

Sunday September 5, 2021

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer (Jon B)

There's a lot of commotion in our world at the moment. The pandemic has caused so much social upheaval hasn't it. There's a lot of fear and a lot of talk. But above all this commotion, there's one Voice we need to hear. One Voice that can still the storm and calm our fears: The voice of the Lord. Listen to His voice from

Psalm 29:1-4 "Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord is over many waters The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is full of majesty."

Let us pray. Lord we bow down before you this morning and worship. We give you the glory. All strength and power belong to you. Lord, there's so much commotion in your world. But we know it's always been that way since the Fall: the nation's rage and people plot. The rulers of the earth are bent on rebellion against you. People try to stop the ears from hearing you. And yet you speak. Forgive us for listening to the media more than you. And letting the cares of this life drown out your voice. Lord thunder to us this morning. Speak, and still the storm. Help us to know that Christ is with us. Help us to know your great love for us. And your great power working all things for our good and our salvation. In Christ's name. Amen.

Song – All creatures of our God and King

[All Creatures of Our God and King • Prayers of the Saints Live - YouTube](#)

1. VERSE 1

All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou, burning sun with golden beam
Thou, silver moon with softer gleam
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. VERSE 2

Let all things their Creator bless
And worship Him in humbleness
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son
And praise the Spirit, Three-in-One
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

3. VERSE 3

All the redeemed washed by His blood
Come and rejoice in His great love
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Christ has defeated every sin
Cast all your burdens now on Him
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

He shall return in pow'r to reign
Heaven and earth will join to say
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Then who shall fall on bended knee?
All creatures of our God and King
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Bible Reading – Ezekiel 33:1-14 (NIV)

The word of the LORD came to me: ²'Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: "When I bring the sword against a land, & the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, ³and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, ⁴then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes & takes their life, their blood will be on their own head. ⁵Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head. If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves. ⁶But if the

watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood." ⁷ *'Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel so hear the word I speak & give them warning from me.* ⁸ *When I say to the wicked, "You wicked person, you will surely die," and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin & I will hold you accountable for their blood.* ⁹ *But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.*

¹⁰ *'Son of man, say to the Israelites, "This is what you are saying: 'Our offences and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'"* ¹¹ *Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?"* ¹² *'Therefore, son of man, say to your people, "If someone who is righteous disobeys, that person's former righteousness will count for nothing & if someone who is wicked repents, that person's former wickedness will not bring condemnation. The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live even though they were formerly righteous."* ¹³ *If I tell a righteous person that they will surely live, but then they trust in their righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered; they will die for the evil they have done.* ¹⁴ *And if I say to a wicked person, "You will surely die," but they then turn away from their sin and do what is just and right –* ¹⁵ *if they give back what they took in pledge for a loan, return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil – that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them. They have done what is just and right; they will surely live.* ¹⁷ *'Yet your people say, "The way of the Lord is not just." But it is their way that is not just.* ¹⁸ *If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, they will die for it.* ¹⁹ *And if a wicked person turns away from their wickedness & does what is just & right, they will live by doing so.* ²⁰ *Yet you Israelites say "The way of the Lord is not just" but I will judge each of you according to your own ways'*

Announcements for 5th September

Happy Father's Day. To all the fathers out there we hope you are appreciated for all the hard work that you have put in. And isn't it great we all have a father in heaven who has been so good to us?

Focus for the month – Family Prayer. Prayer is important on a number of levels. Few would argue that a faith without regular personal prayer to the Lord will struggle. Likewise, a Church without a ministry of prayer may have programs but no power. But what about family/couple's prayer? Why do so many of us not have a regular time of prayer with the people we love and live with? This month we want to think through whether this something that you and I should rectify. Why not have a conversation this week about what household prayer could look like and should look like. When? Where? How often? They are all good questions to ask

Outreach Service. A great job was done by all who invited people to our service last week and prayed for specifically for them in prayer. Please continue to pray that God's word and god's Spirit would do great things in their hearts.

COVID. It looks like we will be unable to have physical services for at least this week and next. If you have any pastoral needs what so ever, please speak to Stephen, Jon or Jo or one of the elders.

Keeping in Touch. Have your organised your Church buddy to keep in touch with? It is so important that we all play a part in caring for one another. Over the last 18 months the work of the church has fallen heavily on our key members. Now is the time to us all to play our part in helping care for one another in these difficult times.

Work Day for next Saturday as also been cancelled.

Lords Supper. We plan to have the Lords Supper TODAY so please can you find some bread/juice to act as a reminder of God's grace to you.

