

#26 Northside Natter

16 September 2020

Ezekiel 3:18-19

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

To set the scene a little, Ezekiel was a Hebrew priest as well as a prophet of God. He was told by the Lord to warn the inhabitants of Jerusalem that their wickedness would lead to their destruction. Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel was taken away as a captive with those who survived, or surrendered, to Nebuchadnezzar II. Once settled into Babylonia, Ezekiel continued to speak to the Jews, perhaps to make sure they were connecting all the dots correctly and so they didn't repeat the sins of the past.

Ezekiel 3:20-21

Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous man that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.

Many people disregard the Old Testament teachings, believing that the New Testament is all anyone needs. In simple terms, I guess that may be true, but the Old Testament holds many explanations that help us to understand the depth of what it is our Father wants from us. For example, the New Testament offers the following:

Mark 16:15-16

Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

This sounds quite different to the verses we've already seen and much less worrying to a prophet. Yet when we look at Ezekiel, we see a greater depth of obligation and we see that there are consequences to avoiding that obligation.

Yes, we are under a new covenant with the Lord because the old one was broken many times over and became unworkable. Yet God does not change – he is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We are still required to preach God's message and if we don't, we will answer for it. Is our message different to the one preached by the ancient prophets? Let's take a look.

Ancient prophets were to warn the population of their impending destruction if the people did not turn from their idolatry, immoral practices, corruption of all kinds, murders, violence, perversions and a myriad of other wicked vices. Modern prophets are to warn the population of the destruction of their souls – eternal life vs eternal damnation – due to their rejection of God. Therefore, both ancient and modern messages from the Lord are about accepting and worshipping him as their God, or suffer for it.

It may seem that the New Testament ways are more lenient than the ancient ways. However, I reiterate that God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. The only difference between the two eras is that Jesus died to atone for all sins; past, present and future. With all sins atoned for, it has become obvious that the whole point of the Lord's messages is to worship the Creator and none other.

We are commissioned to talk to the people around us and tell them what they're doing wrong and why their lives are such a mess.

Ezekiel 58:1

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and shew my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins.

God still requires us to spread his message and has sent us to warn others in this world, just as he did with Ezekiel. We cannot be silent. We are obligated to tell the people in our lives that what they are doing will lead to their everlasting destruction – unless they cease from doing it and start living their lives the right way. We are accountable if we don't tell them.

If there is someone in our lives that we know is living unrighteously and whose life has become an unravellable mess, we need to speak to them, as a friend, and offer them a better way. If we know that a family member thinks they'll be 'just fine' for salvation when they are not, we must speak to them and help them see what they're missing. If we know a brother or sister in the Lord is doing something they ought not to be doing, or involved in things they ought not to be involved in, we need to speak to them and encourage them to turn around.

Not everyone will hear our words or take up our advice or follow through. But God has promised us that their blood will not be on our hands; they are fully responsible for their own choice.

The ones that do listen to our words, take up our advice and follow through will be saved and there will be great rejoicing on earth and in heaven. We will be responsible for that outcome. I like that outcome.

Has witnessing to people become harder over the years? I used to think so but now I feel it is just a changing process. We witness today in different ways to how we used to thirty years ago. Back then, we would talk to people in the street, park or shopping centre. We knocked on their doors and spoke to them at their homes. We were not friends, family or acquaintances of these people – they were strangers living in areas where we did. We often carried a tiny bible to show them scriptures that supported what we told them.

Now people don't like being stopped in the street, they're too busy rushing from pillar to post. They don't like having their door knocked by bible-bashers and post signs to say so. They are wary of strangers, even from their own area.

Today, we witness to people by placing a pamphlet in their hand as they hurry by in the street. Today, someone we speak to is more likely a friend, work colleague, or family member. Today, we can share scriptures on our phone, go to recorded talks, send links to

saved meetings or our church's website. Today, we can follow up via mobile phone, emails, texts or social media posts. Technology makes it easier to generate new friends and to spread the word of God. I don't think it's ever been easier than it is now.

In all this, I feel it is our testimony and the face-to-face chatting with people that brings the greatest results. Why? Because we can build rapport with the person and show that we are open and honest when they look into our faces. Our sincerity wins them over and the fact that we allow them to choose for themselves lets them feel safe, not pressured. They realise we are not there to scam them but to leave them with a message from God that will save their lives. In other words, we get more results just by being ourselves as we deliver the Lord's words.

When we first came to the Lord and did as he asked (water and Holy Spirit baptisms), we were also committing to following in the footsteps of the many past prophets. We are the new prophets of God, the mouthpiece of the Almighty, the worker in his field of white unto harvest. We are to tread the beaten paths to make ourselves heard and understood by this untoward generation.

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

May we all be blessed to hear from the Lord, *'Well done thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.'* (Matt 25:21).

[AMEN]