August let's hear the testimonies of how others became Christians. And on 29<sup>th</sup> August let's have an invitation service. All pretty logical. But now with COVID these plans are up in the air. But... But.. the opportunities for evangelism are still there. The need to preach the gospel is still here. So why don't we pray that God would open up the door and bring others into the Kingdom? Lets still aim to invite someone to Church on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August. It might be live or livestream. In person or via an interactive service. But lets look to the Lord for grow His Kingdom through us.

**Stay Salt.** A discussion on this book on evangelism. Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> August from 2-3pm at the Charlestown church. Buy the book (Reformers /Koorong \$20 per copy or \$13 electronically). Read the book. Discuss the book. Put the book into practise!

**Hunter Men's Convention.** Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September 8:30-3pm @ Grace Evangelical Church. Speaker: Simon Manchester. Topic Ezekiel (is God trying to say something to us) Cost \$30. There are only a few more spaces left, so get in really quick!

**Kamal Weerakoon** is planning to visit us as a Church on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 7-9p, to talk with our youth group and their parents (and other interested parties) about Porn. This is a major issue for most Christians today and it would be a good to hear what God's word has to say about it and how God's help can help us to say no to this sort of temptation.

**A worthy gift for the Dads** - Not sure what to get your Dad for Father's Day? Why not buy a 10L or 20L jerry can of fuel, without going within 4,000km of the fumes? MAF has been flying food, medical aid, health workers, missionaries and God's Word into the most remote parts of the planet for more than 75 years. One 20-litre jerry can of fuel will keep a MAF plane in the air for 20 minutes. Talk to Sam Collyer (0405 566 273) for more information.

## Family Matters

If you were in Church a couple of weeks ago you would have seen the first part of the Bible Project's Ezekiel video. Today we are going to watch the second part. Please go to [Overview: Ezekiel 1-33 - YouTube](#) and start at 4 minutes 52. If you missed it last time, why not begin at the start and go through the whole video, I am sure you will find it really helpful!

## Song – Nothing that my hands can do

[Nothing That My Hands Can Do \[Official Lyric Video\] - YouTube](#)

1. There's nothing that my hands can do

To save my guilty soul

I cannot cleanse my filthy stains

Or make my spirit whole

For nothing but the blood of Christ

Can all my sins erase

I dare not claim my righteousness

But hide within His grace

'Tis Christ who saved me from the depths

God's pardon I've received

I'm washed within His precious blood

My heart is sprinkled clean

2. I'll praise the God of holiness

Of justice, truth, and might

Who guides me by His mighty hand

To walk within His light

While Satan weaves his shallow lies

God speaks to me in love

Reminding me His only Son

Has bought me with His blood

And Christ dispels my every doubt

Through Him I am redeemed

I love because He loved me first

I live because He lives

3. My life is but a fleeting sigh

A tear within the sea

But you are everlasting, Lord

And You've predestined me

To leave this fading world behind

Not fearing death will come

For then I'll look on Jesus Christ

And to his arms I'll run

And when I see Him face to face

What glory that will be

To look upon my Saviour's scars

And know they were for me.

## Pastoral Prayer ~ 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021 (Steve G)

*Father in Heaven we thank you that you are a good and loving God, and we commit to you our church family. We pray that you will remain close to us as we are separated, and that though separated we will maintain our commitment to you and to each other.*

*We commit to you the many churches now unable to meet in person due to Covid restrictions. We think of those who are discouraged by this and pray for patience, wisdom, and acceptance as we continue to deal with this discouragement.*

*We ask for you to be with those who are in poor health. We ask for healing if it is according to your will, and comfort when healing is not forthcoming. We commit to you those who are lonely and ask for opportunities to care for them and comfort them.*

*We commit to you our HSC students. Pray for Phoebe Baldwin, Maddie Hearn, Coel Mulready, Yvette Chesterfield, James Hakwa, Will Homer, Wyeth Scott, Peter Hyslop, Heath Brown. Pray for strength during these uncertain times. Pray for peace during all the stress. Pray this would be a time when their trust in God deepens.*

*In our world we pray for England and revival for the churches and transformation of hardened hearts. We pray that new arrivals there will be confronted with a vibrant Christian witness. We commit to you our link missionaries and pray that their work will be able to continue in challenging times. We pray the Holy Spirit will continue to work through them and prepare hearts for conversion and repentance.*

