

God's Good Pleasure!

18th Sun. after Pent. – 09/27/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 32, [Literal translation from the Hebrew,] **“For I do not delight in the dying of anyone dying, declares the Lord Yahweh; so all of you turn, and all of you live.”**

Introduction

✧ In 1983, when Horst Schulze became one of the founding members of the modern Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company he wanted all of their employees to speak in a manner that promoted the polished and lavish impression of a luxury experience for each and every person entering their hotels. So, he taught all of his employees a simple two-word response. Instead of saying the standard, “You’re welcome” or the more negative, “No problem,” they were to convey the value and importance of every guest’s care by saying, “My pleasure.”

➔ Now, I’m guessing that most of us here have never been to a Ritz-Carlton Hotel to enjoy this experience. But, many of us still get to experience that kind of service closer to home. Because, you see, the founder of the fast-food chain, Chick-fil-a, Truett Cathy; after he experienced that 5-star service when he stayed at a Ritz-Carlton in the 1990s, he was inspired to come home and train his employees to adopt a similar kind of service and language in his restaurants. Truett wanted every guest to feel like they are special; like it truly is Chick-fil-a’s desire and pleasure to have you in their restaurant.

✧ When someone we dearly love comes into our presence, whether it is just for an hour or on a more permanent basis, it pleases us; it makes us happy. Why? because we love them deeply and unconditionally. We desire to be with them as much as possible.

➔ And when we get to know a loved one more intimately, then we also learn what it is that makes them happy. We care about what pleases them as well.

✧ Well, all of us here really love God, right? Does that mean that we care about what pleases Him? Do we really care about His desire?

➔ That’s what the prophet Ezekiel shares with us today, directly from God Himself. So, what is it? What gives God pleasure? What makes God happy? Is it Joyful worship? Obedience? Prayer? Faith? Love?

➔ These are all part of the larger answer that God gives to that question in today’s Old Testament Reading. But here’s a hint of where this text leads us to land today. It’s in that delightful last sentence of verse 32, “I do not delight in the dying of anyone dying, declares the Lord Yahweh; so all of you turn, and all of you live.” What is God’s good pleasure? That you; all of you live!

I. God Delights in His Gift of Life for All

✧ Actually this isn’t hard for any of us to confirm, because basically every page of the Bible tells us of God’s delight in life. In the beginning, Genesis 2:7 says, “Yahweh God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” And in John 3:16, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

➔ And what brings joy to that Son, Jesus’ heart? He tells us in John 10:10: “I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly.” In fact, Jesus died to give you life, didn’t He? And He rose again to life to pour into you the Holy Spirit; the Lord and giver of life. Listen to Romans 6:4, “We were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

➔ Fast forward then to the very last chapter in the Bible, Revelation 22:17: “The Spirit and the Bride (i.e. the Church) say, ‘Come.’ ... Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

- ✘ Yes, it is right here at this baptismal font that the Holy Spirit pours out life for you. And at this altar that the resurrected Jesus feeds us with His own living self. He is everlasting life. And every Sunday, at this very pulpit, the Father speaks the power of His living Word through His lowly servant, into your heart.

➔ What is God’s good pleasure? That you; yes you will live!

II. The Cause of Death: Chasing Our Own Pleasures

- ✘ Yet, none of us can avoid the inevitable truth: we all die! Why must people die? Why do I; why do you sometimes feel dead inside? Why is it that some go down to damnation; the horror of never-ending torment and death, as the Bible describes it?

➔ Does death give God pleasure? Never! It’s people chasing after their own pleasures; that is the real killer! The Lord says in verse 30 of our text, “Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.”

- ✘ God created and designed us for life, even life like His own. His life overflows with self-giving love. But, what if we live only to please ourselves? James 1:14-15 describes those details. “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” You see, selfish desire infuses us with the killer. Sin gives birth then to death!

➔ It is sin inside of us that believes, “I must make myself happy.” So, we work and work to get a life. Yet our sin earns only more of the unhappy wage. Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God alone is the free Giver who always delights to freely give you life.

- ✘ Through Ezekiel, God could not be more clear in verses 3-4, “As I live, declares the Lord Yahweh ... all souls are mine ...: the soul who sins shall die.” The facts can’t be more clear: turn down God’s free gift of life and you are a goner; gone forever. Yet here and now today, the living God calls to us: “Turn to Me, and live!”

- ✘ Still those complainers before Ezekiel say, “We know all of that.” “Sin does bring death, yes. And that just proves our point; that God isn’t fair! Look, our grandparents 50 years ago followed that wicked King Manasseh (2 Kgs 21). They worshiped idols. They shed innocent blood. They even offered their own children in sacrifice. And still God allowed them to live as prosperous and free! Even our parents these last 15 years followed our most recent evil kings (2 Ki 23:31–24:20). They also turned away from the true God. And yet, as awful and twisted as they were, God gave them their homeland!

