

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I include this page each week as an 'instruction page' for worship.

Attached is the bulletin for your devotion and worship. It is consistent with the components of worship that John Calvin insisted must be present in Reformed worship.

It is my prayer, and the prayer of your session, that these worship and devotional aids will nourish you during this time that we cannot be together.

**You will find the five Components of Reformed Worship in bold:**

*\*Open with a moment of personal Prayer*

**1. The Invocation** (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

**2. The Word** (you will need to read the scripture cited on the top left of the first page)

*\*After reading the scripture sing a hymn or sing along with a hymn* (Hymn suggestions below)

**3. The Confession** (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

**4. The Sermon**

The Affirmation of Faith (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

*\*Read a psalm aloud as your offering to God.*

(A suggestion is provided below.)

**5. The Benediction**

All of these components are on the bulletin you've been sent. If you read through each in the order above, you will have moved through the rhythm of a traditional Reformed worship service. You should feel free to intersperse songs of praise, Psalm readings and personal prayer. Suggested places to do this are indicated at the asterisk (\*) above.

Our prayer is that this will prove nourishing to your Spiritual health.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor

Alan

**For your convenience, songs are recommended below:**

*All Creatures of our God and King* — Hymn Number 23

*What a Friend We Have in Jesus* — Hymn Number 473

A 'Reading' suggestion: Psalm 119:33-40

P.S. Note that the Affirmation of Faith is not one of Calvin's components of Reformed Worship. Nevertheless, I have included it because it has become a standard part of the worship in the Presbyterian Tradition.

Dear FPC  
Saints,

Although my regular schedule at Arcadia is over I am providing the worship resource for this week and for June 14th. Your Worship Team is hard at work looking to fill in the other Sundays and your Search Committee continues its work to find your next pastor. During this time in-between you are often in my prayers. When Carla and I are back from our adventures we will be sure to come by and worship with you again. In the meantime, I pray that your summer is safe and spirits are lifted by those who work with you.

I want to say 'thank you' for the many cards, calls and emails congratulating us on our new grandson, Amos. We look forward to a couple months near to him and the rest of the family — it promises to be a good summer!

Until we see you again: *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the news of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.* (Romans 12:9-13)

I continue to ask that you stay in touch with brothers and sisters in Christ. Use this time to visit the Web Pages and Facebook pages of other churches in our presbytery. Listen to messages on UTube.

I'll say it again, stay in touch with one another and don't become too isolated! And, keep praying. God is listening for the concerns of His people! Be confident in His promises and Grace!

Peace and God's  
Blessings,

Pastor  
Alan

# SUNDAY WORSHIP

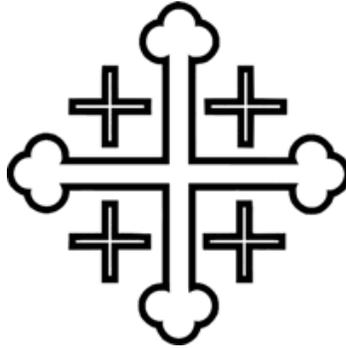
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## Invocation

God, we thank you for Jesus Christ, your Son, who was sent among us and was tempted as we are tempted yet lived without sin. By His grace we are justified: (forgiven and cleansed) and live no longer unto ourselves, but unto Christ who died for us and rose again. We pray that your Holy Spirit be with us today and each day so that we too may live as Christ lived and claim also the promise ; that our death shall be no more valid than His. Guide us in the truth of His life, the truth of your Word, and the truth of your Holy Spirit. Today we ask, that we may listen to your Spirit, who lives with us, in the name and power of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. . Amen.



AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD GOD, I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED.

**All That is Gold Does Not Glitter.**

(Subtitle: *Why Will You Die?*)

## I. The Historical Context

Nearly everything on earth has a life cycle, and great civilizations are no exception. Even armchair historians will quickly discern that the world’s greatest civilizations exist on average only about 200 years. More important, though, is that each of these great civilizations of human history has progressed through a life cycle. That is, a series of stages common to all of them. As we look at that cycle, think about where our own civilization might be in the cycle today:

From bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from great courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance. From abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; and from dependency back again into bondage.