*We pray for our leaders and health care workers. Pray for wisdom for our leaders, pray for skill of our healthcare workers, and pray for opportunities to meet as a church family at the earliest opportunity. In Jesus name, Amen.*

## Bible Reading – Ezekiel 16:15-34 & 59-63 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup> “But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. <sup>16</sup> You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. You went to him, and he possessed your beauty. <sup>17</sup> You also took the fine jewellery I gave you, the jewellery made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols & engaged in prostitution with them. <sup>18</sup> And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them. <sup>19</sup> Also the food I provided for you—the flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat—you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>20</sup> “And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? <sup>21</sup> You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols. <sup>22</sup> In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood. <sup>23</sup> “Woe! Woe to you, declares the Sovereign LORD. In addition to all your other wickedness, <sup>24</sup> you built a mound for yourself and made a lofty shrine in every public square. <sup>25</sup> At every street corner you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, spreading your legs with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. <sup>26</sup> You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your neighbours with large genitals, and aroused my anger with your increasing promiscuity. <sup>27</sup> So I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory; I gave you over to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were shocked by your lewd conduct. <sup>28</sup> You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied. <sup>29</sup> Then you increased your promiscuity to include Babylonia, a land of

merchants, but even with this you were not satisfied. <sup>30</sup> “I am filled with fury against you, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! <sup>31</sup> When you built your mounds at every street corner and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment. <sup>32</sup> “You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! <sup>33</sup> All prostitutes receive gifts, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favours. <sup>34</sup> So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favours. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.

<sup>59</sup> “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. <sup>60</sup> Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. <sup>61</sup> Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both those who are older than you and those who are younger. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you. <sup>62</sup> So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. <sup>63</sup> Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

## Sermon – HIS - Story (Stephen T)

“They say that history is written by the winners. That when you win the war, when you get into the seat of power, when you get the chance to teach the next generation what happened in the past, you always paint yourself in a better light. You highlight all the good things that you did. And you conveniently forget about your faults or your sins.

Slide 2

I was taught in school about the beginnings of our own nation’s history. How the English came to a place that was primitive, backward, hard and unforgiving and through sheer hard work and a fair bit of luck, they planted a colony that has become the envy of the world. It has only been in recent years that my understanding of history has been filled out by hearing of the dispossession of our native people, the treating them as sub-human for far too long. Of our plundering of our natural resources and the fact that we have often turned a blind eye to the horror of what has gone on amongst us and all around us.

Slide 3

Well in Ezekiel 16 we see God rewriting Israel’s history books. Israel had always emphasised the fact that God had chosen them out of all the countries of the world. That they were a special people with a special place in the history of the world; & that was true. But it wasn’t the full truth. So, in verse 1 we hear the word of the Lord comes to the prophet Ezekiel. And in verse 2 we hear him say <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices.” Confront them. Challenge them with their own view of themselves. For they are conveniently forgetting that their past and present is filled with evil behaviour.

And so we get one of the most disturbing chapters in the Bible. Where God lets them have both barrels, so to speak. Last week we saw that God told Ezekiel to give silent sermons pointing God’s people to the depth of their sin and the need for God to punish it. And if you read Ezekiel chapters 12 to 24 God goes even further and exposes that the very fabric of Israelite society is completely evil.

God says that both behind closed doors and in the very open there is oppression, injustice, bribery, extortion, robbery, taking advantage of the weak and vulnerable, idolatry, adultery, perverse sexual activities, bloodshed, wickedness. And he is only getting started! But the people are not listening to Ezekiel so God tells them a story, a powerful and disturbing allegory. That is meant to shock. That is meant to wound. That is meant to cut them open so that the real cause of the problem might be exposed to all. Because God’s people are so stubborn and slow to listen, God lobs in a stick of dynamite to blow up their defences.

And while he is doing that, you and I will also be shocked, wounded, cut open and exposed as well. Before we are all pointed to the light at the end of the tunnel, Jesus.

Slide 4

1. And this allegory starts with Jerusalem, God's people being in the **Gutter! (v 3-5)**

*"This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite."* Israel was very proud of its spiritual ancestry. Abraham was their father. In their backstory were luminaries like Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Hannah & Isaiah. But that was a rewriting of history. The truth is that Israel had pagan roots. Their beginnings were like the other pagan nations in their region. If they were to go on ancestry.com they would find out that they had really come from the Amorites and Hittites.

