

## **“Our Sovereign God Ezekiel 14, 1-11**

Our sermon text this morning is from the book of Ezekiel, chapter 14, reading verses 1 to 11. Before the reading we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, as we come now to hear from your word, I pray that you would help me as I speak. I pray that you would help us all as we hear. May we be given ears to hear, and eyes to see, and hearts to understand and to obey. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ezekiel chapter 14, starting at verse 1: <sup>1</sup> Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. <sup>2</sup> And the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>3</sup> ‘Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? <sup>4</sup> Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, <sup>5</sup> that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. <sup>7</sup> For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself. <sup>8</sup> And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD. <sup>9</sup> And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. <sup>10</sup> And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike— <sup>11</sup> that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord GOD.’” Amen, and may God bless His word.

It's very easy for people who grow up in an environment where the living God is worshiped, who grow up in a place where there are churches, or, in the Old Testament context, the temple; where you grow up and you know that your family is faithful, that God has made promises to your family, and that God keeps His promises—it's very easy to get very casual about the God whom you worship.

It's very easy to start taking things for granted that ought not to be taken for granted. It's very easy to get into a frame of mind where you think that you are comfortable in the presence of God, and you think that you are supposed to be comfortable, and that worshiping the living God is an easy thing to do, where you start to think that you've got this religion thing all pretty much worked out. “I do “A”, God does “B”; I do “C”, God does “D”. It's pretty easy to start to think that life was meant to be easy, and that there's nothing much to worry about.

It's pretty easy to actually just start to think that you can take the blessings of God for granted. “Yeah, I'm a Christian. I was raised a Christian. I've always been a Christian. Never been anything but a Christian. We don't have idols in our house. We don't have anything wicked in our house. We're good people. God is in favour of us. God is our best friend.”

Or, you know, I see something on signs. I don't know if this is a reference to a book or something that I just haven't read—and I tell you I never will read it—but I've seen this on signs around cities: "Jesus is my co-pilot." Jesus is my co-pilot? What, so I'm the chief pilot and Jesus takes orders from me? I decide the course we're flying, I decide where we're taking off and where we're landing? Jesus is my co-pilot, and occasionally I say, "Well, co-pilot, you can have the controls. I'll sit back and see how you go, and I'll judge your performance"? Jesus is my co-pilot?

Wow, I tell you what, I don't want Jesus to be my co-pilot, I want Jesus to be my only pilot. I want to let Jesus fly the whole thing. I want Him to choose the course. I want Him to choose where we land. I want Him to choose how high and how fast we fly. I want Him to choose whether we fly at all. I want Jesus to run the show. The Lord help any fool that thinks that Jesus is his co-pilot.

As we come to our passage this morning in the book of Ezekiel, we better put it into some kind of context. What's happening here? Ezekiel is ministering to the people of Judah and Israel during the captivity. We've been recently in the book of Isaiah, and Isaiah had promised that God's people would be taken off into captivity as a result of their sins. Well, in the book of Ezekiel, that's happened.

Ezekiel is filled with visions, and it's actually, in a way, hard to tell exactly where he was when he was there. It starts off with visions of Jerusalem, and wickedness in Jerusalem, and corruption in the temple at Jerusalem. And then he says, "And God lifted me in a spirit, and he took me and he put me in the land of the Chaldeans, and there I was ministering to the captivity there, to the people who'd been taken off in captivity." And it's kind of hard to know where he literally was at any particular time. It appears that in this instance, he is either in Jerusalem or the land of the Babylonians. We don't know.

But elders of the people come to Ezekiel, acting as though they were the holy people of God, seeking a word from the living God. They were very comfortable with the idea that they were in God's good books. They were very comfortable with the idea that all they had to do was make a show of religion. After all that has happened to this nation—the destruction of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem—they've still got this idea that if we just go through the motions, surely God will be happy with us. If we just come into the presence of the prophet and seek a word from God, surely now we'll hear a favorable word. Surely now God will say something nice to us and encourage us.

The problem is, God says that these men are idolaters. Not only are they idolaters, not only do they have a false religion, the problem God sees is that their idols are actually in their hearts. Looking at verse 3 of Ezekiel chapter 14: "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? <sup>4</sup>Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, <sup>5</sup>that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols."

