

WRONG ABOUT GOD!

We can be so wrong about God and that can be a tragedy! What we believe about God is absolutely critical. Suppose I offered you the choice of a holiday, one is for two weeks in an exclusive hotel in Bermuda, all expenses paid. The other is for two weeks in a caravan on a traffic island in the middle of London. Which one would you choose?

In the short term your choice is quite important because the quality of your holiday depends on it, but in the long term, it doesn't really matter, because in two weeks, you'll be home again either way!

What we think about God is critical now, and for eternity. All the way through Ezekiel, God desperately wants his people to know that life is better with him, now and for eternity. But the people have some wrong views about God that are making it hard for God to bless them. In fact their view of God is so wrong they now find themselves in exile. A challenging thought, is that, this may be true for some of us here today – living in exile!

The people of Judah are wrestling and fighting in all sorts of ways because they have wrong views of God. How about you friends?

The deep and profound truth of Ezekiel chapters 18-20 is these three words from chapter 18 v 32: 'Repent and Live!'

Friends, that deep and profound truth echoes in this place today – right here and right now! For today, in these very moments the invitation from the Almighty God himself is: Repent and Live!

You could hear that in a harsh tone, from an angry God who wants to beat you into following him. But you would be very, very wrong about God. You could hear that in a profoundly loving tone from a God who knows that life is better with him. And the deep and profound truth of these chapters is that God knows that, and longs and aches for us to know it too!

There is a lot of rubbish in the lives of the people of Judah. They've filled their minds with wrong thoughts about God, they've lived in ways that do not honour God, they've chosen paths that lead them away from following God, and they've collected a lot of rubbish along the way.

'Repent and Live!' means God is saying: "Give me the rubbish." The people of Judah were blaming everybody else for the rubbish. It was their parents fault, their ancestor's fault, and of course, because they were now in exile, it was God's fault.

The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.
(Ezekiel 18 v 2)

The meaning of this proverb the people were quoting was simple: "It's those who went before us that did wrong and now we're suffering because of what they did." The implication is clear: God is not fair or just! God makes a gentle and gracious response in the rest of chapter 18. He says they are wrong, the only person who is responsible for your life - is you! God says: "I don't punish people for someone else's sin!" The only person who will have to answer for the way you live friends, is you!

There is a difference between living with, and in the consequences of, the actions of previous generations, and other people, and the choice you make about how you will live. The truth here, today, is some of us have been greatly damaged and affected by the way our parents behaved and lived in front of us; some of us have been greatly damaged or hurt and scarred by the actions of others we may have loved, or lived with or near. There are many experiences in life that will have shaped us, which if we could, we would change. It is, we know, often a second choice world. But there are two extremely important truths for us to grasp: The first, God does not, and is not, punishing you for the sin of somebody else. If you believe that friends, you are wrong! You may be living in the consequences of what others have done, but that is not God punishing you!

It is true for me! I go regularly to see a Christian Psychologist to help me, because I am living with issues and pain that are not my fault!

But here's the second truth: the only person who is responsible for the way I live is me! I cannot blame others for how I live! I, and I alone, must take responsibility for the way I live and that means that I, and I alone, am responsible for clearing out the rubbish in my life!

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit..... Repent and Live. (Ezekiel 18 v 31)

Life is better with me!

Ezekiel chapter 20 is an ancient version, a forerunner, of my second favourite story: "Guess how much I love you!" In that story, however much Little Nutbrown Hare says he loves Big Nutbrown Hare, Big Nutbrown Hare is able to say he loves Little Nutbrown Hare just a little bit more!

In Ezekiel 20, God reminds His people that whatever they do, however much they rebel, however much they turn away, however much they refuse to listen, he loves them just a little bit more, and because he loves them just a little bit more, he will not let them go.

Because he loves you all the way to the cross and back, he will not let you go, however you live! But today, just as in Ezekiel's day, he longs for you to Repent and Live!

Today, here, right now, God invites you and only you, to bring all the rubbish you've collected and give it to him, and he will give you a new heart and a new spirit.

TO THE RIVER

*To the river I am going, bringing sins I cannot bear
Come and cleanse me, come forgive me Lord I need to meet you there.*

*In these waters, healing mercy flows with freedom from despair
I am going, to that river Lord I need to meet you there.*

*Precious Jesus, I am ready to surrender every care
Take my hand now, lead me closer Lord I need to meet you there.*

*Come and join us, in the river, Come find life beyond compare
He is calling, He is waiting, Jesus longs to meet you there.*

*He is calling, He is waiting, Jesus longs to meet you there
Precious Jesus I am ready to surrender every care.*

*Take my hand now, lead me closer Lord, I need to meet you there.
Take my hand now, lead me closer Lord, I need to meet you there.*

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 15th March 2015, by Rev. Ian Phillips.