But it was worse than that. In their family tree was not a host of murderers or convicts like our nation has, but in the beginning, they were unwanted and uncared for and were actually abandoned. <sup>4</sup>*"On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths."* <sup>5</sup>*No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised."*

Slide 5

Even today there are children coming into this world unwanted. And children raised in households who don't care for them. Actually, there are millions of young babies whose lives are terminated before birth because they are not wanted. But it has always been like this. Babies were regularly left out to die. Especially girls. Or those who had disabilities. One of Satan's lies has always been that young life is expendable. And Israel experienced that. They were unwanted by everyone. Except by the Lord. And so this allegory tells us the rags to riches story of God's people, who were literally in the gutter before receiving God's grace.

Slide 6

2. **Grace!! (v6-14)**

Look what happens next. <sup>6</sup>*"Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!"* When Israel had absolutely nothing going for them, God walked by and delivered a one-word sermon. "Live!" Live! And that is all that was needed to change everything. Absolutely everything.

That's the power of God's word. Apparently, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, a leader in the Scottish Church during the 1600's was actually converted by this one word coming from this very verse. He had come under conviction of sin by a sermon preached at a funeral and he said that he felt hell actually opening up for him when he found himself reading Ezekiel 16:6 and he later wrote down that this one word, "live" had "put a new life and spirit in my soul."

Slide 7

And that's what happened to the Israelites when God called Abraham. When God made a covenant with Abraham. But he did more than just give him His word. Ezekiel continues, <sup>7</sup>*"I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed & entered puberty. Your breasts had formed & your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked."* God took pity on this helpless child. God saved her, cleaned & protected her. In short, he adopted & chose her.

Israel was now ready for great things. God had prepared her for great things. But that's only part of the story for the Lord went on to marry her. <sup>8</sup>*"Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine."*

During the time that Israel was in Egypt she was in need of further protection and love and care and God was willing to give all of those things to Israel. It was the genius of the prophet Hosea who first introduced God's people to the concept that the relationship which Israel had with their Lord was like a marriage relationship. Where he loved them so much that he committed Himself to them until death do us part. But here Ezekiel takes that metaphor and expands it into a story moving it from a cartoon to a high-tech movie on surround sound.

Slide 8

You see the story of Israel shows us that God marries his bride and then provides all that she needs to become beautiful, stunning in fact. He washes her, provides her with ointments, fine clothes, beautiful shoes, expensive jewellery, gold and silver, fine food. And how does Ezekiel summarise God's grace to his people? *"You became very beautiful & rose to be a queen. <sup>14</sup> And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD."*

God has now fully transformed his people. God's love has made them special, unique, perfect. God is rewriting history and telling them that "Israel's beauty came not from itself but solely from God's grace." They had become the Princess Diana of the ancient world. And so in the time of King Solomon people flocked to Jerusalem, including the Queen of Sheba. They came to hear and see what God had done. And they left praising the Lord.

Slide 9

This is the story of Israel but let me point out that this story also has a wider application. Could we not see in this story our story? The story of Australia? When you think about it, we didn't have the greatest beginnings, did we? Our ancestors are convicts, migrants and refugees. Indigenous people who were dispossessed. And poor farmers who found a passage to the other side of the world and hoped to be able to make it good.

And by God's grace we now have a stable, prosperous, democratic, compassionate nation. A nation where the Lord has blessed us mightily. And given us freedoms and a life style that is the envy of the world. Where people from all nations have come to us to make a fresh start. And to achieve their dreams. And if God is sovereign over the nations this has not happened because we have worked harder than anyone else, no one of our most famous exports is the long weekend! Nor because we are the lucky country. It is all due to God's grace.

Slide 10

### 3. Gutter, Grace & thirdly Grateful!!? (verse 15-43)

So, are we grateful for all that we have been given? We might think about that again in a moment but let's stay with the text a bit longer. Was Israel grateful for all the blessings that she had received? Did she respond to their husbands love with a matching love of their own, so that they all lived happily ever after? Yes? No. They left to become a prostitute.

<sup>15</sup> *"But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favours on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. <sup>16</sup> You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. You went to him, and he possessed your beauty. <sup>17</sup> You also took the fine jewellery I gave you, the jewellery made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols & engaged in prostitution with them."* Israel took the very things that God had given to them & used them to chase down other lovers. Now that's one way to say thanks to God for His grace, isn't it?

