

Family Chores – Family Love

15th Sun. after Pentecost – 09/10/23 – Pastor Keith Besel
Text: Ezekiel 33:7-9 Mt. Calvary Luth.

v. 7 [Yahweh says to Ezekiel,] **“So son of man, I have given [you to be] one watching closely for the house of Israel.”**

Introduction

⊗ I know we all have some history; some connection to the concept of chores; whether you are on the receiving end of a list of chores as a child or on the giving end as a parent.

➔ It can be a real battle of wills; a tension between the “have-tos” and the “I-wish-I-didn’t-have-tos” as well as a constant longing on both sides for the “I-can’t-wait-tos”.

⊗ If you’re the child, the burden can sure seem overwhelming at times. It can feel like all you ever hear from Mom and Dad is, “Do this” and “don’t do that”; clean the table, take out the garbage, do your homework, clean up after the dog. It’s as if your entire life is nothing but an endless list of “have-tos” that number one, you just don’t want-to-do, and number two, don’t seem important according to your own list of life-priorities.

➔ And yet for the loving father or mother, having to hand out the “have-tos” is no fun either. Frankly there are a lot of things parents would much rather say and do than spending their time holding their children accountable to the “have-tos”. But sometimes the “have-tos” are a necessary part of parenting, for the good of the child; for the good of the family and even for the glory of God.

➔ Life has its shares of “want-tos” and “have-tos”. It’s an endless tension between the things we can’t wait to do and the things that we must do as a member of the family – both your blood family and even more the family of God.

✘ Well today, in our Old Testament Reading, we engage with God’s calling to His prophet Ezekiel. And frankly if you’re looking for a happy-go-lucky, exciting, upbeat message from Scripture, you’re going to be a bit disappointed, because we run into a predicament. At first glance, this message sounds like nothing but a list of one unpleasant chore after another. God gives Ezekiel (and us) a list of unpleasant, hard-to-do “have-tos”. But if we look closely we see one very loving, wonderful “can’t-wait-to” as well.

➔ And that’s what it means to be in the family of God our Father. Because of His unparalleled love for us all He has appointed us, His Children, to some very important “have-tos” so that we and countless others might receive His one gracious “can’t-wait-to”!

I. The children “have-to” repent.

✘ Most children bristle when their Mom or Dad says, “Once you complete you chores then you can do something fun.” But that’s most often the case in life; the “have-tos” have to come before the “can’t-wait-tos.” So, here’s the first “have-to” in our text today – one that is both for us and for God Himself.

✘ The children have to repent ... and the Father has to do what’s necessary to bring us to repentance, because after all, no sinner can repent of his/her sins, without God first giving him/her the ability to do so.

➔ Ezekiel and God’s family of Israel had been carried off into captivity by the Babylonians at the time of this text. They were living far from home because they had turned their back on God; they had refused to live according to the “have-tos” of what it means to be in the family of those whom God has saved from sin.

✘ To be honest, it’s hard for us to imagine being an exile who has been torn away from home. Perhaps we can

get a picture of that suffering from stories we see and hear.

➔ It's the image of a refugee camp in a war-torn country – desperate souls staggering away from famine, persecution and poverty. They don't belong, yet they can't go home. Not only is the concept of "home" distorted, but also the idea of "family".

➔ This was the setting for Ezekiel and Judah – far away from home ... because God "had-to" send them there! He surely didn't want to do this to His children; no parent wants to discipline their children; their pride and joy. But it was what He had to do to bring them into repentance.

⊗ By the time of this text, God's family was nothing of the holy nation He had graciously made them to be. Ever since God brought them out of Egypt into their own Promised Land, they had rebelled; constantly and continually.

➔ Though He showed them His saving love and His infinite power over the mightiest forces on earth, like Pharaoh and the Philistines, as well as all of the other nation's so-called gods like Baal and Rah, they still would not honor and worship and obey God as the loving Father who knew what was best for them.

➔ They broke all Ten of the Commandments daily; worshipping the idols of their neighboring nations; selfishly bickering and fighting with each other as brothers and sisters; lying and cheating and never satisfied with all that Yahweh provided for their daily bread, protection and happiness as His children.