Retreat. Stephen is on his annual retreat this week. Like everything else at the moment, it will be over ZOOM. Please pray for Stephen (who is leading it) and the other ministers involved that they may find a

time of refreshment and renewal in these difficult times. If you need any pastoral assistance this week please speak to Jon, Jo or one of the elders.

Offerings for July

Budget Offerings for July	\$24,005
Actual Offerings for July	\$22,974
Deficit for July	\$ 1,029
Deficit for Jan-July	\$ 9,444

Our offerings have fallen quite a bit this year compared to last year. Please remember that the costs of the church continue even in a lockdown. If you normally give to the Church via cash at the weekly service then please note there are some other options you might consider

* You can write a cheque made out to Charlestown Eastlakes Presbyterian Church and send to PO Box 41 Charlestown 2290 OR

* You can give electronically Bank: Commonwealth Kotara, Account Name: Charlestown Eastlakes Presbyterian Church. BSB 062 829, Number 1019 4850 (Please put Swansea or Charlestown in the description)

Christmas Boxes. Despite the lockdown our Church is still planning to participate in Operation Christmas Child to deliver Christmas boxes to those who need them most all over the world. This year we have 2 options:

- Option 1. Transfer \$20 per box to church account. (See Offerings for July notice for Church bank details!) Reference: OCC and your name (name is optional (\$10 for postage and \$10 to have box filled) Leila Fells from OCC will fill boxes on your behalf.
- Option 2. Collect boxes from church, fill it yourself and return it to church. This option will only be available if we are able to meet at church.

Sunday 11th October will be the final date for boxes to be returned and for transfer of money. If you have any questions, please contact Kathryn O'Callaghan on 0424 428 722.

Song – Behold the Lamb

[Behold the Lamb \(Communion Hymn\) - Stuart Townend - YouTube](#)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away,
Slain for us: and we remember:
The promise made that all who come in faith
Find forgiveness at the cross.
So we share in this Bread of life,
And we drink of His sacrifice,
As a sign of our bonds of peace
Around the table of the King. | 3. The blood that cleanses every stain of sin
Shed for you: drink and remember
He drained death's cup that all may enter in
To receive the life of God
So we share in this Bread of Life,
And we drink of His sacrifice,
As a sign of our bonds of grace
Around the table of the King. |
| 2. The body of our Saviour, Jesus Christ,
Torn for you: eat and remember
The wounds that heal, the death that brings us life,
Paid the price to make us one.
So we share in this Bread of Life,
And we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of love | 4. And so with thankfulness and faith
We rise to respond: and to remember
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ
As His body here on earth.
As we share in His suffering,
We proclaim: Christ will come again!
And we'll join in the feast of heaven |

Lords Supper (Stephen T).

We live in strange times. Times where Christians have to demonstrate and grow their faith in slightly different ways. We can no longer go to Church and be fed, encouraged, challenged by others. It is not possible to meet physically for small groups, youth groups, play groups, any groups. Which means many of

the external supports to our faith that we have relied upon for most of our lives are no longer there in exactly the same form.

Which means our own personal walk with the Lord becomes more important. Our own reading of the Bible. Our own prayer times. Our own acts of service and attempts at fellowship with each other. And now when it comes to the Lord's supper our own communion with the Lord. Are we going to use this time to delve deeper into the faith? Are we going to take this opportunity to deeply reflect on the grace that God has given us and our need to make it the centre of our lives? Are we going to take the bread and the wine today thoughtfully, faithfully, humbly?

Hear again these familiar words and allow them to sink deeply into your soul. ²³ *“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread & drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. ²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.*

Let’s be discerning about ourselves. Let’s remember Christ. Let’s be willing to allow him to come deep inside of us as we take the bread and the wine today. Let’s pray. *“O Lord, from the depths of our hearts we thank you for this time to remember Jesus. We desire to put aside this time to allow his strength and his forgiveness and his spirit to again take over our lives. We have been distracted from the things of God. We have been worried about our future. We have been disconnected from our brothers and sisters in Christ and so we ask that you will draw near to us this day. Refresh us this day. Renew us this day through the taking of the bread and wine. And we thank you for this time in Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

For on the night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it & said, “Take eat, this is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” So, Take eat in remembrance that Christ died for you and be thankful.

In the same way, Jesus took the cup and said, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.” So, drink and be thankful.

