



The Soul Who Sins Will Die

Sermon: Sunday 9:30 am – August 28th, 2011 – At Living Hope Lutheran Church

Gospel Reading:

Ezekiel 18:1-4; 25-30 New International Version 1984 (NIV1984) –

The Soul Who Sins Will Die

¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ²“What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel:

“ ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’?”

³ “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. ⁴ For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

²⁵ “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ²⁶ If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. ²⁷ But if the wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. ²⁸ Because he considers all of the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. ²⁹ Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?

³⁰ Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.



Sermon: The Soul Who Sins Will Die

Pentecost-11 Sunday – 9:30 am - August 28th, 2011 – Pastor Todd Goldschmidt

Modern medical science is amazing, isn't it? While physicians and surgeons don't have all the answers to every disease, sickness or injury it's remarkable how far they come in recent decades. The strides they've made in diagnosing, treating, preventing and sometimes even curing once dreaded illnesses is truly astonishing. Many of us are the beneficiaries of the advancements that have been made in the health care field—me included. One of the latest technological trends is “micro surgery” that allows doctors to perform procedures far less invasively than in the past, including delicate heart surgeries. Even heart transplants are not all that uncommon anymore. More and more, patients are recovering from maladies that would've killed them in years past. Increasingly, individuals are given a miraculous “second chance” and a whole new lease on life.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” David prayed in Psalm 51—and we sing after the sermon in the liturgy of “The Common Service.” Through His prophet Ezekiel, the Sovereign LORD says to each one of us this morning: “get a new heart and a new spirit.” Only His Holy Spirit can work that miracle in us through the gospel in Word & sacrament.

At the time Ezekiel penned the words of our text, the children of Israel had been carried off into captivity in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. By the rivers of Babylon, they sat down and they wept as they recalled their many blessings in the land of Zion. But they also suffered from a serious case of denial. They believed that they were paying the price for their parents' sins. Their common proverb put it this way: “The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.” These exiles refused to take individual responsibility for their predicament, preferring, instead, to blame it on their parents. They didn't understand that their own rebellion was driving a wedge between them and their Creator. In self-righteous indignation, they claimed that God was unjust; that He wasn't playing fair with them the way He should've been doing.

Self-righteousness indignation differs from righteous indignation. When we witness something that is morally reprehensible we're totally justified in being offended, and even expressing our feelings by our words and actions. Jesus Himself displayed righteous indignation, for example, when—on two occasions—He drove the merchants and money-changers out of the temple in Jerusalem. He expressed His angry at their misuse of God's house in a forceful, passionate way. We feel righteous indignation when we observe a callous disregard for the standards of God's will in our contemporary society in matters such as sexuality, abortion, injustice toward the poor, or the seemingly complete absence of any ethical standards within the financial industry. In such cases, it's legitimate for us to feel justly angry at such blatant displays of immorality.

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Page 2 of 4



Self-righteous indignation, on the other hand, is a completely different animal. Self-righteous indignation doesn't arise out of seeing something that is completely at odds with God's will. Rather, it rears-its ugly head when we develop our own standard of righteous and then judge our life's experiences by that standard rather than by the standard of perfection that God established. So it happens, that when things don't go our way, according to our standards, we get mad at God for not giving us what we think we deserve or for not working out a situation or relationship issue for us they way we want Him to. "What have you done for me lately Lord," we complain.

While doing research for one of his books, famous American scientist and science fiction writer David Brin studied addiction. He discovered that even more powerful and prevalent than drug, alcohol or sexual addictions is the negative behavioral pattern of addiction to self-righteousness. It feels so good to be self-righteous because you can elevate yourself by putting others down. Calling it "the paradigm of self-reinforcement," Brin writes: "Any truly honest person will admit that the state *feels good*. It's the feeling of knowing, with subjective certainty, that you are *right* and your opponents are deeply, despicably *wrong*. Sanctimony, or a sense of [self] righteous outrage, can feel so intense and delicious that many people actively seek to return to it again and again" (<http://www.davidbrin.com/addiction>). Sadly, we're just as guilty of such self-righteous indignation as the exiled Israelites—even blaming our problems on God just like they did (Ez. 18:25)

Blaming God or others for our sins, minimizing our culpability when we're caught with our hand in the cookie jar, is as old as earthly time. Adam and Eve did it after they ate of the forbidden fruit. So it should come as no surprise to us that when we look long and hard into the mirror of God's moral law, that we see Satan himself staring right back at us in the lies we tell and double-lives we live. It's not easy for any one of us to openly and honestly admit our sins and weaknesses, our shortcomings and our failures to ourselves, much less to the LORD or those we've sinned against. We're afraid of looking bad, of feeling small and ashamed, of appearing weak. Our sinful pride stands in the way of so much joy and healing that could be ours if we'd just humble ourselves in the sight of the LORD and fess up to our moral imperfection and sincerely apologize to those we've hurt because of it. David put it this way: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 51).

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Page 3 of 4



Out of love for the Israelites, “the Sovereign LORD” commissioned Ezekiel to call them to repent of their sin of self-righteous indignation and to stop wallowing in their miserable self-pity. He said: “every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.” It doesn’t matter who your father was, how your mother comported herself, or what your grandparents did for a living when it comes to your standing before the righteous Judge. Each individual person must stand before Him as a beggar before a king, with nothing in one’s hand to bring except a passel of sins and a contrite heart—a heart that trusts in Jesus alone as its Savior from sin and the Lord of its life. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [faith in] me”—period. In Jesus, the Judge’s justice was satisfied for every single sinner who has or will ever live. Paul wrote, “God made [Jesus], who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.” Friends, if God gave us what we deserved we’d all spend eternity in hell.

So whose ways are unjust—God’s or ours? We know the answer. And so God says to us today what He said to His exiled people of old: “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!” When we do, God graciously gives us something we could never accomplish on our own: that “new heart and a new spirit” that He demands! With that new heart and spirit comes a whole new perspective on life. Jesus took all our self-righteous indignation and self-deception with Him to the cross and died for them so that we can be free from such delusions. In the “washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit” that took place at our baptism, we became God’s adopted children. The Bible says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come”! Like newborn babies, we crave the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word so that by it we can grow up in our salvation now that we’ve tasted that the LORD is good! In Christ, we have a second chance! Don’t waste it! Amen.

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Page 4 of 4