

## Title: “The Sour Grapes of Sin.”

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Ezekiel 18:1-4

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**Service Readings:** Ezk. 18:1-4, Ezk 18:25-32, Php. 2:1-18, Matt. 21:23-32

*No longer do we consider the unfairness of any punishment we might receive because we know, in our hearts, that it is our sinful actions we are judged against. And when the weight of this reality is too heavy to bear, we collapse at the feet of God for we can do nothing else. And it is there that we find forgiveness and peace.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel. And what did God say to him? He said this:

<sup>2</sup>“What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? <sup>3</sup>As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. <sup>4</sup>Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

In the time of Ezekiel, the people of Israel were full of complaints to God. Not because they disagreed with the principle of punishment for sin. What they disagreed with was the thought that God was punishing the wrong people. They didn’t deserve what was happening to their nation, or what might be left of the nation. The twelve tribes of Israel had long since divided. Most of them had been exiled by the Assyrians, never to be heard from again. All that remained was Judah but the Babylonians were knocking at their door. They were facing the same fate as the rest of the Jewish nations. But why? What was it, exactly that they did to deserve this?

And thus was their complaint to God. ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ In other words, “why are we to bear the punishment of our fathers and our father’s fathers?” But God answers them through Ezekiel and informs them that their complaints are not valid. For the judgement that was imminent would be linked to their own sinfulness and could not be laid upon their forefathers. They had no excuse, no scapegoat, nothing. This was on them and God was very clear. Israel would soon be captured by the Babylonians. They would be exiled out of their nation, out of their beloved city, Jerusalem. And this city, along with the dwelling place of their God would be destroyed. Completely.

God continues with his proclamation:

<sup>25</sup>“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? <sup>26</sup>When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. <sup>27</sup>Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. <sup>28</sup>Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. <sup>29</sup>Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

<sup>30</sup> “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. <sup>31</sup> Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup> For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”

Now, we could continue with this drive through history but I would like to abandon it there and pivot to our own time because I think that the application of this message is so critical for us today and I don't want to run out of time. For so often when we talk to people, especially those who have moved away from the church or who have never found attraction to it, a passage like this could serve as the reason for their choice. For within these verses is a portrait of a God who seems vengeful, full of wrath and anger, waiting patiently in the shadows to catch a sin. He seems like a God who might even delight in this task because it seems that when he catches a sin, pounces and pronounces judgment on the sinner! But it doesn't end there, for it seems that his wrath cannot be satisfied with this single judgment but must extend upon those of this person's family – his children and his children's children. Even Moses seems to agree for he writes that God is a jealous God, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate [him], but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love [him] and keep [his] commandments.”

But this isn't the whole story, not for Ezekiel and not for any prophet. For they never just spoke words of judgement but always included words of promise, of restoration. And we see that even in the passage we just read. Look again at the last two verses. God makes clear that his pleasure, his desire is for the salvation of all! He pleads with us to cast away our transgressions and turn back to him with a new heart and spirit. But how can Israel do that when it won't claim ownership of its sins? And how can we do it if we don't first do the same?

You see, these verses are not verses of judgement but instead an invitation to receive God's amazing grace. They are a love song to sinners from a God who wants his creation back. “Take ownership of your sin”, he says. “Come to know that it is you who fall short, who have sinned,” he pleads. Because he knows that once we do, once we acknowledge where we have acted against God, the forgiveness can begin. And that is what he desires most of all. And how can we be confident of this? How can we know that the desires of his heart are an eternity with us? Because,

Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Don't lose the connection between Ezekiel's prophecy and Jesus. The prophet was calling the nation to accountability. But not for damnation, but as an invitation to repent. God would judge this nation but ultimately they would find their propitiation, their reconciliation, hundreds of years later. And it would not come from their own actions but from God's actions, himself. *He* would be the one to satisfy the consequences of creation's infractions. How ironic it is, then that the nation of God's people are complaining about being punished for sins they didn't commit, and yet in the future God would subject himself to exactly that.

So what are we to do with all this? Wait! If that question is being asked then maybe we are back to the sour grapes proverb and maybe we need to start this discussion over again. But I'm guessing that we aren't there. I'm guessing that we can connect our own lives, our own actions, our own context to that of the people during Ezekiel's time. And so, the question then becomes more about how we *apply* the reality of what God

has done for us through his son, Jesus. And we find advice from Paul in our reading, today. In his letter to the Philippians he writes:

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you. When we hear the words of the prophet and when we apply them to our own lives, our own context, we find ourselves at the foot of the cross. For what we discover is that *we play the entire role* in our own sinfulness but God *plays the entire role in our own salvation*. When we realize that, we begin to tremble for we feel the real weight of its cost. It *could have cost us eternity* but it didn't. Instead, it cost God his son.

Our sins cost God his son.

And his son willingly took upon himself our sins.

And so the only thing that remains is our response. .... And what is that response? It is, as Ezekeal says, to

Repent and turn from all [our] transgressions.... <sup>31</sup>Cast away from [us] all the transgressions that [we] have committed, and make [ourselves] a new heart and a new spirit!

It is to turn and to God and to live. Turn to God and live.

Please pray with me.

Who has felt the nails upon His hands,  
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man?  
God eternal, humbled to the grave.  
Jesus, Savior, risen now to reign!

Behold our God, seated on His throne.  
Come let us adore Him!  
Behold our King, nothing can compare.  
Come let us adore Him!  
Amen.