They've got idols in their hearts. It doesn't even necessarily say that they've got idols in their houses. It doesn't even necessarily say that they're practicing any kind of idolatrous or occultish religion. God's accusation is that they have idols in their hearts. I really want us to think about that idea.

There are many, many people throughout this big wide world that we live in who claim that they worship the one true God. They claim that they worship the God who has revealed Himself in the Holy Writings, the Scriptures. And when they say "Scriptures," they often also include, you know, the Quran, and they include other things, whatever that might be—the book of Mormon, or the writings that come out of the Watchtower Society, or whatever. They all claim to be worshipers of the one true living God.

But I would suggest that none of those people are worshipers of the one true living God, because they worship a man's idea of God. They worship a man's doctrine of God. They worship a god who is not the God revealed to us in Scripture. They worship a false idea of the true God. They say they worship the true God, they say they know the true God, they say they love the true God, but their doctrine concerning the true God is false doctrine.

Whatever their weakness in their doctrine of God is—whether they believe that God is one and only one, though God has revealed Himself as being one and only one who is three persons, three persons who are the one God—Trinitarian doctrine; whether their doctrinal failure is that they don't appreciate the fact that God is both distant—can't be approached, God is holy, holy, holy, God is entirely separate from us and in a way, we could say God cannot be reached by us—and yet we say that God is imminent, to use a theological phrase. He's close at hand. He's omnipresent. He's near to His people. By His Spirit, He is indeed close to us. God is both of those things—distant and imminent. And if you emphasize one at the loss of the other, you start to worship a God who is an idol.

These people have come to Ezekiel with their idols in their heart. You know what? They may never even have heard of the name of some of the idols that were around in Old Testament times. I mean, I'm sure they have Baal or Ashtaroth, or all the rest of them. But God says, These people are coming to me with their idols in their heart. I really think God's getting at the idea here that they claim to know me, but they don't know me. They claim to be worshipers of me, but they are not worshipers of me. They claim to know the living God, but the living God they claim to know is not me, it's a living god of their own invention—their own invention, or the invention of whatever men teach them. The idols in their heart, they think are the true God, and God says, "No. Not so. The idols in their heart are not me. The idols in their heart are false."

Everybody in the world seems to think that approaching God is just a very easy thing to do. Everybody in the world seems to think that as long as you say "God," as long as your prayer is to God, as long as you imagine that you are speaking to God, that He must hear you; that He has an obligation to accept you; that He must hear you. But if God is God, and if God is who He says He is, we can only approach God in the way that God has said we must approach Him. A man who comes to God with a multitude of idols in his heart is not truly coming to God, and God is under no obligation to reveal Himself to that person. He is under no obligation to commit Himself to that person. He is under no obligation to hear that person's prayers. He is under no obligation to bless that person. God is free to deal with sinful humanity in whatever way He sees fit.

I would suggest to you that if you've got a comfortable idea of God, if your Christianity is very comfortable, if your worship is comfortable, if you think that there's nothing to worry about—"It's all good for me. God and I are mates, buddies, pals."—I would suggest to you that if you look closely at our passage here today, you might get shaken up a bit. There might be a bit of an earthquake coming your way, a bit of a flood, a bit of a volcanic eruption.

Look at what God says here in verse 9 of Ezekiel chapter 11: "And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. <sup>10</sup> And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike."

Now for those of you who've got the New King James, I think it says, "And if the prophet is induced to speak a word, I, the LORD, have induced that prophet." The specific word in the Hebrew behind it tends to suggest someone who is easily fooled. It's basically saying, "If the prophet is easily misled and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have easily misled that prophet." It's suggesting the person is simplistic and can be played the fool. Many translations use the word "deceived," and deceived is also a good and legitimate translation, and probably cuts closer.

"If the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel." "I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet." That's not a comforting word. Think about that. That's not a comforting word.

Scripture assures us that God cannot lie—we're going to look at some of those verses soon. It assures us that God cannot lie, that God does not lie. Yet somehow or other, we've got to understand in Scripture, in the light of Scripture, we've got to understand that God here tells us that He deceives a prophet, and the He deceives idolaters who come seeking a word from that prophet. We've got to understand that. We've got to take that on board. We've got to understand that.