Pastoral Prayer (Simon M)

Sharing communion together, we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, but we also look forward to his return. We know our future is secure and Heaven is our home. Then I saw *“a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, living in this fallen world, we know lots of tears, we know loneliness, we know frustration and disappointment, we know sickness and death. We know sadness and pain. As we grieve this fallen world, may our eyes be lifted to heaven. Thank you that we have a strong, certain hope of heaven as our

home. Lord, we long to be with you. We long to see your face. We long to dwell in your presence. We long to enter your rest.

Lord we ask for patient endurance for our HSC students as they wrestle with uncertainty about their exams. We pray for Phoebe Baldwin, Maddy Hearn, Coel Mulready, Will Homer, Yvette Chesterfield, James Hakwa, Wyeth Scott, Peter Hyslop and Heath Brown. Grant them peace in the midst of stress, and times of good rest and recovery. We ask that your Spirit would be at work, helping them to trust in your sovereign hand.

Lord we pray for all our families. For those who are feeling cramped and overwhelmed living under the one roof, we ask for your kindness and grace. We ask for patience, gentleness and forgiveness. For those families who are separated by distance and unable to see each other, we ask for your comfort, love and mercy. For those living on their own we ask for your special care and tenderness. Help us to keep loving each other as a church and bringing encouragement and friendship.

Lord on this day, we thank you for all our dads. We thank you for their fun, care and protection. We thank you for the good times we cherish and for the memories of good times. Bless our dads and help them to walk in godliness and contentment.

We pray for our friends, and link missionaries, the Webbs, in Broome. We thank you for their ministry to the Aboriginal community and for the relationships they have developed. We pray that your Word would be faithfully taught, and bearing fruit in the fire-side Bible study group, in the men's Bible study on the oval, and in the People's Church each week. Grant insight, wisdom and encouragement to Chris and Karen as they share the gospel with their community & may their kids grow up in the knowledge and love of you.

Lord, we pray for our own community here in Lake Macquarie. We pray for safety and recovery for those suffering with mental health. We pray for provision and sufficiency for those in financial hardship. We pray for protection for those who look after the sick and vulnerable. We pray for wisdom for our leaders. Father we ask that your gospel truth would be known throughout our community, bringing hope, joy and peace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Bible Reading – Ezekiel 33:21-33 (NIV)

²¹ In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, 'The city has fallen!' ²² Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was on me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So, my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.

²³ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ²⁴ 'Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, "Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession." ²⁵ Therefore say to them, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? ²⁶ You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbour's wife. Should you then possess the land?" ²⁷ 'Say this to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: as surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword, those out in the country I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and those in strongholds and caves will die of a plague. ²⁸ I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. ²⁹ Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done."

³⁰ 'As for you, son of man, your people are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, "Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD." ³¹ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. ³² Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. ³³ 'When all this comes true – and it surely will – then they will know that a prophet has been among them.'

Sermon – The city has fallen! (Stephen T) <https://youtu.be/GXiAPhr89aU>

At the heart of our passage today is one of the saddest statements in the whole of the OT. Ezekiel 33: 21 "In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, **"The city has fallen."**

Slide 2

"The city has fallen." Now that would have been devastating news for the Jews of Ezekiel's time. For there is no longer any temple. There is no longer any Davidic king. There is no city of Jerusalem left, and that was the city of God. There is no longer any land, the land that God given to his people is now gone. Which means there is no longer any hope. It is hard to exaggerate the impact of that one phrase, "The city has fallen!"

So, what are the Jews to do when everything that they hold so dear has now been snatched away from them? What do they do when all they have taken for granted has been taken from them? Where all their hopes and dreams as well as the assumptions that they have lived their lives upon are now all shaken and shattered?

Slide 3

Now that's a really good question and it is one that many of us have been facing with COVID. What happens when the freedoms we rely upon are taken away? What happens when the health system that should always be there for us is buckling under the strain? What happens when we can't see our families? When we can no longer travel? When our future is now really uncertain?

But it is not just COVID it also happens when we lose a loved one, or our marriage goes belly up, or we have a fracture in our family, or we lose our health or our job. What are we going to do when the things that mean so much to us are snatched away from us? What are we going to say to those all around us when it happens also to them? Well, it is into that sort of situation that God speaks. Ezekiel 33:1. "The word of the Lord came to me", God's word came to Ezekiel. And it is that word, that trustworthy word that can make all the difference.

Here in this chapter God is going to ask us four questions about that word. Four challenges that will help us when our world is shaken. And the first question is this

Slide 4

1. Will you share the Word? (Verses 1-9)

"The word of the LORD came to me: ² 'Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: "When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, ³ and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, ⁴ then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes & takes their life, their blood will be on their own head."

