

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Pastor Steve

Proper 21 A

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### **Let's Be Real: It's Time to Repent**

If you think things are bad now, just wait a few years. It's going to get worse. Many more will die. You won't be able to go back to your home. The place where you worship and that entire city will soon be destroyed. There won't be anything to go back to even if you could. The prophet Ezekiel had a lot of bad news to share with God's people in Babylon. The king of Babylon had ripped them away from the Promised Land. He moved them to Babylon so they couldn't rebel and cause more trouble back in Israel. And Ezekiel had to tell them that more punishment was coming.

These Israelites in Babylon were not happy with LORD about it. To them it felt like a punishment they didn't deserve. They kept repeating a saying to let God know how they felt: "The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Basically, "It's not our fault. It's the people who came before us. It's the people who are still sinning back home. The LORD is wrong for what he's doing to us." They were having a hard time with what was going on. More than that, they were missing God's personal call for each of them to repent of their own sins.

Let's be real. If you're not hearing the LORD's call to turn away from your sin right now, I don't think you're paying attention. The LORD is putting change into your life so you can't miss it. Have you been forced to think about disease and death, about the value of life in our society, about all the problems that come from not knowing what's going to happen next? That's God shaking you out of spiritual apathy and laziness.

Change was meant to force these Israelites to listen but they hadn't. God had taken them from their homes and made them foreigners. Their normal way of life couldn't be the same in that place. This was their chance to start over in the right way. So, the fact that they had a saying to prove how God was doing wrong, is crazy, right? They go further the wrong way! The only way they'd understand was if God spelled it out slowly for them, The one who sins is the one who will die. God speaks truth to slow hearts. Each individual had better check themselves for signs of death.

Then things get scary. God goes off on them. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? What do you think Israelites? If someone chooses to live in sin, they'll pay for it. If someone recognizes their problems and chooses to turn away from sin, I'll let them live. Yet the Israelites say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? You can hear God's anger with these people who seemed to care less about going down the path of sin.

This is the kind of conversation you don't want to be around for. You can hear the anger with a purpose and reason behind it. You and I rightly get nervous to read through what God said two thousand years ago, to a people who are long dead. God was sick of their complaining and excuses. They'd ignored his warning and gone down the wrong path. It was time for them to admit they'd been doing things wrong, but they didn't. And God had enough.

Let's be real, we wouldn't put up with it either. How long could you last going the wrong way? What if your gps wasn't reliable? You put in the address and sends you somewhere else. You'd be late for meetings. You'd miss appointments. You'd be lost. You'd be mad enough to throw your phone out the window. And only if you're a patient person, would it last more than a few days. It's why there isn't an average gps. They have to be right all the time or you'd be infuriated over going the wrong way.

You've got high standards for your phone but how about for your spiritual life? When's the last time you've done a spiritual self-check to look and see whether or not you're on God's path? Have you turned to get back on God's path in the last few weeks or months or years or ever? The mentality that the LORD is good and gracious and he'll forgive later is not part of God's path. Sure, it's easier to see when others are on the wrong path but looking at them won't help you. Or maybe you've lost the desire to be on God's path because he hasn't done anything you wanted, so why bother living for him? Just like these Israelites, you and I are way too comfortable spending time on the wrong path, the one that leads to death. **Let's be real, it's time to repent.**

God is calling out to you too: 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. He's tired of your excuses and complaints. The word used here is more like "throw off." Get those sins far away. He doesn't want to watch you get any closer to spiritual death.

When there are the times that you come face to face with your real self, you know it's true. You know your failures all too well. The regret keeps you up. The guilt crushes your spirit. You try to hide how much it bothers you to be on the wrong path, but you can't hide it from yourself. You want a new heart and a new spirit because you're sick of going the wrong way too.

I think it's why they came up with Mario assist mode. I think everyone was sick of people going the wrong way. Can you imagine being a video game designer and watching people get stuck on easy levels? If you've played video games you know the other side and how frustrating it is to miss something that's right in front of your face. So the designers added this detail in the newest games. They put an arrow above Mario's head

pointing in the right direction. You can't ignore it. You don't need to question it. It always guides you the right way.

That's what the LORD does for you. Who don't deserve it. Who can't do it on your own. He gives you a new heart and a new spirit. A new heart and a new spirit that change everything for you. **Let's be real: it's time to repent** and you do. You turn off of the wrong path and back onto God's. You look for opportunities to admit sin. You trust that you're forgiven because God promises you are. The right path becomes where you want to be. Your heart and spirit are refreshed as you return to the LORD and walk in his path toward life.

This new heart and new spirit hear the LORD's words in a different way. For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live! You hear it now. God's grace. God's care. His concern for you, for all people. He calls out to you like a good father watching over his kids. He gives you every reason to turn and be back on his path. He wants you to live.

This new heart and new spirit let you live, for real. Repentance becomes something to cherish and not something to avoid. You don't offer just lip service, you follow through and turn from sin. And the LORD blesses you. He watches as your life changes on the right path. He keeps you motivated through his promise of forgiveness finished. **It's time to repent**, to live the life God shows you is good.

Ezekiel didn't have only bad news for God's people. He called them to repent because God would bring them back home. He'd send their descendants back on the path to the Promise Land. He'd keep them there long enough for a baby to be born. One who would live his entire life on God's path. One who would take the real punishment for sin on the cross, for the whole world. One who would come back to life and offer real life, free and full to people who can't do it on their own. One who gives us a

new heart and a new spirit. Listen to the LORD right now. **It's time to repent**, to turn back to Jesus. Amen.