What does God want from us, by the way? What does He want? It says He wants our hearts. It says He wants our hearts. Looking back at Ezekiel chapter 11, verse 5, "that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel." That I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel. What He wants is true worshipers, worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth. And anyone who is any form of idolater is not a true worshiper, and not a worshiper in spirit and in truth.

So let's have a look, and let's have a look at some Scripture and try and get a bigger picture here. God says that He will deceive a prophet, and one who seeks the prophet with his idols in his heart. Yet Scripture tells us God cannot lie. Let's look at a few of the Scriptures that tell us that God does not lie.

Turn to the book of Numbers, chapter 23. Look at verse 19: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" God is not man, that He should lie. God tells no lies. God does not lie. There it is, plain.

First Samuel, chapter 15, verse 29: “And also,” it reads, “the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” There we have it again. God will not lie or will He have regret. “The Glory of Israel will not lie.”

In your New Testaments, go to the book of Hebrews, chapter 6. We’ll start reading at verse 17: “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,<sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.” The author of the book of Hebrews is quite confident of something. What is he confident of? “It is impossible for God to lie.”

Let’s look at one more text. Stay in your New Testament, and go now to the book of James, chapter 1. Just looking at verse 13. Now the word “lie” is not used here, but I think we can draw reasonable inference from this verse. James chapter 1, verse 13: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” God does not lie, God does not tempt, God does not cause people to sin. They sin in and of their desires. God does not lie.

But we’ve still got that problem here in the book of Ezekiel chapter 14, “I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.<sup>10</sup> And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike.” I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet.

I want to suggest to you that God dealing judgmentally with people is throughout the Scripture, and that part of God’s judging people is that God blinds their eyes, that God darkens their understanding, that God hardens their heart, that God does not let them receive, or hear, or know, the truth. Let’s have a look at a few passages that might give us that idea.

I want you to turn first of all in the Old Testament to Psalm 18, looking at verses 25 and 26 of Psalm 18: “With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;<sup>26</sup> with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.” With the crooked, you make yourself seem tortuous. With the merciful, God is merciful; with the blameless, God is blameless; with the pure, God is pure; with the crooked, God is tortuous—troublesome, difficult. God makes Himself seem unknowable to the crooked.

How about we go in the New Testament to the book of Second Thessalonians, chapter 2. We’ll look particularly at verse 11, but let’s start reading from verse 8. Second Thessalonians chapter 2, we’ll start our reading at verse 8:

“<sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

What does it say there? “Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false.” It’s pretty serious stuff, isn’t it—pretty heavy stuff. God sends them a strong delusion.

Go to the book of Second Corinthians chapter 4. We’ll read it first, and then I’ll explain a few things. Second Corinthians chapter 4, I want us to look particularly at verses 3 and 4. Paul speaking: “<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Okay, let’s have a closer look. Verse 3: The gospel is veiled, and it’s veiled to those who are perishing. Verse 4: “In their case the god of this world.” And we’ll stop there. The god of this world. There are two explanations of this. There’s a low-heat, academic argument amongst Christian theologians about verse 4 here. Either “the god of this world”—and most of our translations I’m sure have a small “g” god—is a reference to Satan, or it’s a reference to the one true living God. Arguments go back and forth both ways.

In the end, it doesn’t make a whole lot of difference. It’s perfectly obvious that Paul believes that these people are having their eyes blinded according to the will of God, especially when you look at this passage in the light of what we just read in Second Thessalonians chapter 2. They may be being blinded by Satan. If they’re being blinded by Satan, it’s because he’s the means by which God sends them the strong delusion spoken of in Second Thessalonians chapter 2. He may be simply speaking directly of God blinding the minds of the unbelievers. In that case, how does God blind the minds of the unbelievers? Well, we were told in Second Thessalonians, God sends a strong delusion. That strong delusion would be the Devil himself.

You get the point. In other words, you can argue technically about exactly who Paul’s speaking of there. In the end, the result is exactly the same. According to the will of God, those who will not believe, those who are perishing, their sight is veiled, covered. They cannot see the truth. Their minds are blinded so that they *will* not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The Bible tells us that God is always and ever dealing with humanity, and that God is always and ever judging humanity, even today, even now—even now! What’s one of the most popular lies that you hear in the world from people, especially people who’ve got what I would call an inoculation—a little bit of Christianity? Their parents sent them to a Christian school, or they grew up in a family that was on-and-off churchgoers. They heard a bit, they didn’t hear a bit, they heard a bit, they didn’t hear a bit. Talk to them about how God deals with people, and basically you’ll hear them say something like, “Well, here’s the way it is. God gives everyone a choice, and He waits to see what that choice is. This world is a world of choice. You get to take your choice. One of these days, I might choose Jesus, but it won’t be today.”