Take all the good things that God has given you and give them to others. Can you imagine a husband going to his wife and saying I know money is short and we have a budget that we are keeping but I need some money for something really important? And the wife saying yes this will be a stretch but because I trust

you, I will give you that money you asked for. And the husband uses that money to have sex with a prostitute. How would the wife feel if she ever found out about that? How much of a betrayal is that?

Slide 11

Well, that's what Israel did, they took their beauty and used it to chase after the Egyptians. Who were the top dogs in the region but when their influence waned they offered themselves instead to the Philistines, the Assyrians & then to the Babylonians. They made military alliances with the nations around them rather than trusting that the Lord would look after them. They made sacrifices to the gods of the nations around them rather than worshipping the Lord their God. Actually, they did both. On the Sabbath that we were found in the Temple & during the week they gave themselves to gods of the nations around them.

Slide 12

Which meant according to verse 20 they even stooped so low that *"And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? <sup>21</sup> You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols."* Like many a dysfunctional family they go back to the sins of their fathers. Israel was unwanted herself. Now God gives them the blessing of sons and daughters and they are so selfish that they are willing to give them up as well to chase their own evil desires and plans.

Slide 13

But it gets even worse. Imagine marrying someone who is so desperate for sex they become a prostitute who pays anyone else for sex? Preacher HL Ellison puts it well *"the adulteress may by some be excused by the strength of passion & blind love but for the prostitute there is no excuse except of stark necessity. But for Israel there is not even this excuse. She has not been paid by her lovers, but she has paid those who have taken their pleasure of her."*

Wow. Israel continues to be unfaithful to God. It is not just a thing of the past, for she still is worshipping other gods even now. God sent them prophets, priests and kings & they have not repented. He has sent them the Babylonians who have destroyed Jerusalem and taken the people into exile. But still no response. He has given them Ezekiel who has preached his heart out for a number of years. Still nothing. So, now he will give them over to their sins.

Slide 14

<sup>36</sup> *"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you poured out your lust and exposed your naked body in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children's blood, <sup>37</sup> therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see you stark naked. <sup>38</sup> I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring on you the blood vengeance of my wrath & jealous anger."*

You gave yourself to these loves. Now I will let them have their way with you. And it won't be a pretty sight. I will no longer protect you from the implications of your actions. Instead, justice will be service. And my wrath will come upon you. You will die for your sins. Instead of being wooed by your loves you will be woe-d and wounded and wiped out. In the words of one commentator, *"Naked he found her; naked he would leave her. The hell that awaited her was not the creation of some demonic or external power, **but of her own making.**"*

Slide 15

Let's stop there for a moment, shall we? Has Ezekiel offended us yet? This talk of not being wanted, abortion, broken marriage, adultery, prostitution, child sacrifice, nakedness, hell, God's wrath and judgement. Its touching plenty of raw nerves, isn't it? And that is what it is meant to do. We are meant to be offended. Meant to get angry. It is meant to get our blood boiling. Because the story of Israel is also the story of all mankind.

Slide 15



We have been, each one of us, given life by God. And He is the source of all the good we enjoy. He has shown us incredible kindness by giving us life, food, shelter & clothing, love, support, encouragement, faith and we in turned His good gifts against Him. Yet in the words of Presbyterian preacher Neil Chambers, *“We take our tongues, His good gift of language & tell lies about Him. We take His good gift of sex, and use it to enslave ourselves and others to our lust. We take His good gift of intelligence, and seek to construct world views that exclude Him from the world. We claim ourselves to be the source of our life and wealth, and give Him no thanks. **And at the same time** many say God should do this or that for us & we have a right to be disappointed in God when things go wrong, shake our fists at Him and say if He was really God, He would never let drought or fire or earthquake or war happen to us.”*

Now I know that is offensive! The story of Israel is not just the story of Australia, it is the story of all mankind. It is our story, yours and mine. But we haven't got to the end of the tunnel yet. It is going to get even darker. For the sin of Israel is even greater than that.

Slide 16

#### 4. Greater!?! (v44-58)

Because Ezekiel begins another allegory which may even be more offensive than the one about Israel being married to God. And that is that Israel has two sisters, Samaria and Sodom. And within that family it is not true that Israel is the Cinderella and Sodom and Samaria are the two ugly sisters. No Israel is the worst sibling in the family. By far!

For there is a biblical truth, “the more that is given to you, the more that is required of you.” The more you have received, the more that is expected from you. And Jerusalem has been given grace after grace. And yet still they are worse than Samaria and Samaria were judged harshly but fairly by God a few hundred years ago. And Israel are even worse than Sodom who was completely wiped off the map in Lots time.