⊗ God brought them into His Promised Land of milk and honey where they lived in the glory and wealth of David and Solomon's empire; where they had a personal relationship with Yahweh, but they threw it all away like a stubborn, ungrateful child.

→ So God warned them. Over and over He sent prophets like Samuel and Nathan and Elijah and Isaiah and now He sends Ezekiel. It's not like they didn't know better. God never wanted them to lose His blessings.

→ But finally God "had-to" bring the evil nation of Babylon against them with all of its sufferings. It was His necessary, sternest call yet to repentance. He gave them the ability to repent. He gave them warning after warning, chance after chance.

✘ And my dear children of God, He has done the same with each one of us here this morning; with every member of His beloved family of believers. And so, this is our first "have-to" as members of the family.

→ As God's children, we must repent if we are to remain His children. To do otherwise is to turn away from His "gift" of salvation; to reject His love and mercy. We cannot willingly remain in our sin and still receive God's blessings. It's not how the family works.

→ So, we cannot worship our idols of self and money and busyness. We cannot ignore God's command to put Him first in every aspect of our lives. We cannot refuse to live as God's family and still expect to be God's family.

✘ He warns us in His own Word, like right here in this text today, that we must repent – it is a "have-to" for us and it is a loving "have-to" that God has given Himself, because He doesn't want to do the other thing that becomes a "have-to" if we refuse to repent, and that is to send us into eternal exile in hell if we die in that state of rebellion. As Hebrews 9:27 says, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...".

II. God appoints His "watchmen" with a "have-to".

✘ This is why God is constantly appointing people like Ezekiel; like His pastors and His people in His Christian family to another "have-to."

→ He set up His family with this crucial, but loving “chore”, where the children “have-to” call other children to repent. In the original Hebrew it literally couches this “have-to” in the language of a gift. In verse seven God says to Ezekiel, “I have given [you to be] one watching closely for the house of Israel.”

✘ Try to picture how this all went down. Ezekiel is hanging out with the exiles in Babylon when suddenly heaven opens up and God speaks. God makes him His child and “gives” him the role of watchman for His family.

→ Ezekiel’s story begins much earlier than our text. And it’s far from easy, this task that God gives to him. It’s an unpopular and odd job. His wife dies, and he is told not to mourn. He lies on his side for days, eats bread baked over dung and builds little models for the sake of his message. Frankly, it’s a job Ezekiel would never have chosen, but he has no choice; it is a “must,” a “have-to.”

✘ And let’s be honest, it’s not a job any of us would ever choose, but ... God also chooses and appoints us as watchmen – and like Ezekiel you and I have no choice; it is a gift as a member of the family; a “have-to.”

→ There are only two categories of believers; of children in God’s family. We are either those who have repented (and continue to repent when we sin) or those who have, and are, refusing to repent. So, for we who have heeded God’s call to repent God says in verse seven, “Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me.”

→ I know, it sounds scary, but did you notice, God says we “must” “give them” the warning from God. It is a “have-to” for us, but it is God’s gift to them, even if they do not want to hear it!

✘ God is clear in verse eight, this is not optional for us. If we “do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way...”, God says, “his blood I will require at your hand”.

→ I know it's scary and intimidating, but brothers and sisters, it's the loving thing to do for the family! If you see that your neighbor's house is burning, you are going to warn them to get out of the house if you can, right? If you see your child reaching for the boiling pot on the stove, you are going to do all you can to keep her from getting burned!

→ So it is when a member of God's family is rebelling against His Word or actively refusing to forgive another just as God has forgiven him in Christ or the like. We do not want them to be eternally condemned and out of the family.

⊗ All of us were called to this task when we were baptized into God's family. It's there that we, like Ezekiel, received God's gift; that we became His children by grace.

→ It's there that God also gave us the loving role as watchmen; each one of us lovingly watching over one another. But He is always the one who is at work in and through us. Our chore; our "have-to" is not to save anyone else, but only to remain faithful in witnessing to God's truth. If your attempts are rejected, you have still obeyed your Father and verse nine says, "you will have delivered your soul". Not that you have saved yourself – only God can do that, but you have not entered into unrepentance yourself.

III. The Father can't-wait-to forgive.

⊗ So, why is this family chore such a must; such a "have-to"?, because by it God then opens the way to the one thing that He "can't-wait-to-do": that is to forgive His children when they repent and then bring them back into His loving arms.

