

The Reality of Heaven and Hell (Ezekiel 18:21-32 & 2 Thes 1:1-12)

04-Aug-19

Begin Service with:

Psalm 1

¹ Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,

and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Context (2 Thes 1:1-4)

Today we're beginning a **new series** on the Apostle Paul's **2nd Letter** to the church in **Thessalonica**. We looked at Paul's first letter - back in February and March of this year.

[PowerPoint 1 - Map of Thessalonica]



[Explain Map]

In Paul's first letter we found out that the church in Thessalonica was:

[PowerPoint 2-Context-1st Letter]

- Established in 3-4 weeks
- Paul had to leave due to hostility
- It was hardly the ideal start for a new church
- That Paul's first letter was to *encourage the believers in Thessalonica to keep going in the face of any opposition*
- Paul also explained to them *what would happen when Jesus returned*

[PowerPoint 3-Context 2nd letter]

Paul's 2nd Letter was written not long after the 1st - and this 2nd letter was intended:

- a) To thank God for their **growing faith**
- b) To thank God for their **growing love** for each other and
- c) To thank God and encourage the Thessalonians in their **perseverance through the persecutions** they face from inside and outside the church
- d) All this whilst they wait for the return of Jesus

The Thessalonians are pretty much in the same position we're in today - **preparing for Jesus to return** - so Paul's 2nd letter explains **how to live whilst we wait**.

Intro

[PowerPoint 4-Blank]

So, if you could have your Bibles turned to **Ezekiel 18:21-32** and then - 1

Thes 2:1-12 - we'll see what we can learn from all of this

There's the usual outline - if you'd like to take some notes.

Let me pray first though...

Let's pray...

(pause)

As some of you know before I went into ministry, **I worked with computers**

We used to have a **saying** in the Computer Business

There are **three types of Computer people**

Those that can count - and those that can't count

I'll let you work out which type I was...

(pause)

Two Types of People (Ezekiel 18:21-32)

[PowerPoint 5-Heading]

Unlike me, thankfully *God can count*

And there are two types of people in our OT passage from Ezekiel 18:21-32

1st Type of people are the **wicked** (v21)

[PowerPoint 5a-Wicked]

Who are the wicked?

The ones that don't love God, don't have faith in God and don't obey His rules

The punishment for them is death

We saw that way back with Adam and Eve - God told Adam and Eve - if they disobeyed His rule - they would **surely die**.

When God said Adam and Eve would surely die

They died physically one day

But more importantly - they died spiritually inside - their relationship with God was broken - and there was separation from God - something inside died - like any broken relationship.

That's what we mean when we talk about death here - physical - and spiritual death.

(pause)

[PowerPoint 5b-Righteous]

2nd type of people are the **righteous** (v22)

Who are the righteous?

Those that are right with God - they love God and have faith in God and obey His rules

(pause)

[PowerPoint 6-Heading]

But in this passage from Ezekiel there's a bit of a twist

[PowerPoint 6a-Wicked]

Because the **wicked people** - type 1 - they **actually turn away from their sins** (vv21-23) - and they start believing in God and keeping his commands. God through Ezekiel says because they have turned back to God - they won't die after all - they will live.

God even says - He doesn't take pleasure in wicked people dying - instead He's really happy when wicked people turn back to Him (v23) and He says He won't remember their sins anymore.

[PowerPoint 6b-Righteous]

On the other hand, the **second type of people** - the **righteous** people (v24) God says - if the **righteous** people - **turn away from God** and become like the wicked were - and do detestable things - then the righteous people will not live - they will die - and all the good stuff they did - will not be remembered?

Does this seem fair?

Well that's the question God through the prophet Ezekiel debates -

God says - in v25 - the Israelites accuse God of not being fair and just.

But God says - it's you Israelites who are unjust - you're the ones who continue to sin and turn away from Me and still expect Me to let you live? God's logic is - shouldn't someone who was following God and turns away be punished. And shouldn't someone who was going away from God - and who does a U-turn - be welcomed back by God and accepted? Isn't that fair?

God's bottom line - is that He judges the HEART

[PowerPoint 7a-Heart]

See v31

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed and get a NEW HEART – and a NEW SPIRIT.

What God means is people should come to Him - and confess what they have done wrong - say how sorry they are - say they want to follow His way for their life - and genuinely and sincerely mean it.

And when people do genuinely turn back to Him - they will want their hard heart of stone (a heart hardened against God) - they'll want that hard heart ripped out - and replaced with a new heart - a heart of flesh - a soft heart - a heart softened towards God - and they'll want to walk His way from now on.

