

Sermon for September 27, 2026 – The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 EHV

Theme: Repent and Live!

- 1) God's judgments are just.
- 2) He mercifully desires your salvation.

The word of the LORD came to me. ²What do you mean, you who keep repeating this proverb concerning the soil of Israel, "Fathers eat sour grapes, and their sons' teeth are set on edge"? ³As surely as I live, declares the LORD God, you will never again use this proverb in Israel. ⁴Indeed, all souls are mine. The soul of the father is mine just like the soul of the son. The soul who sins is the one who will die... ²⁵But you say, "The LORD's way is not fair." Listen now, house of Israel. Is it my way that is not fair? Is it not your ways that are not fair? ²⁶If a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and practices unrighteousness, he will die because of it. Because of the unrighteousness that he has practiced, he will die. ²⁷But if a wicked man turns from his wickedness that he has done and practices justice and righteousness, he will preserve his life. ²⁸Because he has seen and turned away from all the rebellious acts that he had committed, he will surely live, and he will not die. ²⁹But the house of Israel says, "The LORD's way is not fair." Is it really my ways that are not fair, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not fair? ³⁰Therefore, I will judge each one of you according to his ways, O house of Israel, declares the LORD God. Repent and turn away from all your rebellious acts, so that you will not set out a stumbling block that makes you guilty. ³¹Throw off from yourselves all your rebellious actions by which you have rebelled, and obtain a new heart and a new spirit for yourselves. Why should you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the LORD God. So repent and live!

"Mom, why am I getting in trouble? She hit me first!" Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, humans love passing the blame when confronted over a sin.^a We convince ourselves that we are being treated unfairly, that we are the victims.

We not only react this way when people confront us, but we do it with God as well. "It's not my fault I get drunk all the time. My Dad drank when I was a kid. I inherited my problem from him."

Still worse, our sinful hearts question God's justice when He calls us to repent. "Why is the pastor talking to me about gossiping? My sin is nothing compared to that of Christians living together outside of marriage. He should talk to all those people, not me."

Oh, how sad this is. Why? Because the whole reason God confronts you when you sin is so you can **repent and live!** 1) God's judgments are just. 2) He mercifully desires your salvation.

Part One: God's judgments are just.

The prophet Ezekiel, who wrote our sermon text, was one of the Jews exiled to Babylon when Jehoiachin, king of Judah, surrendered to the army of Nebuchadnezzar.^b This was all in fulfillment of what the LORD had long prophesied through prophets concerning Judah's idolatry. Time after time, the LORD warned the Jews that He was going to punish them if they did not turn back to Him in repentance and faith. Time after time they refused, so God fulfilled His threat.

The exiled Jews thought God's judgment was unfair, saying to each other: *"Fathers eat sour grapes, and their sons' teeth are set on edge."* Or, to put it another way, "Our fathers sinned, and we are suffering for it." They quoted this proverb against the Lord, claiming that it didn't matter what they did because God was going to punish them anyway. They charged God with being unjust.

Even though God didn't have to answer the people's charge against Him, He responded with a call to repentance. Why? Because the LORD loved His people and didn't want them to die in their sin. Therefore, He commanded Ezekiel to say:

³As surely as I live, declares the LORD God, you will never again use this proverb in Israel. ⁴Indeed, all souls are mine. The soul of the father is mine just like the soul of the son. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

God's ways are completely just. He does not condemn children for the sins of their fathers. He punishes each person for his own sins. Each person has been born with their own sinful nature. Each person commits their own sins. Your parents' faith in Jesus will not save you if you do not believe. Neither will God hold your parents' sins against you if they don't believe in Jesus for forgiveness, but you do. God judges each person based on their own relationship with Him in Christ.^c

Sadly, many people think God should practice righteousness by association. The Jews, for example, felt that because of the promise the LORD made to righteous Abraham, He had to bless them regardless of how they lived.

And aren't we tempted to think the same? "I'm a lifelong Lutheran - born and raised in the Church. I don't need to go to Bible class because I learned this stuff already. I don't need some newbie pointing out my sins, telling me how to live. I don't have to worry about such things because I am a Lutheran."

But such trust in heritage is no different than what the Jews did when they trusted their ancestry to save them. God does not look at such things. He looks at the heart.

Therefore, the LORD continues: *²⁵But you say, "The LORD's way is not fair." Listen now, house of Israel. Is it my way that is not fair? Is it not your ways that are not fair?*

The Jews in Babylon thought they were suffering unfairly for the sins of their fathers. But the truth was that their current idolatry and impenitence were reason enough to warrant God's judgment. His ways were not unjust. Their ways were unjust. They were the ones who thought that children

should be rewarded based on what their fathers did. They were the ones who thought that good deeds should make up for unrepentant sin.

And aren't we also tempted to think this way? "I am a good person. I pray all the time and help at church. Don't these things outweigh my minor sins of gossip, insults, or being slightly judgmental?"

Listen to what the Lord says about His justice: *²⁶If a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and practices unrighteousness, he will die because of it. Because of the unrighteousness that he has practiced, he will die.*

It doesn't matter how righteous you were in the past: if you sin and refuse to repent, your lifetime of prayers, daily Bible readings, and grand church offerings would all be meaningless. They don't change the fact that you're rebelling against God.