→ Only two verses after our text, in Ezekiel 33:11, God says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but

that the wicked turn from his way and live.” He never “wants-to” see any of His family in exile. Eternal punishment in hell is never God’s desire for any soul He has created.

✘ That’s why He did the “have-to” of giving up His own Son into death on the cross, because our Father “can’t-wait-to” forgive us all!

➔ Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice; for all souls; for all time; for all sins – past, present and future, paid for them all. Everything is ready! He can’t wait to give the blessings of that forgiveness to you and you and you and every one of His children.

➔ That’s exactly what He did for us in His saving work of Baptism. That’s why He gives you and me the “have-to” of calling others to repentance, because in love – as our Father, He “can’t-wait-to” forgive.

Conclusion

✘ Look I know, this text is tough. I know when we first hear it; we think there’s no way we could ever call others to repent. It makes us all wonder why we ever complained at the “have-to” chore of loading the dishwasher. Who wants a job where rejection is almost a given?

➔ But when we consider that God gave someone else in the family the “have-to” of calling you and me to repentance, so that He could do what He couldn’t wait to do in our baptism or through His Word – forgiving us and making us His child forever, we then realize that rejection is not always the outcome.

➔ Just as He gives us life forever for free, so He’s the one who empowers us all in our calling. He’s the one who goes with us into the face of rejection; who brings us even to see Him face-to-face on the day of His final return. Oh, that’s the great “can’t-wait-to” – for us, isn’t it, but also for our loving Father. So all of us in the family

pray with John in Revelation 22:20, "Come, Lord Jesus."
Amen.

Sermon Outline

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Introduction

- ✘ We all know about chores: tension between “have-tos” & “I-wish-I didn’t-have-tos” & longing for “I-can’t-wait-tos”. (explained)
 - ➔ They’re necessary for the good of the child; the family & even for the glory of God.
- ✘ God gives Ezekiel (& us) a list of “have-tos” and 1 loving, wonderful “can’t-wait-to”.

I. The children “have-to” repent.

- ✘ The Father has to bring us to repentance. We can’t as sinners w/o God 1st giving us the ability to do so.
 - ➔ The context of Ezekiel & God’s family (Israel) in captivity explained. (They refused to repent.)
- ✘ God didn’t want to do this to His children. He had to do it to bring them into repentance. (explained w/examples)
 - ➔ God warned them, He sent prophets – now Ezekiel.
- ✘ He’s done the same w/us. Our first “have-to”: we must repent to remain His children. To do otherwise is turn from His “gift” of salvation. (examples)
 - ➔ It’s a loving “have-to” God has given Himself, because He doesn’t want to do the other “have-to” if we refuse, send us into eternal exile in hell. (see Heb. 9:27)

II. God appoints His “watchmen” with a “have-to”.

- ⊗ God's crucial/loving "have-to": call other children to repent. Hebrew = "I have given [you to be] one watching closely for the house of Israel." (It's a gift.)
- ⊗ God gives Ezekiel a gift he would never have chosen, but he has no choice; it is a "have-to." Same with us.
- ⊗ Only 2 categories of children in God's family: 1) those who have repented, and 2) those refusing to repent. For those repenting, "Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me." (v.7)
 - ➔ v.8, If we "do not speak to warn..." we sin; we are not showing love. (examples)
- ⊗ God gave us this task in baptism. But He's always the one at work in/through us. Our "have-to" = remain faithful in witnessing to God's truth. Only God saves!

III. The Father can't-wait-to forgive.

- ⊗ Ez. 33:11, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." He never "wants-to" see any of His family in exile/eternal punishment.
- ⊗ So He did the "have-to" of giving up His Son on the cross, because our Father can't-wait-to forgive us all!
 - ➔ By Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice means everything is ready! He can't wait to give the blessings of that forgiveness to every one of His children.
 - ➔ That's why He gives us the "have-to" of calling others to repentance, because in love He can't wait to forgive.

Conclusion

- ⊗ This text is tough. Consider: God gave someone else the "have-to" of calling you to repentance so you could be saved; so we can Him face-to-face at Jesus' final return.
 - ➔ That's the great "can't-wait-to" – for us all. Amen.