The prophet Ezekiel comes on the scene toward the end of this great lifecycle of a nation. He comes as Jerusalem returns to bondage after its conquest by King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. He is one of an elite group who has been deported (disbursed) into Babylon. It is in the midst of this storm of national defeat that the Lord calls the priest Ezekiel to be a prophet. His people have been devastated. Ezekiel comes upon the scene at a time when the people of Israel again find

## Affirmation of Faith

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

## Benediction

*May the Lord bless you and keep you,  
May the Lord be kind and gracious to you.  
May the Lord look upon you  
with favor and give you peace, both in  
this life, and in the life to come.*

**Go now in peace,  
and peace be with you all.**

themselves in bondage. They have completed the lifecycle! They now find themselves as foreigners in a strange land ruled by an authoritarian government.

We do not know much about Ezekiel. Apart from his Call to be a watchmen or sentinel over Israel, the only personal information we have about him is that he came from a priestly family. But the most important thing for us to know about Ezekiel is that he has been called by God, to speak and to be a prophet, and to set forth the Word of God. Ezekiel is to “*afflict the comfortable and to bring comfort to the afflicted.*”

While we do not know much about Ezekiel, we do know that he has been called by God. We do know that he has been given the daunting and risky task of warning his people that they have fallen from ‘*liberty in abundance*’ to ‘*dependence and bondage*’. God has appointed Ezekiel as a sentry. A sentry is one whom God commissions to look out for others, even at great risk to oneself.

## II. Ezekiel’s Call

When I was growing up in Connecticut, almost every night of the week during the summer months, great flocks of crows would come and land in the woods behind my grandfather’s house. The crows would roost there during the night, and before most humans would arise the next morning, they would be gone, only to return again around dusk the next evening.

Occasionally, my grandfather would take me, as a young boy, into the woods just before dusk, in a veiled attempt, to go crow hunting. I say a ‘veiled attempt’ because every crow hunter knows that crows post sentries, that is, watchmen or watch-crows. It is the job of a crow sentry to let the other crows know if danger is approaching. So, we would go before dusk to ensure that we would not be seen. The tactic is not uncommon among those who know anything about crow hunting.

Bill Gothard, in his book *Character Sketches*, tells the story of two people who succeeded in sneaking up on a flock of roosting crows and scaring them before the sentries could give any warning. He said in his book, “*The birds burst into flight,*

*immediately attacked and killed the two sentries, and only then, did they fly away.*” Hey, being a sentry is dangerous business. It is a great responsibility. It is even a matter of life and death.

God appointed Ezekiel has a sentry over his people, Israel! He too is to be a watchman; he too is expected to warn the people for their sake, as well as for his own. Ezekiel has been given the responsibility of warning the people of their sins—to break the *natural life-cycle* that has claimed every civilization that has come before them! He’s been called to bring the Word of God that could save them, and can save us, from ourselves.

If he fails to do so, the people will suffer the consequences of their own transgressions, and Ezekiel's life will also be required.

### III. God’s Indictment of Israel

At first glance, the book of Ezekiel seems very much like a book of doom—a poignant message from God concerning the rebellion of God's people. But it is *not* prophecy in the sense of ‘future telling’. This is a message about what *is*; this is an opportunity to stop the cycle; these are current warnings, about current events. Ezekiel is to tell the people of Israel that they need to change their rebellious and wicked ways.

Let us be clear about this: The people are not at risk of *becoming* wicked; the people *are* wicked! At this moment in history the lifecycle of a nation is working just fine.

Listen to the Word of God earlier in this book as he commissions Ezekiel to the role of prophet among his people. The Scripture says: ***“I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day.”*** (Ez. 2:3) God accuses the community of rebellion; of taking more than God has given; of abusing what they have; of being full of pride and greed and lust; of thinking that only they, the descendants of Israel, are God’s children; of not having love for anyone, or anything, except themselves.

