

Pillar Passages – Ez 18

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Repent *To* or Repent *From*

Well, welcome back to another one of our Pillar Passage. Today we are looking at Ezekiel 18.

Ezekiel is a prophet to the Israelites who were exiled to Babylon after the Babylonians invaded and beat Jerusalem.

The entire chapter concerns a proverb that the exiles were saying. This is the exact same proverb that Jeremiah says that the people of Jerusalem were saying. So, this must have been a very common proverb among the Jewish people of the time. It comes up in verse 2. The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. Meaning that the fathers have done bad things, and now the children are paying for them. This is a fatalistic, passive, 'woe is me', kind of attitude that the people who had been exiled—which is terrible, terrible judgement—were saying. We are paying for our father's sins. Woe is us.

God says, "What do you mean with you say this? Why do you say this? How dare you say this?" essentially. For (verse 3) as I live, declares the Lord, I am going to do everything in My power—and I'm God—to make sure that this is no more used. That you completely change this perspective because this perspective is deadly. If you continue in the perspective, it will be *deadly* to you.

God will see to it out of grace—a hard-nosed grace to rid this perspective and He will replace this perspective with this—verse 4—this principle: all souls are Mine. The soul of the father, as well as the soul of the son. The father's generation or as an individual, or the son's generation or the son as an individual. What do I mean by that? The soul who sins shall die.

Yes, we do somethings inherit the sins of our fathers and repeat them, and there are continuing consequences upon the second, third, and fourth generations. Just like the Old Testament promised. God allows this to happen and this is the general way the world works. But this is not how God intervenes in history. God Intervenes. God brings judgement upon the person or the generation that did the sinning.

Beginning in verse 5, God teases this out some more. He teases this out beginning with this statement, "If a man is just and obeys these things—these things being a list of sins that we could look at here, and then they're repeated over and over again in this chapter. What are these sins?"

First off, they are idolatry—does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel. That's number one—idols.

Number two would be, adultery or lewdness; defiling a neighbor's wife or approaching her or any women in a time of menstrual impurity.

Number three, oppression or injustice. Oppressing people. Refusing to restore to a debtor his pledge. In other words, the thing that he put up as collateral. Refusing to give it back to him. Committing robbery that way. In the same respect, refusing to give generously to the hungry, or covering the naked with a garment. Similar to this would be taking advantage, lending at interest, or taking a profit but this mean taking a profit at the expense of the weak. This doesn't mean lending in general. Whoever does this, or whoever withholds his hand, whoever sins by omission and does not bring justice, but allows injustice to continue where he has the opportunity to do it. Who does not exercise true justice between man and men, that sort of thing is a big problem to God. That really gets God. This whole area of oppression and injustice.

Then lastly, to sum it all up we can say simply, walking in God's law. Up or down, yes or no. Walking in God's law. Keeping His rules faithfully. If a person does these things, he righteous and he shall surely live. It's that simple.

Now, to tease this out further (verse 10) if a man fathers a son who commits these sins—again the same sins—shall then live? The son that is. No, he shall not live. He has done all these abominations. He shall surely die. His blood shall be upon himself.

Now, continuing this thought, suppose a man fathers a son who see all the sins his father and done and he does not do likewise. He doesn't follow in his father's footsteps. He—the son—shall not die for his sins. He shall surely live. Or his generation will not pay the price for the father's generation. As for he father, because he did all this, he shall die. Or his generation shall experience consequences for disciple for their sin.

Then verse 19 gets interesting. That generation, and our today, says what should this not be the case? Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the farther? To put this in modern terms, why shouldn't current, modern, white people suffer for the sins—for instance—of racism of their fathers. Why shouldn't that be the case?

Well, because, verse 20, the soul who sins shall die. God matches the sin with the sinner, and with each generation. To say otherwise, to demand otherwise, to insist otherwise, is to become or take the place of God as judge.

God continues to unravel this or unpack this even further. Verse 21, if a person who is wicked, turns away and repents from all his sins, and he begins to keep all of God's statutes and does what is right, he shall surely live. He shall not die. None of the transgressions—*none* of his transgressions that he *has* committed shall be remember against him by God. By the judge. The righteousness that he had done will be counted to him, and he shall live.

Why? Why is this? What is it about God's heart that is operating here and that orders things in this way? Because God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He is gracious. He is bent

toward grace. Towards mercy. He wants all who are wicked to turn from his way and live. God wants this for everyone. Thus, in the same way, when a righteous person turns away—repents—same word—repents from his righteousness, and does injustice, shall he live? Nope. None of the righteous deed is did before shall be remembered by God. The treachery that he repented *to* is what defines him in God's eyes. And thus, he shall die for his generation.