Do you now understand why the LORD takes living in any kind of impenitent sin so seriously, even if we consider it minor? Do you now understand why a fellow Christian might confront you over such a sin? He does it out of love - not wanting you to forfeit your salvation through impenitence.

But what about the opposite case? What if a lifelong irreligious, unrighteous, and abusive man repents, asking the LORD to forgive and help him change his ways?

Regarding such a man, the Lord says: *²⁷But if a wicked man turns from his wickedness that he has done and practices justice and righteousness, he will preserve his life. ²⁸Because he has seen and turned away from all the rebellious acts that he had committed, he will surely live, and he will not die.*

Yes, the one who turns to the LORD in genuine repentance - that is, the one who, after considering all his ways, is terrified and sorrowful that he sinned against the LORD, confesses his sins, and trusts the LORD's promise to forgive him for Jesus' sake - such a man will not die but live. And because the LORD forgives him completely for Christ's sake, he will want to live for God's glory in the peace of His forgiveness.

You see, real repentance looks different from what the world imagines. Even though faith alone saves, faith is never alone. The man who says he is sorry but refuses to give up his sins does not receive the forgiveness Christ won for him; his sins are retained. Why? Because his desire to hold on to his sins proves he isn't truly repentant - choosing them over Christ. But the truly repentant man will give up his sins for Christ's sake. He is forgiven - not because he gave up his sins. No, he is forgiven because Christ paid for his sins through His cross and clothed him with His righteousness by faith. The peace of forgiveness moves the new spirit God places in this man at his baptism to fight against his sinful nature and to love his LORD.

Understand, however, that such a man will not be perfect. As long as he walks this earth, he will have a sinful nature that will fight against his new desires, causing him to stumble. But the LORD

promises to be with that man, picking him up when he falls so he can continue to live in the peace of Christ's forgiveness, as the Apostle John once wrote:

My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.^d

Yes, God's ways are certainly superior to our ways. According to humanity, your good deeds must outweigh your bad deeds to be saved. God's justice is different. He doesn't put our deeds on a scale; He laid our sins on His Son. It is finished: Jesus paid for your sins in full – the righteous for the unrighteous. It is finished: you are fully reconciled with God. Repent and receive this gift as your very own through faith in Jesus, because He mercifully desires your salvation. He desires the salvation of all.

Part Two: He mercifully desires your salvation

Therefore, the LORD exhorts His people:

Repent and turn away from all your rebellious acts, so that you will not set out a stumbling block that makes you guilty. ³¹Throw off from yourselves all your rebellious actions by which you have rebelled, and obtain a new heart and a new spirit for yourselves. Why should you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the LORD God. So repent and live!

God earnestly desires us to repent and live. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The damnation of anyone saddens God immensely. Why? Because He sent His only begotten Son into the world to win the righteousness we need to stand before Him and pay for the sins of all.^e Because Jesus did that, no one is damned for lack of payment. And yet many are condemned to hell. Why? Because they refuse to repent of their sins and receive God's gift of salvation through faith.

This is why God earnestly urges: *Repent and turn away from all your rebellious acts, so that you will not set out a stumbling block that makes you guilty.*

Pet sins cause the downfall of many. What are they? They are the sins people want to cling to instead of giving up, sins that people excuse away so they can continue in them. God calls such pet sins "rebellion" – stumbling blocks that shipwreck a person's faith because they want to have their own way instead of conforming to God's way. This is why God says:

³¹Throw off from yourselves all your rebellious actions by which you have rebelled, and obtain a new heart and a new spirit for yourselves.

Yes, we all need a new heart: one that is not selfish, but loves the Lord and His ways. We all need a new spirit: one that rejoices in the LORD, His salvation, and His teachings. But a new heart and

spirit are not something we can create within ourselves. They can only be obtained from the Lord through Word and Sacrament, which is why we pray with King David:

“Create in me a pure heart, O God. Renew an unwavering spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Sustain me with a willing spirit.”^f

Do you know how the Lord answers such a prayer? Ezekiel tells us:

This is what the LORD God says... ¹⁹ I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from their body and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ so that they will walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and carry them out. They will be my people, and I will be their God.^g

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God’s ways are just, and He mercifully desires your salvation. Therefore, repent and live. Daily confess your sins to the LORD and your need for His salvation. Then trust the LORD’s absolution: for Christ’s sake, He has forgiven all your sins. He has adopted you as His child through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, when He poured out His Spirit over you and clothed you in His Son’s righteousness by faith.^h Through that same sacrament He gave you a new heart and a new spirit – one that confesses with the Apostle Paul: *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*ⁱ Amen.

^a Cf. Genesis 3:12

^b cf. 2 Kings 24:10-17

^c cf. Ezekiel 18:5-20

^d Cf. 1 John 2:1-2 EHV

^e Cf. John 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:19

^f Psalm 51:10-12 EHV

^g Ezekiel 11:17a, 19-20 EHV

^h Galatians 3:26-27 EHV

ⁱ Galatians 2:20 EHV