

OUR JUST GOD: EZEKIEL 18

I've referenced this passage several times between classes and a few sermons. Still, I've never dedicated an entire sermon to its message. Its message is powerful because it speaks to anyone who's had an influential figure in their life, whether good or bad. It gives hope, warns of unfortunate realities, and also answers the doctrine of Calvinism (though that wasn't the purpose behind the message). Today, we'll look at a father, son, and grandson. Which best represents you? What will you do with God's mercy and grace? Do we have the ability to hold ourselves accountable? Let's get into the passage!

Vs. 1-4 The Proverb

- Background: The Babylonian takeover actually happened in 3 captivities. Ezekiel was captive during the second "wave" of attacks (2Ki 24:12-16; 2Ch 36:10; Jer 22:26; 24:1; 27:20; 29:1,2; 52:28-30). He began to prophesy when he was 30 (believed to be 592 B.C.). Jerusalem was destroyed in the 3rd captivity in 586 B.C. (6 years later), and the siege lasted 18 months. He prophesied for 22 years, and his message was for those already in captivity and for Jews in Judah. He spoke of the final captivity.
- Jeremiah probably taught this proverb before Ezekiel (Jeremiah 31:29-30), but either way, it speaks to the mindset of the exiled Jews.
 - Set on edge: to be dull, become blunt, i.e., to take on a shape that is not sharp-edged due to grinding or impact . . . "set on edge" apparently focuses on the involuntary reaction of biting or grinding that accompanies a very bitter taste in the mouth, which could imply a dulling of a tooth's edges; note: some sources translate "numbed," which may focus on the result of damaging the teeth by forceful, damaging biting.
 - So, the picture shows a man biting into a sour grape, and his teeth clenched together, causing them to grind over time or even cause damage. The problem is that one man bites the grape, and his child's teeth are damaged. That's not natural or just.
- While God instructed Israel not to put a man to death (physically) for his father's sins (Deut. 24:16), many times, others suffered physically because of other's iniquities. Many people in the Bible have died because of other's sins (think about the children who died in the flood, or David's son, the children of Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15, and on and on). This is why I believe the fundamental concept behind death in this passage is speaking of spiritual separation. Ezekiel is rebuking these people for their sins. A son may physically die for the sins of his father but not be morally guilty for his sin. So, God must be considering another kind of death in this passage. God is rebuking them for their sin and speaking of their guilt.

Vs. 5-9 The Father

- Cornelius was a righteous man (Acts 10:22), among several others. Not that they're outside of Christ or are totally righteous. But they do what is right and good.
- Here is a man who follows God's law and acts faithfully. He is righteous and will live.

Vs. 10-13 The Son

- The previous man fathers a son, but the son is disobedient (though the father was not).
- He will not live because of what he has done. His blood is on his own hands.

Vs. 14-18 The Grandson

- The son fathers his own son. He notices his father's life and decides to live a righteous life. He obeys God.
- He will not die for his father's iniquity. He shall live. His father will answer for his own sins.
- Please note how the change occurs: it's not by some miraculous work of the Spirit. The son observes his father and doesn't follow in his footsteps.

Vs. 19-20 Why Shouldn't The Son Suffer?

- Again, they're trying to justify themselves because that's their claim. On one hand, they don't think it's fair, but at the same time, they expect the innocent to suffer because of others. They're having difficulty accepting accountability.
- Could God be any clearer? He is just. Everyone is responsible for their own actions. The son will not be guilty of his father's sin, and the father will not be guilty of his son's sin.

Vs. 21-24 God's Answer

- If a wicked person turns away from sin and does what is right, God will give them life. God will no longer remember his transgressions and accept his righteous deeds.
- God does not take joy in the death of the wicked. God's desire is that mankind will turn and live.
- A righteous person who turns away from doing right and becomes wicked will lose their life. His righteous deeds will be forgotten, and he will die for his sins.
- This means that a person can indeed turn away from sin and toward God and receive life. They actually have a choice. They are not forced. They are not chosen to be righteous over someone else. That decision rests on their own shoulders.
- This means a person can be righteous but turn away from God. To say that anyone who turns away is a perception only because they were never faithful followers is false.

Vs. 25-29 The Lord Is Not Just!

- This is reiterating what has been stated. It's common sense. It's what we all perceive to be the right approach and judgment.
- Vs. 28 makes it clear how someone repents. They consider and turn. Nothing miraculous here.
- God calls them out for their hypocrisy, calling God unjust, when, in fact, they're the only ones guilty of such a thing.

Vs. 30-32 The Last Gracious Word

- Notice what God calls for—repentance! And who does He extend it to? Everyone! So, let's not say that God has chosen some to be saved and others lost. There is nothing new here. We see this same principle in 1 Timothy 2:4.
- Who is going to give them a new heart and spirit? Listen, it goes without saying that we are dead in our sins without God and without direction or hope. God gives us guidance and strength through His word and promises. But in this passage, they've got to do their part—they have to adopt a new heart and attitude.
- God doesn't want ANYONE to die; so turn and live!

- It would help if you heard something: your past does not define you (either good or bad). It's about today.
- Parents, sometimes you've made a mess of things, and your kids have followed in your footsteps. Sometimes, you've been excellent, but your children did not follow in your footsteps. That's yesterday, but it's not today. You're only responsible for yourselves. Regardless of what they observe, your children will stand before God alone and be held accountable.
- Sins cannot be inherited any more than faith can.
- Our environment is not more powerful than God. Environment is not omnipotent! Your habits can be broken. They are not omnipotent either!