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"Losing Sin Weight"

Ezekiel 33

Pastor Gary Hamrick

When we are not right with God—when we have unconfessed sin in our lives, or when we are walking in disobedience to God—we will start to feel the weight of our sin. It can be heavy. So much so, that sometimes people feel in despair of life under the crushing weight of sin. But God sent His Son Jesus to lift the burden of sin from our lives and to free us from its accompanying guilt and shame. Join Pastor Gary for today's teaching as he shares from Ezekiel 33 and Matthew 11 about how we can lose the weight of sin.

Historical Background

In 606 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem. This culminated in the destruction of the city in 586 BC after King Jehoiakim's refusal to pay any more tribute to King Nebuchadnezzar. In those days, it was standard Babylonian practice to deport conquered government officials and citizens, exiling them to Babylonia, where they could be converted and integrated into Babylonian culture. The exiled Israelites would remain in captivity for 70 years, for God desired that the Israelites contemplate their sin, awakening them to their rebellion against Him. Our verses today are roughly 12 years into captivity, when the hard hearts of the Israelites are finally beginning to soften. This happens in large part because God sent his prophet, Ezekiel, as one of the exiles. God uses Ezekiel to warn the Israelites of the gravity of their sin, that the consequences are not limited to the destruction of Jerusalem, but that they risk much more if they remain unwilling to get their hearts in line with God.

Scripture Passage

Ezekiel 33:10-11 (NLT, Emphasis Added)

10 "Son of man, give the people of Israel this message: You are saying, 'Our sins are heavy upon us; we are wasting away! **How can we survive?** **11** As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?"

What to Do When Sin Weighs You Down

1. Feeling the Weight of Our Sin

- a. When we are not right with God, when we have unconfessed sin in our lives, when we are living in disobedience to God, and living unrepentant of our sin, we eventually begin to feel the weight of our sin. It begins to feel heavy upon our soul. King David wrote of this in the Psalms, as he lived with his unrepentant, sexual sin with Bathsheba.
 - i. **Psalm 32:1-4** – *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”*
 - ii. **Psalm 38:3-4** – *“There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, Nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.”*
 - iii. Take special note of the descriptive language David uses to describe the weight of his sin. He says he is as one whose bones have grown old, groaning under the weight of his sin. His vitality was as the drought of summer. There was no soundness in his flesh. **“Like a heavy burden, [my sins] are too heavy for me”**. David recognized the weight of his unrepentant sin. It caused him great anguish and became unbearable.
- b. Verse 10 of our Ezekiel passage reflects the same heart: ‘Our sins are heavy upon us; we are wasting away! **How can we survive?**’
 - i. The primary sin of the Israelites over the past 400 years was idolatry. They were crafting idols out of wood and metal, bowing down and worshipping them. This is the reason that God sends them into captivity, so that they may recognize their sin and repent. Verse 10 speaks of their emotional state as they begin to recognize their sin. How can we live? Our sins are too many and the weight is too great.
- c. **Moment of Reflection and Discussion:** Are we sensitive to the consequence of our sin? Are our hearts hard like the Israelites, refusing to acknowledge or feel the weight of our sin? Or are our hearts soft and ready to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

2. God is Patient

- a. Before continuing with how we should respond to the weight of our sin, our passage provides an excellent opportunity to enrich our understanding of God, chiefly, that God is patient. For 400 years, God put up with the idolatry of the Israelites before committing to the 70 years of exile (“Israel's timeout”). God put up with Israel's sin for **FOUR HUNDRED** years! How many of us would put up with a cheating spouse for 400 years? How long would we deal with a neighbor who steals from us? God's patience is worthy of worship.
- b. The world will often accuse God of being quick to judge, quick to anger, wrath, and vengeance. But that is because their eyes and ears are closed to the divine patience of God. How much more patient does our God need to be with us? He is not some vengeful God that desires to punish us. God is not against us. What God would send his only Son to die on our

behalf if he is against us? As with our story today, God did not sentence the Israelites to death but to 70 years of captivity to purge them of their idolatry, and then he takes them back! Oh, what patient love!

- c. **2 Peter 3:9b** - "*[He] is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*"
- d. **Moment of Reflection and Discussion:** In all honesty, how do we view God; as one quick to anger, or as a loving Father, who is quick to forgive and patient in all His ways? It will change our lives to know that we can trust in His patience and love, not having to be fearful of anger and wrath. Our burden of sin does not have to be a death sentence, but an opportunity to repent and receive forgiveness.

