

To God be the Glory, great things he has done for you and for me. Amen.

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 a 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 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. ³¹ 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? ³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live! **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

I would guess that most of you would agree that parenting is hard. You want your children to do the right thing but it takes time and patience to train them in the way they should act and behave.

Our relationship with God is much like that relationship between father and child – we call God our heavenly Father and through faith we are children of God – part of the family of God. God trains us through his Word and disciplines us when we need it. There is no one more loving or more patient than God. We have a great example of that as we consider the Old Testament and especially as we consider the sermon text before us this morning.

In this portion of scripture, Ezekiel, God’s representative, is reaching out to the Children of Israel – God’s chosen people – with a **“Call to Repentance.”** Obviously they have done something wrong and so first, **“They are led to recognize their sin and guilt,”** and then **“They are led to rely on God’s grace.”**

I. Ezekiel was an Old Testament prophet of God who was serving God’s people in the land of Babylon. The Children of Israel were in exile in Babylon – in other words, they had been captured by the Babylonians and taken away from their homeland to serve as servants and slaves in this foreign country.

You might wonder why God had allowed this to happen to his children – his chosen people. Well, it was because they had shifted the object of their faith from God to the temple in Jerusalem.

They believed as long as the temple was standing, they were saved. A lot of people think the same way today – as long as they are a member of a church they are saved, whether they ever set foot in that church or not – people get caught up in thinking that their membership saves them.

The Children of Israel knew that they had sinned in some way but they thought that God was being too harsh with them. That's why they complained by quoting this proverb, **“The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.”** It was their way of saying, “God, why are you punishing us for the sins of our fathers?” They knew they were sinful but they thought the previous generation was far worse. Their fathers may have deserved to be sent into exile but certainly not them!

God's reply was that their argument had no basis. He created each one of them, knew them personally, and was judging them on their own merit. It had nothing to do with the previous generation, even though it was a wicked generation. The standard for judgment was simple, **“The soul that sins is the one that will die.”** Why? Because sin separates us from God and God is the only one who can take care of that sin and so if you don't have faith in God you are shifting your focus away from the only one that can bring you forgiveness and life and that's exactly what the people were doing.

That's not what the Children of Israel still wanted to hear. They thought they could argue their way out of being accountable for their sin and so they accused God of not being fair. That didn't work either because God's Word is clear and has always been clear that the wages of sin is death. No matter what God did, the people complained because they didn't want to take a close look in the mirror and admit what they really saw.

In many ways we are like the Children of Israel. We don't like to hear about our sins and when someone might point out one of our sins, we have all kinds of excuses and arguments. It wasn't as bad as what someone else did or everyone else is doing it so it must be okay or quit picking on me and on and on and on. We don't like it when our children or grandchildren do that so why should we think it's acceptable to act that way toward God?

So, does God want to bring judgment on us? With this harsh message you might think so, but God doesn't want to condemn us. If we insist on it he will, but God asks the people, why do you want to die? Why are you so stubborn? Then he goes on, **“For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”**

God wants us to see our sins, repent, and look to him for forgiveness. That is what his love and grace are all about. He sent his Son to pay for all of our sins so that when we acknowledge them we can receive the assurance that they are forgiven. Repent and live – don't let your stubbornness bring you condemnation. Rely on God's grace.

II. God's grace is his perfect love for us imperfect human beings and goes beyond anything we could ever do. Take a look at God's patience for example. God's patience spans years, decades, even centuries. This section of scripture might seem pretty harsh but it shows us God's love for his people. If God were a harsh, unloving God, he would have wiped the Children of Israel out as soon as they started complaining a few days after leaving Egypt but he patiently worked with

them throughout the generations, continuously calling them to repentance and blessing them when they followed him. This cycle of belief, turning away from God, discipline, repentance, and deliverance repeated itself quite a few times though out the Old Testament. It is a great illustration of God's undeserved love and patience with his people.

As parents I would hope we raise our children in much the same way. Patiently working with them and training them about what is right and wrong and disciplining them when they need it. This is hard work and takes a lot of time and patience. God has taken so much more time with us and shown us so much more patience than we will ever show our children. That's because we seem to have such a hard time following God's direction. We can only do that with God's help. Only God's grace can change our hearts and help us turn from our sins. That's what it means to repent – not only to be sorry for what we have done but to turn away from the temptation that leads us to commit that sin and to look to Christ to help us.

God's Word guides us to live according to his will. We have everything we need for life and salvation in the scriptures. Don't reject the word or ignore it because you don't like what it says or it doesn't agree with your lifestyle. The Children of Israel did that time and time again and it just brought them so much sorrow and for many of them it brought judgment. Rather follow the direction of God given through the words of Ezekiel, **“Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.”**

God has called us to repent and as a result of our sorrow over our sins he has given each one of us a new heart and a new spirit. May we always thank God for being our gracious Father in heaven. May we always thank God for his patient and loving discipline. May we always thank God for his gift of faith, life and salvation that has brought us into his family and may we always look to our gracious God to guide us in life and to take us home to heaven someday to be with him forever. Amen.