Slide 5

Ezekiel starts with a picture of a watchman. It would have been a familiar story to a people whose land was often subject to raiders and invaders, and it sounds a familiar story to us, for we have already heard in chapter 3 of God's appointment of Ezekiel as a watchman. But here it is different. According to verses 2 & 10, Ezekiel is not just a watchman, the people of God are now also watchmen and women. The word of

God is to go public, to go viral even.

Slide 6

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

Slide 7

You see there is a lot of responsibility on the watchman. They have to stay awake and keep watch no matter whether it is day or night, hot or cold, raining or fine. They will be a target for an enemy soldier because if they can strike down the watchman then the town will be more vulnerable. And at the first sign of any danger, the watchman needs to sound the alarm. They need to blow the trumpet. They need to warn the people of impending danger.

And if they do that, they have discharged their responsibility. Now they can't make anyone respond to the danger, that is the individual's own responsibility. But if they are neglectful, sleepy or distracted, the punishment will not just fall on the innocent bystanders within the walled city, it will fall on the watchman who should have given them the warning.

Now today we don't have watchmen or town criers but we do have life savers, and we do have smoke alarms. So, let's try & understand what God is saying by using an illustration.

Slide 8

In your house you have a smoke alarm with a battery in it. And for it to work properly, it must detect the smoke & sound the alarm. Watch & warn. Now imagine you are asleep one night and the alarm works perfectly, it detects the smoke from a faulty heater & before you know it, the piercing sound of an alarm is echoing off the walls. You are now wide awake. You now have two options. You can get everyone up & deal with the blaze or if you can't do that, get out of the house ASAP OR you can ignore the sound of the alarm & go back to sleep

But only a fool would do that. Only a fool would hear the warning of the smoke alarm & ignore the danger. Only a fool would ignore the message that God's judgement was coming & do nothing about it. Only a fool would sleep through Ezekiel's message in ancient Israel or in the Church today. But if they do that, then they will have no one to blame but themselves

Now Ezekiel was not made Israel's watchman by popular vote. No God says to him in verse 7 *"I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel."* So, the issue is not whether Ezekiel is a watchman, more like will he be a good watchman or a bad one? But Ezekiel is not the only watchman appointed. Here in Ezekiel 33, it becomes the responsibility of all those who hear Ezekiel's message to sound the alarm. And in the NT its application is made even wider.

Slide 9

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul says God has appointed us his ambassadors "as if he is making his appeal directly through us". Those who have had the truth revealed to them have a duty to tell others the message that God has given to them. Which means that today we are God's watchmen and women. We are not responsible for what people do with the message we proclaim but we are responsible for sending out the warning. God's judgement is coming!

Right now, in our world there are approx. 2 billion people who currently don't have access to the gospel. Right now, there are people around us, including many that we love greatly, that are going to come under God's judgement and end up in hell. And we have been given the good news. That through people can be saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. That Jesus is their only hope. And as I reflect on my life

my greatest failure as a watchman has not been when I have said the wrong thing, it has been when I said nothing.

Slide 10

And right now, God is asking us will we share the word? The word of God that we are hearing today! Will we be the Lord's smoke alarm? The world is currently shaken. Our assumptions have been shattered. Our future is uncertain. And the Church has the words of eternal life and the sort of message that can give people a solid foundation when everything else is falling apart. So, will we share the word? Or will we go quiet. Will we sound the alarm or go back to sleep?

Slide 11

2. Will we share the word and secondly **will we believe the word (verses 10-20)?**

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

You get it? God is grieved by the current situation. God doesn't want to send everyone to hell. He doesn't like the fact that judgement is coming. He doesn't get his kicks out of throwing his weight around. It grieves him, it saddens him, it sickens him. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord longs for the prodigals to all come home.

And there is a way they can come home. They can turn. Eight times in this section we hear the word turn. And each use is pointing us to the need for repentance. To turn, to do a U turn. Go back you are going the wrong way. This is not just regret. Saying in your mind, "Why, on earth did I do that"? This is going further than remorse, "I feel bad in my heart about what I did to you". This is an act of the mind and the heart and the will. I will change my mind and see this as sin. I will change my heart for now I want to please God. And I will change my will and turn from my sin and turn to the Lord God and ask for his mercy.