3. Our Response to the Weight of Our Sin

- a. The exile was God removing the Israelites from their comfort zone, from their land. Is it not true that when we have everything precious stripped away from us, that we turn to God? The Israelites had everything stripped away because of the extreme hardness of their hearts. They arrived in Babylon, only to be separated from their families and forced to live in a land where everything was foreign and uncommon. After twelve years of this, the exceedingly hard hearts of the Israelites began to soften. God was graciously giving them every advantage in responding to the weight of their sin.
- b. When they finally turned to God, they came as those aware of the crushing weight of their sin, experiencing both guilt and shame. But guilt and shame are just symptoms of the larger problem, which is sin. Trying to remedy the guilt problem only deals with the symptom. God desires to deal with the root issue, the sin issue.
- c. Experiencing the dark valley of sin can be so crippling that you believe the only outcome can be death under the weight of this sin. Satan lives for these opportunities, where he can use condemnation to accuse us of our sin. He plants seeds of self-hate and hopelessness. Let us be wise to both our own natural responses to sin and to the tactics of the enemy.
- d. Condemnation is a weapon used to keep you under the weight of your guilt and shame. Jesus did not come to condemn you but to save you. His tool is the conviction of sin, which comes from the Holy Spirit, so that we may come to a place of surrender. At the altar of surrender, we can give him the weight of our guilt and shame so that we might be free. He who the Son sets free, is free indeed! For, "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*" - Romans 8:1
- e. **Moment of Reflection and Discussion:** What are our responses when we feel the weight of our sin? Do we run and hide in shame? Are we aware of how the enemy seeks to accuse and destroy us? Do we condemn ourselves because of the guilt of sin? Or do we respond to conviction with repentance and acceptance of God's grace and forgiveness?

4. Jesus' Response to Our Sin

- a. The way to lose the weight of sin is to turn from the way of sin and turn toward God!
- b. **Matthew 11:28-30** – "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you*

rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

- c. Jesus is speaking to an agrarian (farming) population who would naturally understand the illustration of a yoke. A farmhand would use oxen yoked (harnessed) together in order to work the fields. They would yoke together an older, larger, stronger ox with a younger, smaller, weaker one. The purpose was twofold. First, the younger ox would learn from the older ox as he was forced to follow around the larger ox. Second, the pairing between stronger and smaller was so that the larger, stronger ox could do the larger portion of the work. He would cover for the weakness of the smaller ox by carrying most of the weight and workload.
 - d. With a yoke image in mind, think about what Jesus is saying... He desires to be the larger ox to our small ox. He will carry the burden, for “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”! This is the response of Jesus when we feel the crushing weight of our sin. “Here, give it to me. Let me take that so that you may be free and light.” He wants to give rest to our souls, taking all our guilt and shame, dealing with the root of sin. This is His promise to us!
 - e. Near the end of the sermon, Pastor Gary called a volunteer up on stage. He chose a young fit man to whom he gave a bucket to hold out to his side around shoulder height. Pastor Gary then began to place rocks in the bucket marked with sins - unforgiveness, lust, pride, breaking oaths, greed, hatred, rage, stealing, sexual sin, gossiping, lying, drunkenness, murder, envy. The weight of the rocks represented the weight of our sin. And we are all sinners, our own buckets are being filled, and our sins have become a heavy burden to carry. In the illustration, it wasn't long before the weight of the bucket became too much for the young man to bear and his arm dropped. Pastor Gary, in representation of the work Jesus does, then went and took the bucket from the young man. The recipient of God's forgiveness is then free from all that weight. This is what Jesus does for us. He frees us from the consequence of our sin and gives us freedom, joy, and love in return. We no longer must carry around the weight of our sin!
 - f. **Moment of Reflection and Discussion:** Have you experienced this freedom through the gift of salvation? Do you continue to experience this grace through repentance of sin and receiving God's forgiveness? Or are you carrying around the weight of your sin because you feel you deserve it? Do you believe that real forgiveness from God is closed off to you? There is no shame in admitting sin; the shame is when we refuse God's offer of forgiveness. This is the pivotal moment for us all. When we feel the weight of our sin, we can either give up and accept death, or we can turn, repent, and be set free from the guilt and shame of our sin. Do you have some weight to lose?
5. Close in a time of prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to work upon your hearts, softening your hardness, convicting you of your sin, and leading you to the easy yoke of Jesus.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)