It is doubtful that Ezekiel's congregation of exiles in Babylon enjoyed hearing him expound so pointedly on the moral causes of their national downfall anymore than we would be pleased today to hear that we have become morally bankrupt, or that we have neglected our responsibilities, or that we have changed our ways, or that we're not being faithful, or that we are confused about what justice is, or that we have somehow neglected the very will of God.

God’s message to Ezekiel was an indictment of a nation, a condemnation of His own people, and an acknowledgment that they had turned from their covenant with Him.

### III. The Message of Ezekiel

We have to wonder why God has called Ezekiel to bring this message to people who have already fallen into bondage. Is it just to establish the cause and the effect?

Is it to help them equate their wickedness with their situation?

Is it to teach them just where unfaithfulness will get you?

Was Ezekiel called so that God could make a great display of his wrath?

Listen carefully! Ezekiel has been called to announce to God's people that:

they are *not* slaves to their own past

the past does *not* determine the future

the present is an opportunity for transformation

that life at-hand is an opportunity for new decisions

that life with God is always an occasion for hope and transformation.

The solemn warning we hear from Ezekiel is nothing less than a message of Great Hope! It's an opportunity to break the cycle which continually takes us from great spiritual faith back again into bondage.

Based on the lifecycle of nations it seems that abandoning God is part of our nature! But abandoning us is **not** part of His! It is because of God's mercy, it is because of God's love, it is due to God's initiative, that Ezekiel is there to warn God's people and to call them (once again) out of bondage and into the glorious light of God!

It is clear that God's purpose is to save his people from what already *is*, not to condemn them for what *has been*. This is not a God who is full of wrath or quick to condemn. This is a God of eternal hope!

Listen again to verse 11: ***“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?”***

This seemingly ominous passage is about a God, who grieves and laments over the choices that His children have made. This is a God who grants us freedom and choice on the one hand and then provides a warning when we find ourselves incapable of using those freedoms responsibly. This is a God who speaks to us!

When we put more reliance in our assumptions than God's revelation, He asks,

***“Why will you die?”***

When we stop seeing the needy and the hungry, He asks,

***“Why will you die?”***

When we find it easier to fight than to love, He asks,

***“Why will you die?”***

When we argue and bicker and divide ourselves from one another, He asks,

***“Why will you die?”***

When nations continually squander their blessings and repeat the same cycle over and over and over, God asks,

***“Why will you die?”***

Why can't we take our mutual covenant as seriously as he has taken his? ***“I will be your God and you shall be my people!!”*** (Jeremiah 7:23 et al) You see, God *desires* us to choose life, rather than death.

So, you see, God is not bringing doom upon his people. God is telling us that we are already doomed. God is offering us the opportunity to save ourselves—from ourselves! These are **not** the words of God trying his best to condemn, but of God trying his best to save. This is a message of hope for people who hear it. A message of salvation for those who can see it. God is asking us to look at ourselves, see where we are, where we are going, and where we have been. God's message delivered by Ezekiel is really simple: *If you listen to Me, the cycle from faith to bondage can finally be broken! But know this, says the Lord God, whether you hear, or refuse to hear, you will know that there has been a prophet among you.*

#### **IV. All That is Gold Does Not Glitter**

Now, it is true that the words of Ezekiel may, at first, sound to us like words of wrath, anger and accusation. They are words that seem to lay both blame and guilt upon the people. Words that portray a God who appears demanding, vengeful and jealous. But being these accusations there is our God: A God who is gracious, a God who is faithful, and a God who sent His only Son into the world that you might live. Jesus said, ***“I have not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through me.”*** (John 3:17)

And God says to us, through His prophet Ezekiel: ***“I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked: Why, O why will you die?”*** “ — Good question.

**Closing Prayer:** God of all mercies, we give you thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us and to all your children. We thank you O Lord, for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life. Your love for us is immeasurable and your forgiveness is unmerited. Yet, you care for us beyond anything we can imagine and give us hope. We praise you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.