If you want to put it another way

There are two types of people

- Those with a **hard heart** against God
- And those with a **soft heart** towards God

Despite what some might say - God is not a cruel God - He gives everybody a whole life-time to come back to Him

God doesn't take pleasure in the death of anyone

And God knows we can't stop sinning - no matter how we try

And God also knows we can't save ourselves from dying

Yet God loves us - so much so, that to help people come back to Him

He sent His Son Jesus, to show people the way back to Him - and to show people the way to live a life pleasing to God

[PowerPoint 7b-Repent]

God's bottom line, as the end of verse 32 says is to Repent (to confess, say sorry and do a U-turn back to God) - [Repent and Live!](#)

The reason God - *says to repent* - not just in Ezekiel but throughout the OT and NT - is because - as well as there being *two types of people* - Wicked (Against God) and Righteous (For God)

There are 2 destinations available for all people

That's in our NT passage - 2 Thes 2:5-10

[\[Please turn there now\]](#)

Two Destinations (2 Thes 2:5-10)

[PowerPoint 8-Heading]

There are two destinations in this passage

First there is the **Kingdom of God** -

[PowerPoint 8a-Kingdom of God]

This is another way of saying the Kingdom of Heaven

In broad terms the Kingdom of God is the rule of an Eternal God over Heaven and Earth. It's a physical and spiritual kingdom,

Jesus describes the Kingdom as not being of this world (John 18:36)

And to get into this Kingdom - Jesus says - requires **Repentance** [Explain again]

(Matt 4:17) and requires people being **born again** - born from above - born of the Holy Spirit [Explain] (John 3:5-7) - that's getting that **new heart and new spirit** - Ezekiel talked about

The bottom line is to get into this kingdom - you must have believed and accepted two things:

- 1. That Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for your sin and replaced it with forgiveness of your sins - so you don't have to die for your sins
- 2. That Jesus didn't stay dead but rose from the dead 3 days later - and so he has defeated death - and so if we believe that - that we can also live on after our death. As Jesus says in John 11:25 - I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die.

So, believing in Jesus gets us into the Kingdom of God - **now** as God's children - and gets us into Heaven in the **future** - where we can live forever in the presence of God - that's the **Good News**

In the meantime - the Apostle Paul says - in verse 5 - to the Thessalonians who are suffering - for their faith in Jesus. Paul says their faith and perseverance in the face of suffering of Jesus - is all worth it - they will be counted worthy

of going to Heaven and being with God forever. Paul's saying 'hang in their guys - the best is yet to come!'

We can take encouragement from that today - whatever struggles we have - that better place lies ahead - if we just believe in Jesus and trust God to take us home

On the other-hand, the **second destination place** is **very bad news** in deed - that's in verses 6 to 9

The Apostle Paul encourages the Thessalonians with the truth that **God is just** (v6) and **He will pack back** the ones who are persecuting them - and v7 He will give relieve to them in their suffering.

It's worth noting here - it's not up to us to take revenge and pay back people who hurt us - or persecute us - as Rom 12:19 says - **Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"** says the Lord. (quoting Deut 32;35)

[PowerPoint 8b-Destruction]

This **second destination place** is described in verse 9 - they will be punished with **everlasting destruction** (destruction here does not mean annihilation - it means the loss of all that makes life worth living - coupled with the word everlasting - everlasting destruction - is the exact opposite of eternal life) - AND the punishment also includes being **shut out of the presence of God** [Like Noah's Ark] and **away from God's glory forever**.

This is the **key verse** for me - the second destination place is - a place with **no presence of God - forever**

Jesus experienced His Father turn away from Him as He died on the cross - that's why He said from the Cross - *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*

Imagine no presence of God, forever?

Everything we enjoy in life - comes our way because God sends it and allows it?

Imagine having none of that - just darkness, emptiness, no goodness, no love, just evil and permanent sorrow.

(pause)

[PowerPoint 9-Reality]

The reality is there are 2 destinations:

The Kingdom of God - with God Forever = Heaven

Everlasting Destruction - separated from God Forever - Hell

There's *no in between* (no purgatory) - and no swapping places from Hell to Heaven (Luke 16 will tell us that) - no *get out of hell card* once we're dead.

Our only *get out of hell card* - is on Earth - by putting our faith in the one God sent in His love for us - whilst we were still sinners - and allowed His Son, Jesus, to die for us (Romans 5:8)

Response (Ezekiel 18:32 and 1 Thes 1:11-12)

As always

There needs to be a response

In fact, there's **three**

[PowerPoint 10a-Repent]

1. What **type** of person are you? One that's following God and putting your faith in His Son Jesus - or are you still undecided? If you're undecided - the response is the same as Ezek 18:32 - **Repent and live** - turn back to God, say sorry to Him for disobeying His rule, believe in Jesus and live with God forever. **Or do nothing** - and be **separated from God forever**

[PowerPoint 10b-prayer]

2. 1 Thes 2:11 - **Constantly pray** for our fellow Christians - home and abroad - as we suffer for the name of Jesus - in whatever form that takes - pray as v11 says - pray we would be **counted worthy** as a Jesus person - pray our desire to do goodness would **bear fruit** - pray our deeds done as an outworking of our faith - **would bear fruit**. Fruit that lasts [See John 15]

[PowerPoint 10c-Glory]

3. 1 Thes 2:12 - Pray that all we say - all we think - all we do - **would bring glory to Jesus**. Remember we are **signposts** to Jesus- and **ambassadors** for Jesus

(pause)

Conclusion

A final thought:

One of the ways we can bring glory to Jesus - is to tell people the reality of Heaven and Hell

We need to be careful how we do this:

Heaven and Hell should never be the starting point of our conversation.

We need to build a relationship with the person first - we need to be gentle and respectful - as we lead a person back to God

[PowerPoint 11-Conclusion]

As the Apostle Peter says in **1 Peter 3:15** - and we'll finish with this:

But in your hearts **revere Christ as Lord**. Always **be prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**, (1 Peter 3:15)

Let's pray...