You hear it all the time, maybe not exactly in those words, but you hear it. That’s not what Scripture says. Scripture says God is either calling or rejecting. God is either drawing or pushing away. God is either opening eyes or blinding eyes. God is always and ever judging the hearts of humanity.

I just ask you a question: How can you understand the fact that Scripture tells us God is either hardening or softening, blinding or opening eyes, if you don't understand that God is sovereign over all, that God is ruler over all? How can you make sense of a passage? I mean, I don't believe we've yet made sense of what's said here in Ezekiel. "I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him." I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet. I don't think we've still quite made sense of it. How? How? What kind of fool would accuse God of sin? What kind of fool would accuse God of breaking His own law?

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour." We can draw inference from that commandment, can't we? You shall not bear false witness, full stop. You shall not give false reports, full stop. You shall not lie. The shortened version of the commandments that many people learn to recite as children, is simply said, isn't it—You shall not lie. That's God's law. You shall be honest. That's God's law. You shall speak the truth. That's God's law.

"I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet." We'd better be very careful here, hadn't we? I think I'm here on ground where men should tremble. Because, heaven forbid that I be a fool who accuses God—who is good and only good, God who is holy, holy, holy—heaven forbid that I should accuse God of sin. Heaven forbid that any of us should ever be so foolish as to accuse God of sin.

So somehow or other, we have to seek to understand this. "I, YAHWEH, have deceived that prophet." We know that God doesn't lie, that God cannot lie, that God is not tempted, nor does He tempt. And yet God is tortuous to the crooked, and God deceives both the inquirer and the prophet when a person comes to Him with idols in his heart.

Turn now to our earlier reading at First Kings chapter 22. Let's just quickly run through the story, just to refresh it in our minds again. First Kings chapter 22—what's happening? You've got Israel divided—the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

In the Northern Kingdom of Israel, you've got a king. His name is Ahab. He goes down as the standard for evil kings in Scripture. He is an idolater. He's married to a woman who is an idolater. He's married to a Jezebel, a name that also goes down in Scripture as the picture of an evil and wicked woman. He's an idolater, he practices the occult; he's a murderer, he murders his own people; he is everything evil.

And then you've got the king of Judah, who though he is descended of the line of David, there's a problem, and that is his mother is one of the daughters of Ahab. In other words, you've got the line of Ahab mixed in with the line of David. That's the problem.

So Jehoshaphat goes down to the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat and the king of Israel decide to go into battle together. They seek a word from the Lord, and of course, Ahab has his own personal bevy of prophets, his own prophets on his own payroll, who say the things that he wants to hear, who tell him the things that he wants to know. And they of course come in and they tell him, "It's going to be great! You're going to be victorious!" It even tells us one had horns of iron. You just get this picture: "With these great horns of iron, you're going to push your enemies back out of the nation!" What a show.

And Jehoshaphat at least has the sense to ask, “Is there actually a prophet of Yahweh?” Looking at First Kings 22, verse 7: “But Jehoshaphat said, ‘Is there not here another prophet of the YAHWEH of whom we may inquire?’” “This prophecy that you’re receiving here, Ahab, it’s not like the prophecy that I’ve heard in my life. It doesn’t seem to me to be a genuine prophecy. Would there be one of the prophets of Yahweh anywhere round about?” “Well, we’ve got Micaiah the son of Imlah. I don’t like him. He’s not very nice.” “Let’s get Micaiah in. Let’s get Micaiah in.” And Micaiah tells the truth, doesn’t he: “You’re going to be defeated. The people of Israel should go home. They’re like sheep without a shepherd. Nothing good is going to come of this.”

And what happens then is that Ahab and Jehoshaphat get what I would call a course in “God’s Providence—God’s Providence, Lesson 1.” Micaiah reveals to them a vision of how God is dealing with them at that very moment. We start the reading at verse 19: “And Micaiah said, ‘Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; <sup>20</sup> and the LORD said, “Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?” And one said one thing, and another said another. <sup>21</sup> Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, “I will entice him.” <sup>22</sup> And the LORD said to him, “By what means?” And he said, “I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” And he said, “You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.” <sup>23</sup> Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you.’”

