

THE ERROR OF OUR WAYS/ Sunday, August 16, 2015

Unifying Topic: A CALL FOR REPENTANCE

Lesson Text

I. A False Proverb (Ezekiel 18:1-4)

II. Two Test Cases (Ezekiel 18:5-13)

III. A New Heart And A New Spirit (Ezekiel 18:31-32)

The Main Thought: Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. (Ezekiel 18:30-31, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People are aware of behavior that is harmful to the life of a community. What can be done to build and maintain the health of a community? Ezekiel advises confession and, along with Proverb, exhorts the people to do the right thing and thereby build a just community.

Lesson Aim: To review the message of Ezekiel concerning personal responsibility for one's actions.

Life Aim: To feel accountability for personal acts of omission that damage community.

HISTORY:

Ezekiel's name meant "*God strengthens*." He was called from being a priest to serving as a prophet. As God's spokesman, he spoke to the Jewish exiles in the land of Babylon. It would have been much easier for Ezekiel to remain a priest, for priests were highly esteemed by the Jews, and priests could read the Law and learn everything they needed to know to do their work. However, prophets were usually despised and persecuted. Their assignments became very dangerous, for they never knew what their messages and orders, coming strictly from God, would entail. Ezekiel's prophetic ministry was greatly needed in Babylon because false prophets abounded and they were giving the Jewish people false hope of a quick deliverance.

Ezekiel lived at the same time as the prophet Jeremiah. But Ezekiel does not mention Jeremiah. Jeremiah was still in Judah while Ezekiel was with the exiles. He spoke to the exiles where the Jewish exiles gathered for prayer at the River Chebar (1:2). In Chapter 18, the Jewish exiles in Babylon were blaming their ancestors for the terrible judgment that had befallen them. So, Ezekiel explains that God judges people individually for their own sins, and not for someone else's sins; each person is responsible for his own sin.

LESSON:

Ezekiel 18:1-4 A False Proverb

18:1 The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying,— God reveals His message to Ezekiel again—the Word of The Lord comes to him again!

18:2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?— The Lord's Word to Ezekiel is an inquiry to the whole community in exile: What is the meaning by quoting and repeating this proverb in the land of Israel? "*The fathers have eaten sour grapes* (the fathers sinned), *and the children's teeth are set on edge?* (the children inherited the bitterness)"— children are punished for their father's sins? Some of the people of Judah believed they were being punished for the sins of their ancestors, not their own.

18:3 As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. The Lord

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

is saying that this proverb should have never been quoted in the land of Israel. He swears that there shall no longer be anyone among them to repeat this proverb in Israel again! Some of the people of Judah believed they were being punished for the sins of their ancestors, not their own. They were taking a proverb which had a measure of truth in it and distorted it into a falsehood.

18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. God through Ezekiel flatly refutes that misconception. Although we often suffer from the effects of sins committed by those who came before us, God does not punish us for someone else's sins; and we can't use their mistakes as an excuse for our sins. Each person is accountable to God for his or her actions. The fact that all souls are God's— (the son, with that of the father); it all boils down to only the soul that sins shall die!

Ezekiel 18:5-13 Two Test Cases

18:5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,— But if a man is righteous; doing what is just and right...

18:6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,— But if a man hasn't gone to the mountains to feast before the idols of Israel and worshiped them; if he hadn't seduced his neighbor's wife—neither had relations with a woman during her menstrual cycle...

18:7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;— But if a man hasn't oppressed anyone, but is a merciful creditor by not holding on to the items given to him in pledge by poor debtors—he restores back to the debtor the pledge received for a debt; if he is no robber, but gives food to the hungry and clothes to those in need...

18:8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,— But if a man does not lend at interest; exact usury or take any profit; stays away from sin—abstains from evil; and gives honest and fair judgment between man and man...

18:9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God. But if a man walks; follows by obeying the law; he is careful to observe God's ordinances, then that man is just; righteous and shall surely live. We do know that the righteous do die physically for many reasons: old age, martyrdom, or death in battle. However, the just die to live eternally, and the unjust, who never possessed spiritual life, shall perish physically and eternally. The just shall live no matter what the character of his parents or his children.

18:10 If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things,— But if a just man has a son that's a robber or murderer—prone to violence, and commits any of these misdeeds ...

18:11 And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife,— But if a just man has a son who fulfills none of his responsibilities; worship idols on the mountains and commits adultery...

18:12 Hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination,— But if a just man has a son who oppresses the poor and needy; robs his debtors by refusing to let them redeem what they have given him in pledge; and loves idols and worships them and thereby commits abomination...

18:13 Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him. But if a just man has a son who lends out his money at interest and takes increase: shall he then live? The answer is no—he shall not live. Why? - Because he practiced all these abominations himself. The son will surely die, for he was the one responsible for his own death; it was his own fault; his blood shall be upon his own head.

Ezekiel 18:31-32 A New Heart And A New Spirit

18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?— The key to Eternal Life and triumph over death is conversion. This involves repentance from sin (v.30, 31a) and receiving the new heart which God gives with a new spirit wrought by the Holy Spirit. Conversion and Regeneration can only be effected by the Holy Spirit. But the sinner is responsible to repent and to seek this new moral nature. The conclusion of this message was an invitation from the Lord. He says *"why will ye die, O house of Israel? Cast away from you all your transgressions; put them behind you."* The result will be a new heart and a new spirit.

18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. The Lord says this is not what I take pleasure in seeing; death of them that die without Him. This is your time while you yet have breath—to turn yourselves; repent and live!

SUMMARY:

¹The proverb that the children were suffering for the sins of their fathers had been circulating in Jerusalem and Babylon (**vv.1-2**). The Lord declares that each individual is accountable for his own sin. The people are incorrect in saying that judgment has taken place because of their father's sinfulness (**vv.3-4**). All individuals have an equal responsibility to God. It is only the one whose life is characterized by sin that will die.

To illustrate how God judged the sins of the people, Ezekiel gave three examples, (only the first two are discussed in this lesson), based on the righteousness of a father (**vv.5-9**); the sins of his son (v.10-13); and the righteousness of that son's own son (v.14-18). Now, we come to a hypothetical Jew: If a man is just; who kept God's Law, and he would not die. If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live eternally. Now, this just man has a wicked son. The son cannot have his life spared because of his just father. To prove this point Ezekiel named eight negative offenses along with eight positive virtues. The one responsible for his own death was the one who practiced all those abominations. His personal life is the factor that calls for his death (**vv.10-13**).

Positives

Negatives

does what is lawful and right v.5	eats on the mountains v.6
restores to the debtor his pledge v.7	lifts up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel v.6
gives his bread to the hungry v.7	defiles his neighbor's wife v.6
covers the naked with clothing v.7	approaches a woman during her impurity v.6
withdraws his hand from iniquity v.8	robs by violence v.7
executes true judgment between man and man v.8	oppresses anyone v.7
he walks in God's statutes v.9	exact usury v.8
keeps God's judgments faithfully v.9	takes any increase v.8

²Ezekiel's solution to the problem of inherited guilt is for each person to have a changed life (**vv.30-32**). The Lord's burden for His people is that they have life, not death. But life will not be forced upon anyone who wishes to remain in his sin. The individual must personally respond and repent to have life.

¹<http://www.family-times.net/commentary/a-false-proverb-refuted/>

²<http://www.family-times.net/commentary/turn-and-live/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>