

There are some of you here who read the obituary section of the newspaper weekly if not daily. Others of you may have not touched a newspaper let alone opened one up this year. You might not even know what an obituary is. For those of you who don't know, it's a section of a newspaper—either paper or electronic—which has announcements of those who have died.

Someone might ask, “Why read the obituary section of the newspaper?” Sadly, because you might know some of the people whose deaths are announced in the paper.

If you're younger than 40, you likely believe you're invincible. Death is on the back of your mind. Certainly, you might know of a classmate or coworker who died prematurely, but those are freak accidents that won't happen to you. In our modern world, it's easy to relegate death to the obituary section and say it happens to other people, but not to me.

But the fact of the matter here is that until Christ comes back again, each of us sitting in this room will one day perish, from the oldest person in this room to the youngest baby still nursing.

But there's good news. Christ has overcome death and gives those who believe in Him eternal life. Not only that, the Lord doesn't want us to die, but wants us to have this gift. **BECAUSE HE DESIRES THAT NONE PERISH, THE LORD CALLS US TO LIVE BY HIS MERCIES DAILY.**

First, I. Those who live in sin will perish. The basis for our sermon today is our text from Ezekiel 33:7–20. We learn that those who live in sin will die. There are two broad categories of people that the Lord would have Ezekiel warn: the wicked who does not turn from sin and the righteous who turns to wickedness.

We read: **“But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity.”** If Ezekiel warns a wicked person, and she doesn't turn from her evil, she will die.

Perhaps many of you know someone like this. “I never was one much for church and living a good life, and it's too late for me now, I might as well not even try turning my life around. God knows what I've done, and there's no chance He'll forgive me.”

We can experience this in our lives. We give a new exercise regiment a shot, but then as soon as we slip up we give up. We try to cut out a sin like gossiping, swearing, or getting drunk, but at the first failure, we lose hope

and continue in the sin pattern. We don't believe the Holy Spirit can change our hearts.

But there's an additional warning, **“Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die.”**

There's a lot of people who think they're pretty much a good person. They went to Sunday school, they got confirmed, and they have their to do list filled and their ticket punched. Why bother reading the Bible? Why bother going to Church? If we're saved by grace apart from works, the less I do, the more grace I get, right?

To be clear, the Lord Jesus Christ has lived a perfect life on our behalf and forgiven us where we've done wrong. His righteousness has become ours and our wickedness has become His so that He could forgive it by suffering on the cross. His resurrection proves that those who trust in Him will not perish but live eternally.

But being saved by grace alone through faith alone on account of Christ alone drives us to trust in Christ which means gladly hearing His Word, receiving His body and blood in with and under the bread and wine of holy communion. It means striving to live a godly life and asking for forgiveness when you fall short. Gratitude for all that Christ has done drives us to seek Him out in the places He promises to be.

He who thinks he's graduated from Church at confirmation or think he's a pretty good person are those who trust in his own righteousness which is no real righteousness at all. The Church has the duty to warn the self-righteous that they too will perish apart from Christ.

But there is good news, II. Those who live trusting in God's mercies will live eternally. For many of you listening, I'm preaching to the choir. You trust Jesus as your Savior. You ask for forgiveness when you've done wrong. You know those sins such as gossiping, swearing, and getting drunk are forgiven, and the Holy Spirit can change your heart, so you strive to continually cut them out of your life.

You read and ponder God's Word. You gladly and often receive Christ's body and blood in with and under bread and wine. You know you're going to heaven. You know you're forgiven and loved by God. What an amazing thing!

At the same time, you know your salvation is not something you've earned. You don't do those acts of piety to earn your righteousness, but you do these things because you know you've been made righteous and holy by Jesus Christ who bought you with His blood. You don't do this out of fear of death, but you do this because you rejoice that you have eternal life in Christ Jesus.

But here's the even better news God tells us today: **“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways. Again, though I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, ... he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.”**

Maybe some people despair and think that the Lord will never forgive them, or they say it's too late to teach an old dog new tricks. But that's just it! As long as that person has breath in him, there is still a chance to repent!

Earlier this month I listened to a podcast where a Lutheran pastor talked about one of his members who is a 90-year-old Lutheran filled with joy and filled with Jesus and he views his senior living community as a mission field. Why? He's filled with joy because if he dies tomorrow, he knows he gets to be with Jesus forever. This same man reads the obituaries and he knows there's no much time left for some of his neighbors. He wants his neighbors to know that same joy from forgiveness and life everlasting.

I share this story because the good news is that no matter whether you're a 95 year old agnostic woman who doesn't know if there really is a god or if you're a 12 year old boy whose parents never took him to church and he's more interested in Fortnite than the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, the Lord does not desire the death of the wicked, but desires that all be saved.

Nobody is so wicked that the Lord can't save him or her. Nobody is so righteous that they don't need the Lord's forgiveness. The Lord is calling all people to trust in Him, and to follow Him where He leads.

This is how we have hope in the face of death that is all around us: Christ has overcome death, and there is hope for even the most hardened sinner.

Finally, III. The Lord sends messengers to call us to faith. Our text begins, **“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of**

Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.” The Lord gives a solemn task to pastors and other Christians to warn those who reject Jesus that they could perish in their sins.

Perhaps some of you have been hurt by pastors and other Christian leaders who have misjudged a situation and hurt you when you did nothing wrong. That’s awful, and I wish there were less stories like that in the history of Christ’s Church. Pastors and other Christian leaders are sinners, also, and they—and I—need forgiveness every single day.

At the same time, I would say that many pastors and Christians in general have a list of people they know who after patient, gentle warning of the consequences of sins, still left the congregation when the pastor told them something Biblical that they didn’t want to hear. I think I speak for all pastors in that that call to repentance was not something done out of hatred or prejudice but done out of love with the desire that the person in question turn from sin and be drawn closer to a relationship with Jesus.

On this Friendship Sunday, perhaps you’re here and you’ve been hurt by another pastor or Christian leader. Even if the leader’s presentation of the facts was about as attractive as presenting dinner on a garbage can lid, take the time to consider what God’s Word says. Is the food on the plate still worth eating even if it was presented poorly? Did the leader have a point?

Today is the day to reconsider the Church. Today is the day to turn from sin. Today is the day to understand that God even sends watchmen to care for our souls even if it’s not what we want to hear. Today is the day to be able to read the obituary section unafraid, knowing that if your name appears in the newspaper next week, you have forgiveness of sins, you have eternal life, and you have Jesus, no matter what your past was like and no matter what your future may hold. Amen!