Ahab just got a vision of God’s dealings with humanity in the very throne room of heaven. Ahab just got told, and Jehoshaphat just got told, exactly what was happening right here in their presence before their very eyes. God just told them the truth that they could not possibly know by any other means than by supernatural, divine revelation. A lying spirit has been sent forth from the very presence of God, and he has put lies in the mouth of these your prophets; “the LORD has declared disaster for you.”

Interestingly, Ahab and Jehoshaphat do not repent. They do not receive the truth, but they choose the lie. They choose falsehood. They choose to be deceived. They would rather be deceived. They would rather hear what they wanted to hear. They would rather worship a false god. They would rather keep the idols in their hearts. God veiled their eyes. God hardened their hearts. We could say God deceived them with the truth! He spoke the truth to them. God did not sin. God did no wrong. God spoke the truth to them, but they would not receive the truth. They would not take in the truth. They would not accept the truth.

What’s the state of mankind apart from the intervention of God? Mankind is blind, mankind is dead in sins and trespasses, mankind is under deception, mankind is wicked, mankind will not choose God. Mankind is unable to choose God, even though God tells them the truth, even though God reveals the very truth to them.

We often like to quote Psalm 19, or I often like to quote it. It’s a beautiful Psalm, especially the first few verses. <sup>1</sup> “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” What’s the Psalmist saying? He’s saying that you can know that there’s a God simply by looking at the creation that God has created, and that creation is speaking to all of humanity—all of humanity. They are without excuse.



There is no excuse to not believe in the one true living God, and yet they will not believe, as Roman chapter 1 tells us. They will not believe. They would rather believe in idols, and they're being handed over to their sins—handed over, handed over, handed over, getting worse and worse and worse, worshiping the created things, not the Creator. Well here we have a couple of men who are dead in their sins—dead in their sins. And God gives them a vision from heaven through a bona fide prophet, through a genuine prophet of God.

You know, you can't argue a person into the kingdom of heaven. I'm not saying don't argue, and I'm not saying don't speak the truth, and I'm not saying let the wicked ones have it all their way. We must answer. We must be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have within us. But our arguments don't win a heart for Jesus, unless Jesus ordains that our arguments win a heart. Just because we tell people the truth, they're still deceived, unless God opens their eyes to receive that truth.

A prophet of the living God brought to Ahab and Jehoshaphat a vision from heaven, warning them that if they follow a certain path, it will be their downfall and they will die. Now if we were to read on, we would see that they follow that certain path, it is their downfall, and they do die. It's as simple as that. God reveals to them from heaven how indeed He's dealing with them. But of their own design, of their own desires, they choose to believe a lie, they would rather believe a lie, they would rather be deceived.

Looking back at Ezekiel chapter 14, verse 9: "And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel." They're deceived because they deceived themselves. They're deceived because they would rather believe a lie. They're not deceived because God doesn't speak the truth to them. They're not deceived because God is a liar. God does not break His own law. God is good. God speaks the truth. But they, being bound up in their sins, being bound up in the state in which all of humanity is in, they can't receive the truth, they can't respond to the truth in the way that they ought to respond to the truth.

And here is the fact, my friends—God is under no obligation to break anyone out from under that deception, unless He so chooses to. It's all of God. If you've been broken out from under the deception of death, the reason you've been broken out from under that deception of death is that God has set His love upon you. God has opened your eyes. God has laid hold of your hearts.

Looking at the last verse of our passage: "<sup>11</sup>that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord GOD," if you have turned away from the idols of this world, you have turned away from the idols of this world because God has turned you away. If you have come to Jesus, it's because God has drawn you in. If you have repented of your sins, it's because God has granted repentance.

From a verse like Ezekiel 14:9, "If the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel," you can't come to any reasonable explanation of that verse apart from the idea that we are ruled over by a sovereign God. All things come from His hand, all things unfold according to His will. Nothing happens apart from the will of the Lord our God.

Am I saying that people are puppets on a string? No, I'm not. Am I saying that people don't think for themselves? No, I'm not. Am I saying that people don't take their own choices? No, I'm not. Just remember, we're not from eternity. We're not infinite. We're now all-knowing.