Don't ever think—thinking about all of this here—don't ever think, that the God of the Old Testament is all wrath, and the God of the New Testament is all grace. It's the *same* God. It's the same God that Paul talks about in Romans. Note the *excessive* grace *and* hard-nosed sternness of God.

Grace—excessive grace—to those who repent, and hard-nosed sternness to those who repent *to* treachery, to injustice.

Now, let me make one more observation here. And that is; here we see again what matters most—this whole section here—is about people who repent. Everyone in this section repents. The question is not whether you repent. The question is; to what?

What matters most is not the verbs, but the objects of the verbs. Everybody repents. Everybody turns away from something. The question is, from what to what? That's what matters. That's what makes a person righteous or wicked. It's the object of the verbs Whether the object of the repenting is towards treachery and injustice, or whether it's towards God and life.

Verse 25, another objection, yet that generation say—and so does this generations say—the way of the Lord is not just. It would not be just, to just say that this generation is not racist, though so many people in this generation are white, and male, or Christian, or whatever. Whatever the case may be. The way of the Lord is not just to be so gracious. To be so gracious as to forget all these old sins, and yet to be gracious just upon the act of turning. It's not right of God to count that as righteousness.

It's at this point that Ezekiel and Paul sound a lot alike. They have very similar mindsets—especially in Romans. I've copied that here (Rom. 3:26). I think this is the purpose of Romans, to show God's righteousness. To show that God is righteous and just in how He is ordering things. He is righteous and just in that He is just in what He does in the gospel in Christ, and He does so in such a way that He may be the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. By showing amazing grace and justifying people in Christ, He is not unjust in doing that—in showing such amazing grace to sinners. He does it in such a way that it is *all* just.

That is the question that Ezekiel is grappling with here that Paul really answered in Romans 3. You can look at it later. But here, God says is it really My ways that are not just? I think it's your ways—you, generation then, and our generation now. Because with a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it.

The real question—how to be right before God, how to live in each generation—our job, our call is (verse 28) to consider our ways. To consider our sins. To look at them through God's eyes and then to turn away from them.

Yet, verse 29, that generation and ours says again—I just can't go there. The way of the Lord is not just.

And God repeats Himself. Oh house of Israel, are My ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just. So it goes with our generation that cannot stand the thought that it is a sinful generation.

It's very easy to look back at the WWII generation of Germans and say they were evil. Or to look back at the slavery, Indian hunting generation of America and to say it was evil. But we can't even countenance the possibility that this generation is just as evil—if not more than those generations. That's our greatest problem. That we cannot consider our sins and turn away from them. We're fools. We've been duped.

Verse 30, God says, I *will* judge you, oh house of Israel. Everyone according to his ways. Not according to the ways of previous generations. According to *your* ways. The things that you do in the here and now, declares the Lord. But there is still time. Repent. Turn away from all your transgressions lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

Another comparison with Jeremiah. Here Jeremiah gets a prophesy from God where it is God provides this heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. So, what are we to make of this? Well, they're really saying the same things

We repent. We repent from our sins to God in faith. As we repent from our sins to God in faith in dependences on Him, what happens is God responds to that faith by giving to us a new heart. In that sense, but shifting our weight onto Him, we make for ourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

All of this, because God says, Why will you die? Why will you take the insane path of death? Why? Why would you do that? Because, I for one, would have no pleasure in that, God says. I would have no pleasure, so turn and live. God does not want anyone to be ruined.

We ought to read this and feel grief and the love of a perfect parent here. A perfect parent who is a holy parent. Yet a parent who would go so far to redeem His people to do all for them by sending His Son to die on the cross for us. So that anyone who would turn from their sins would not only be forgiven, but would find life. Would find this welcome back to the father. Not by being perfect, but by turning towards Him. And in that turning towards Him in faith would inherit all the promises of Abraham—all the promises of life.

This is very much for the world, but this is very much for us Christians because right now we live in such unsettled times. And who knows what other troubles await us in the 2020s. This is a call to Christians as well, to deal with *our* sins. Turn from the now. If you have a secret sin that you are holing up and protecting deep in the basement of your life—Get. It. Out. And remove whatever else is keeping you from moving towards God. Fill yourself with God's words, so you can consider for yourself what actually is sin. Because, we in our deluded minds, cannot even determine for ourselves what sin and love actually are. We need God's Word, God's law, to tell us what sin and love are.

I encourage you, if you are a Christian, take this passage as well at face value. This is not just a passage for the world—though it is. It is just as much a passage for God's people. Know this; whatever may come, when we follow the trajectory of this chapter, here's what happens. We can then look at God in the face without fear, but with total acceptance.

This chapter is strong. It is strident. It is also simple. The sins here that really get God, these can be done by faith. We can, as we live in this chapter, move forward with optimism that God will give us life. Walk in the ways of the chapter, brothers and sisters, for your joy in Him