

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

Ezekiel 33:7-11

- The first part of this lesson outlines the task and the challenge of the prophet: to deliver the warning and difficult word to the people. The prophet cannot excuse himself (or herself) by saying, “They should have known” or “They won’t listen.” The task is to speak the word. If the people do not listen when the word is spoken, the blame lays on the people alone. But if the prophet does not warn them and give them the opportunity to repent, blame is also laid upon the prophet. For us, the words to Ezekiel encourage us to speak out, never using the excuse that the people may not listen.
- The second part of the lesson emphasizes the goal of the prophet: to bring about repentance. God desires that our behavior issues out of God’s desires and will.

Psalms 119:33-40

- As part of an extended meditation on the Law, the psalmist here expresses a beautiful prayer to be shaped by God’s laws and teachings, summarized by the end of verse 37: “Give me life in your ways.” Note how the images here involve the entire body. What if we were to consciously pray with our bodies this prayer?
 - Head: “Give me understanding, and I shall keep your teaching”
 - Feet: “Lead me in the path of your commandments”
 - Heart: “Incline my heart to your decrees”
 - Eyes: “Turn my eyes from beholding falsehood”
 - Perhaps, even ears: “Turn away the reproach that I dread”
- Another way that verse 37 is translated is “Turn my eyes from looking at vanities,” which The Message presents as “Divert my eyes from toys and trinkets.” What “vanities” turn your attention away from God’s focus? How can you turn your eyes away from them?
- How do you understand verse 39 – “Turn away the reproach that I dread,” especially in light of the gospel and the first lesson which says that times happen when we reproach others? The Message words it this way: “Deflect the harsh words of my critics – but what you say is always so good.” In other words, the psalmist here asks that we may not get caught up in the “reproach” of others, but to instead pay attention to God’s judgment and grace upon us.

Romans 13:8-14

- Paul here expresses the same thing as Jesus when Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment. All of the Law is summed up in love.
- What does it mean that “salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers”? Does Paul have a different understanding of salvation?
- Paul uses the images of putting on clothes in the morning as a way that we are called to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” What does it mean to you to “clothe yourself” with Christ or “clothe yourself” with love?

Matthew 18:15-20

- This is perhaps the most practical – and least followed – advice that Jesus gives. If somebody wrongs you, go to that person directly first! What makes open, direct communication so difficult to do? How can we encourage one another to practice this advice?
- Notice that when Jesus says “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,” he does not refer to small numbers in worship. Rather, Jesus says that he is present whenever we are working toward reconciliation and healing.