It's eleven minutes to eleven. I don't know what's going to happen at ten minutes to eleven. God knows. I'm taking my choices, I'm choosing my words. I'm living in time. Our choices are real choices. Our exercise of our will is a genuine exercise of our human will. But the very idea that we have a human will that operates completely apart from the will of God is nonsense. It's sheer madness.

If God is omniscient, God is omnipresent, God is omnipotent, how then is it possible that we, feeble little human beings, by the power of our choices, control anything? Of course, of course human will is utterly reliant upon the one great divine overriding will, the very will of God. We in time, we in our humanity, we do take genuine choices. But if you are willing to receive God, if you are willing to be a worshiper of the one true living God, it's because God has made you willing. You are exercising your will—it's the will that God has given you to exercise. You are exercising your faith—it's the faith that God has given you to exercise.

You can't explain a verse like Ezekiel 14 verse 9, if your God is not sovereign. You can't make sense of it, because if God is not sovereign, and it says He's deceived a prophet, well then God is also not good; God is also not the God who He claims to be. But if God is sovereign, if God is sovereign over all things, God can say that He has deceived both prophet and inquirer, and we can see from Scripture how it is that this could be so, even though God Himself has spoken nothing but truth. God Himself has spoken nothing other than that which is right.

They are deceived because they're left to their own self-deception. They're left in the state in which they came to God. They came to God with their idols in their hearts, and they leave God with their idols in their hearts—only more so, only strengthened in their deception, hardened in their hearts, further blinded in their eyes. My friends, don't get too comfortable with God. Don't assume ever that you know all there is to know. Don't assume ever that you have no need to grow any further—"I have no need to learn any more. I have no need to go further." Don't assume that God is safe.

Remember that question in the book in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, speaking of Aslan, "Is he safe?" "Oh my goodness, I didn't say he was safe," was the answer. "I didn't say he was safe. But he's good. He's definitely good." But don't get relaxed and comfortable. Don't assume that he's safe and nice. Don't assume that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, would never, ever, ever refuse to receive somebody's worship. They come to them with their idols in their hearts? They leave Him with their idols in their hearts. It's as simple as that.

There are many people in the world who say they believe in Jesus. Muslims say they believe in Jesus. Mormons say they believe in Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses say they believe in Jesus. There are others who claim to be Christians, but actually their doctrine is lies and nonsense, and they say they believe in Jesus. And I'm telling you, they don't. They believe in their idea of Jesus. They believe in the Jesus whom they have constructed in their own imaginations. They believe in the Jesus of the world, not the Jesus revealed from heaven.

My friends, don't get comfortable about God. Don't get casual. Don't assume that you know enough. We must spend our lives seeking to know, to love, and to understand our God, seeking to grow in Christ-likeness, seeking to grow in true knowledge of God. And the only place you get true knowledge of God is from the Scriptures. We must spend our lives seeking to ever draw closer to God. I often find myself praying, Lord, let me not think the thoughts of the fool concerning you, concerning yourself. Let me not think the thoughts of an idolater concerning you. Let me know you for who you really are, and exactly as you have revealed yourself from Scripture.

Our God is sovereign over all things. He's sovereign over the hearts and minds of humanity. My friends, we must come to Him with humility, we must come to Him with worshipful spirits, we must come to Him with contrite and broken hearts. He hates proud people. He hates people who will not submit to Him. And I mean He hates them. He hates the pride of humanity. He hates sin.

We must come to the living God in the way that He commands us to come to Him, and there's only one way, and that's through Jesus Christ our Lord. We must come to Him confessing our sins. We must come to Him trusting that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He does have the power and the authority to cleanse us from our sins and to bless us with God's Holy Spirit, that we may live a life that is pleasing in the sight of God, that our eyes may be opened, our ears may be opened, that our hearts may be made willing.

Jesus said, "Come to me all who labour 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." We must come to Christ, worshiping God, fearing God, worshiping the one true living God, and that also is the God whom we must be preaching to the nations. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, great and awesome things are spoken of you in your word, and it is your desire that we worship you in reverent, awe-struck fear. And so I pray, Father, that you would indeed reveal yourself to us, that we would indeed know you in truth, and that we would be made to love you in truth, and that we would worship in spirit and in truth. And I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.