➔ “But now look at us and our situation here in Babylon, Ezekiel. We are exiles; slaves of Nebuchadnezzar! Why has God given us all of this grief? We aren’t perfect; but we aren’t as bad as our perverse parents!”

- ✘ These people even quoted a lame excuse that had become a common catchphrase: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (v. 2). “Nothing bad happened to our fathers, chomping on the sour grapes their sin. They got to devour them and enjoy a sweet and delicious life. But now for us, their innocent children? We’re the ones grinding our teeth and enduring life as if we were sick to our stomach!”
- ✘ Ezekiel lived 600 years before Jesus. And all he was hearing was the blame game. But you see, God heard His people pass the hot potato from one generation to the next, ever since

Adam. "It's not my fault. It's the woman's fault whom You gave to be with me!" Eve just passed the blame on: "The serpent deceived me" (Gen 3:12–13).

➔ And even with all of the warnings throughout the last 6000 years of creation, we still play the blame game today, don't we? "I couldn't help but do it. Things were out of my control." We all have our own favorite culprits: "My parents didn't get along." "The teachers treated me so unfair." "My friends forced me to start doing it." "It was the only way I could get them to notice me; to hear me; to see me." "My entire life has been so unfair!" Who can blame us for griping?

- ✘ A more honest question is this: "Who could blame God if He chose to ignore all of our excuses?" He could have just chosen to abandon every one of us; His mutinous, murderous creation. But He didn't, and He won't! Like a friend heart-struck by accusation, God defends Himself even to us in verse 25: "You say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is My way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?"

➔ "After all, My dear people," God seems to be saying. "You keep blaming others for your own evil. Yet, My justice stands true!" Then He describes specific examples of His way of handling things in verse 26. "When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it." No excuses! Those unjust actions he has done – his sin – that's what will kill him. There's no one else to blame.

➔ But going on into verse 27, God says, "When a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life." You see, right there: God is always eager to forgive; always wanting to give life! And then God heaps even more evidence of His mercy on to the pile in verse 28: "Because [the wicked person] considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die."

- ✘ How could anyone say that God is being unfair? If anything He is too merciful; too forgiving and "too soft" with people. Verses 29-30: "Yet ... Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O ... Israel, are My ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord Yahweh."

➔ Oh, finally! Now we're getting somewhere. God's promise is this: "You will not be punished for your parents' sins; or for anyone else's wrong. You are responsible for yourself!" Okay, are we supposed to say, "Woohoo" to that? It is fair, after all. I won't be blamed for other people's evil. I am accountable only for my own sin"? That is and always has been God's truth. But that doesn't change my outcome, if that's where things end up, does it? "The soul who sins shall die" (v. 4). So, even though everything is now as fair as things can be, I must be honest: I still don't want to die – even for my own sin!

- ✘ Enter God's grace-filled commands in verses 30-31: "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit."

➔ And how are those commands "grace-filled"? How am I to repent and turn from my sin, if I am sinful to the core? Where am I supposed to cast away my transgressions? And how, with my self-centered and dying heart, am I supposed to make a new heart or create a new spirit since mine is so utterly corrupt? That's like telling a heart surgeon to transplant a heart into herself, or a person with two collapsed lungs to breathe air back into his own lungs. How am I supposed to rescue me from myself?

III. God's Pleasure is to Turn Us For Life!

- ✘ That's the beauty of our gracious and ever-merciful Lord and God. Because, within every one of His commands, we hear God's promise filled and dripping with His Spirit-filled gift of faith! He

knows our inabilities and limitations well. And so, He is the only one who does for us precisely what we cannot do for ourselves. “Why will you die, O house of Israel? “For I do not delight in the dying of anyone dying, declares the Lord Yahweh; so all of you turn, and all of you live” (vv.31-32).

➔ King David, deep in the throes of his guilt over his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah, was only able to turn back by God’s powerful law proclaimed to him through the prophet Nathan and to receive God’s gift of repentance when he confessed, “I have sinned against Yahweh. And Nathan said to David” in return, “Yahweh also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). It is in the power of that gift from God that David knew now where to turn for rescue; how to cry out in Psalm 51:10, “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

➔ Only God has that power, and as we know now, He has the desire to turn us away from ourselves; away from our sin; away from our deserved death, to His saving forgiveness and transforming gift of life!

✕ As only Jesus could promise as He prepared to go to the cross and die to pay for the guilt of every sin-filled soul, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn. 11:25-26)

➔ That is God’s desire; God’s delight and God’s joy; to give you, and me, and all souls the most luxurious and extravagant life possible. It’s His pleasure! Amen.