And so, we turn, turn, turn from our sins, because we will find that this repentance is not a one stop shop but a place we will need to come back to every day of our lives. And if we turn from our sins, we will find forgiveness is not too hard a thing for our Lord. In fact, he wants to forgive us no matter what we have done. Now do we believe that? That God wants, desires, hopes, that you & I and our neighbours would all repent and come to Christ?

Slide 12

And do we believe that the basis of our coming to Christ is not our own righteousness but God's grace? ¹² *'Therefore, son of man, say to your people, "If someone who is righteous disobeys, that person's former righteousness will count for nothing. And if someone who is wicked repents, that person's former wickedness will not bring condemnation. The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live even though they were formerly righteous."*

Slide 13

¹⁴ *And if I say to a wicked person, "You will surely die," but they then turn away from their sin and do what is just and right –... - that person will surely live; they will not die.* ¹⁶ *None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them."*

You get it? A righteous person who backslides will not be saved by their righteousness. Because one sin outweighs all our righteousness. And because not one of us are ever going to be righteous enough for God. You see we are not saved by our works but by God's grace. Which also means that if the wicked person acknowledges his sin and turns to God then he can still experience life. Life is not based on our works but given to us based on God's grace.

Slide 14

Now do we believe that? Do we believe the word of God? Because it will change everything. We will not put on appearances as if we have got it all together. We will not be proud of our status before God. We will not judge others because there but for the grace of God goes I. But you see the people of Ezekiel's time didn't believe this and they pushed back on him. They said God should cut us some slack. We are the people of God after all. And we have done some pretty good things in the past. And so, they called God's ways unjust.

So, is God unjust? If I have done more good things in my life surely, I should get some reward for that? But remember if you want justice, then we are all in trouble because we have all broken the law at some point or in my case many points. It is only when we come to the cross of Christ that we find that God has found a way to be just & condemn all sin by placing it on the shoulders of his son. Yet justify his sons and daughters by taking Jesus' perfection and placing it on our shoulders. In the final wash up, God will be seen to be just.

Now do we believe God's word? Do we believe that a just judgement is coming upon our world? On our family and friends? On our nation? And right now, just as we find ourselves quite defenceless against COVID without a vaccine so all of us will be found to be under God's just judgement without the blood of Jesus being pumped into our veins. Without the vaccine of life that is available not at Bunnings but through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we believe, really believe it's all about grace and not merit? Do we believe, really believe that it is only through the death of Jesus that we can be saved? Do we believe the word of God, and are we willing to share the word of God?

Slide 15

3. Will we be vindicated by the word of God? (Verses 21-22)

You see for seven long years Ezekiel has been this watchman warning his people of the upcoming danger. For seven long years Ezekiel has been God's prophet telling the people not to put their trust in the temple or in Jerusalem or in their past. But now his message is vindicated because "the city has fallen"

²¹ "In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, 'The city has fallen!' ²² Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was on me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So, my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent."

Ezekiel was not telling porkies. Ezekiel was not like the boy who cried wolf. He was telling the truth. The wolf that was Nebuchadnezzar had come & devoured its prey. The word of God had been vindicated and God's watchmen had been vindicated as well. Ezekiel had done his street theatre, he had mimed God's word as well as spoken it & lived it. But his job was not over yet, no siree! God now opens his mouth. The word of God was not just coming to discipline but to disciple. Not just to wreak havoc but to restore life after the havoc.

Slide 16

And so this marks a new stage in the book of Ezekiel. Up until now it was mostly about judgement, now it would be more about hope. Now that the previous building had been knocked down and the faulty foundations removed, now God could build a whole new structure for the people of God. Involving a new Temple, a new people, a new land and a new covenant. And we will begin to look further at this hope in the weeks to come.

Slide 17

But before we do so I need to ask will we be vindicated by the Word? On the last day when the day of judgement comes, when God opens the books and judges all of us justly what will he say about us? About our words? About our job as a watchman? And what will others say about us? "I never knew they were a Christian? Why didn't Stephen tell me the good news about Jesus, didn't he love me enough"? Or will they

say "I am without an excuse. The alarm went off, the people of this Church told me the truth but I just didn't want to believe it"!

Will anyone say about us, when our world was turned upside down during COVID, it was these people who kept preaching God's word, who kept meeting together as God's people, who kept reaching out to the community with God's gospel. They didn't shrink back or just think about themselves but they used new technology and old-fashioned love to tell me about God's grace. And how God has gone to extraordinary lengths to bring his sheep back into the fold. Will we be vindicated by the word, will we believe the word, share the word?