Slide 17

And Sodom was a byword then and now for heinous sin. Treating women as things. Rape, Sexual sin. Homosexual rape. But that is not the worst of it. Look at verse 49, *“Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She & her daughters were arrogant, overfed & unconcerned; they did not help the poor & needy. They were haughty & did detestable things before me.”*

Slide 18

That's the story of Israel but at the risk of offending again, isn't that also the story of God's people today? Isn't that the history of the Church? We were formed by none other than Jesus Himself. Purified, washed, forgiven, and sent out to be his witness into his world. To be his hands and feet to love the nations and his mouthpiece to call them back to the Lord. But yet we have loved power, money, sex & ourselves more than we have loved God.

We have had our hand out for government money. We believed that big is beautiful. We have trusted in our buildings and our rock star preachers, we have run our churches purely on business models and sold our soul to the world. We have neglected the poor in our community. We have forgotten the lost of the world. Or we have been so disgusted by the Church that we have walked away from God's plans for this world and instead done our own thing. “I will turn my back on what God has called me to do in his word & instead follow the individualism of my peers and just have my own private faith and forget about God's call on my life to be an active part of the body of believers.”

Slide 19

And when we do this and when Israel did it and when Australia has done it and when the whole of mankind has done it God's heart is broken. Here in this passage we see God as a broken father and a jilted lover. We see that our actions have humiliated him. Disgusted him. Repulsed him. Infuriated him. We might be offended by the words in Ezekiel but God is offended by our sin. Your sin and my sin. Israel's sin. Australia's sin. Mankind's sin. All sin.

All sin is offensive to him. Repulsive to him. Disgusting to him. And it is so bad, so bad, that in order to save us from our sin and from the judgement you and I deserved, Christ, God's one & only Son had to die on a cross in our place for our sin. Now this is a core belief of all Christians. Sin is serious. So serious Christ had to die for it to be forgiven. You see for some inexplicable reason God still wants to forgive us our sin. He doesn't walk away from his people or his world. And so our passage ends with God saying two things, I will establish an everlasting covenant with you (v60). And I will make atonement for all you have done (v63).

Slide 20

And he does both of those things through his son Jesus. It is Jesus that inaugurates the new covenant where his body is broken for us and his blood is shed for us. A covenant that will last for eternity. A covenant sealed with his blood which he shed freely to make atonement for our sins. Jesus proves to us once and for all that there is more mercy in God than sins in us. That when sin abounds, grace abounds even more. That it is God's grace that lifts us out of the gutter & it is God's grace that keep us safe even when we want to return to the gutter

Slide 21

You see the story of Israel is not just the story of Australia, of mankind, of the Church it is my story. And it is your story as well. And we need this retelling of history because you and I have swallowed the lie that we are basically good people. No that is not true. There for the grace of God goes I. We are not better than the Israelites. We are not better than the Muslims. We are not better than the atheists. We are all from the same family.

And yet God has chosen us, cleansed us, forgiven us, redeemed us and when we joined the Church married us. And we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing through Christ. I was in the gutter before I was found by Christ. So were you. We have been given so many gifts and yet we are still tempted to love those gifts more than loving the gift giver God. Yet God doesn't give us what our sins deserve but gives us more grace, super abundant grace.

So because sin hurts God & because our sin is offensive to God, the one who has been saved no longer wants to sin. Because we no longer want to hurt the one who has given us so much. It is not that we are saved by our turning from sin but when God saves us we no longer want to sin. Because we have hurt him enough in the past. We want to remember our history, our back story. We want avail ourselves of the power of God that He gives us through his Holy Spirit. And we want to live in the light of the grace that God has given us through his son Jesus Christ. A grace that saves us, keeps us, transforms us & stays with us for all eternity. That is our story. And that is a story worth remembering & telling to others.

## Song – Blessed Assurance

[Blessed Assurance - YouTube](#)

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain. This is my story, this is my song.  
Praising my Saviour all the day long  
This is my story, this is my song  
Praising my Saviour, all the day long.

2. Perfect communion, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my sight.  
Angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love. [Refrain]

3. Perfect submission, all is at rest  
I in my Saviour am happy and blessed  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
Filled with his goodness, lost in his love (refrain)

## Benediction

<sup>6</sup> “Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, “Live!”

## **Morning Tea**

There is no physical morning tea allowed at the moment but why not give someone a call instead? Who might you ring now?