Slide 18

4. (Lastly) Will we obey the Lord? (Verses 23-33)

²³ "Then the word of the LORD came to me:" this section is still about the word, isn't it? ²⁴ 'Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, "Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession." They are saying if Abraham being one person can stay in the land, how much more of a right to this land do we have seeing we numbers many thousands?

But Abraham was a man of faith, who according to Paul in the book of Romans whose works came forth on the basis of that faith. A faith that believed in God and it was God himself that produced in Abraham a righteous life. Whereas the Jews of Ezekiel's day may have heard the word of God but they haven't changed their ways one bit. For the same sins that Ezekiel was condemning earlier in his book are still being condemned here.

Slide 19

²⁵ Therefore say to them, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: since you eat meat with the blood still in it & look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? ²⁶ You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbour's wife... ²⁹ Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done."

In the words of Romans 2:13 "it is not the hearers of God's word that are righteous but the doers of God's word". On the last day don't say to the Lord, I am a child of Abraham, I am a member of the Church, I am a good Presbyterian. For that will do you know good at all. You see the Lords wants to see you walk the walk not just talk the talk. But the people of God were making another mistake in Ezekiel's time. Not only was there no change in their lives from hearing the word of God but they began telling the world how much they loved God's word.

Slide 20

³⁰ 'As for you, son of man, your people are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, "Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD." ³¹ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.

Everyone was now clambering for a piece of Ezekiel. He had become a rock star preacher. His Church was filled to the brim every time he opened his mouth. He was the talk of the town. But they were coming to be entertained not changed. To witness the performance rather than be a witness to God's saving acts that He was performing amongst his people.

Slide 21

And as a shaken world looks at us will they see that we are obeying the word? Will they see that we are different to everyone else? Will they see the power of the word of God not just to move our emotions but to transform our lives?

Because unfortunately many people have stopped coming to Church when they can't sing. Others talk about the preaching but there is no change in their lives. Others will livestream service after service of the

big Churches & listen to sermon after sermon of the great preachers with no discernible change in their lives. They become consumers rather than servants. They want to be entertained and feel good about their lives rather than turn from their sins and seek the righteousness available to them in Christ.

Slide 22

Preacher Derek Thomas put it this way, *"Times of great crisis are meant to soften our hearts, but history reveals that they often have the opposite effect."* And today we have had the privilege of hearing the word of the Lord to us through the preaching of Ezekiel. Today we have been reminded of God's love for us, God's grace for us through God's son who died for us. Today we have enjoyed being part of a Bible believing Church. But being part of a Bible believing Church is only any good if we put what we hear into practise. Or in the words of James if we are not just hearers of the word but doers.

Slide 23

It struck me a couple of weeks ago that ministers are no longer essential workers. The NSW government released a list of who is essential and who isn't and the nurses, aged care workers, supermarket cashier, plumbers, coffee shop owners and police were all essential workers but those who preached and comforted people through God's word were not.

Slide 24

But let me tell you something. Ministers may not be essential workers but watchmen are. For in the midst of our world where many of our assumptions and hopes are being shaken what our world needs more and more is God's word. And they need God's people to deliver that word to them. So, one last time, can I ask you, will you share that word, will you believe that word, will you be vindicated by that word and will you obey that word?

Song – Your Word

[Your Word \(Song Leading Video\) // Emu Music - YouTube](#)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Your word is good, it's ever faithful
Worth more than gold, the heart's delight
Your word gives life to all who hear and obey
Your word endures forever</p> | <p>3. Your word transforms, it lifts the humble
Rebukes the proud, protects the poor
Your word discerns the mind and spirit of all
Your word endures forever (x2)</p> |
| <p>2. Your word is true, it never changes
It formed the earth; sustains it still
Your word defends; providing refuge and strength
Your word endures forever</p> <p>Chorus</p> | <p>Chorus</p> <p>Bridge</p> <p>Your word is more than just letters on pages;
It's life and it's love and it's freedom for us
Your word is more than just wisdom of ages;
Its treasures are endless, it's always enough
Your word is more than just stories of old;
It's the truth and the way and the story of love
Your word is more than just breath into dust;
It's your Son, as a man, come to dwell here with us</p> <p>Chorus</p> |
| <p>3. Your word is a lamp unto my feet
Your word is a light unto my path
For your word is my hope, it's my joy and my song
Your word endures forever</p> | |

Benediction

¹³ "Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!" (Ezek. 33:11)

Morning Tea

There is no physical morning tea allowed at the moment but why not give someone a call instead? Who might your ring now? Maybe the person you are hoping to keep in touch with?