



### God's Judgment Is Just and Fair

**Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32** *The word of the LORD came to me: "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'? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. 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. [...]*

*"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? 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. 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. Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. 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? 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. 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!"*

We are all sticklers when it comes to fairness and justice. Especially when it comes to ourselves. From little on we are experts at measuring the size of the pizza slice and calculating the mass of the ice cream scoop down to the nearest microgram, and if ours is any smaller than brother's or sister's or the previous customer's was, we cry foul, "That's not fair!" We're the same when it comes to the punishments and disciplines that we receive. If both of us get pulled over for going 70 miles per hour in a 55 zone, but you get a ticket and I escape with only a warning, you'd complain, "That's not fair!"

In Ezekiel's day the people of Judah were in a complaining mood towards the Lord. In fact, their griping was so pervasive they had even developed a proverb to summarize their case: "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," meaning the fathers and forefathers had sinned and made mistakes but now it's their children who have to pay for it and endure their punishment, and that's not fair. We shouldn't be too quick to judge them for having that perception. They were correct that the sins of generations past had put them and their nation on the precipice of disaster. Their forefathers had rejected God; refused to listen to his prophets; they'd embraced idolatry and made military alliances that God had forbidden; and now King Nebuchadnezzar's army was poised to obliterate their capital city because of their constant rebellion.

But let's admit that people today are not so much different from the people of Judah. We too like to complain that someone else is to blame for all our problems and the angry, rebellious, and ungrateful state we're in. Maybe a grandparent was addicted to gambling and so the family struggled in unnecessary poverty or perhaps someone was born into a single-parent home or had a bum teacher or an older cousin who was a bad influence. While there's no denying that all such circumstances impact and shape us, the holy God never gives anyone an excuse, a free pass, to sin. Rather, it's the complete opposite. He tells Ezekiel, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." From God's perspective every person belongs to him and is immediately responsible and accountable

for himself or herself in the present moment, nor do we get a pass based on our past faithfulness and goodness. If a righteous person (that's God's way of talking about a believer) turns from the Lord and does evil, they risk forfeiting their soul and being condemned forever with the ungodly.

In all their complaining and blaming, the people of Israel conveniently overlooked one crucial thing: that God wanted them and he wants all people to repent right now. They looked at their nation's history and their current military predicament and said, "What's the use! There's no point in loving and serving this God since he's just going to destroy us anyway!" They used their assumption of God's injustice as an excuse to harden their hearts against him and refuse to repent and change their sinful ways and their national trajectory. So, in the end it was their own decision that brought about their own ruin. Their own stubbornness that turned it into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But that's not what God intended, not why he was doing this, why he had brought the Babylonian battle lines up to Jerusalem's gates. As always, the LORD, the faithful God of grace, was doing his utmost to give them one last chance to repent, to give up their sins and rebellious ways and trust that he wanted to be merciful to them. The perfect God who cannot lie, says in black and white that he does not desire the death and condemnation of ANYONE. Some 600 years after this he would give his own Son, Jesus, to die on a cross surrounded by his enemies and pierced through for the sins of all and suffering in place of all people so that the whole world may know and see God's proof that he desires nothing more than for all sinners to run to his mercy, embrace his free forgiveness, and live with him forever. That is nothing like what our sins deserve and our misdeeds have earned! That is totally unfair! That is grace.

*Prayer: Merciful Father in heaven, forgive me for all the times I make excuses for my sins and waywardness and the problems in my life. Help me remember that you are in control. You know my weaknesses and you look on me with mercy and forgiveness and love for Jesus' sake. Moved by your grace empower me to quit my sin and live new for you. Amen.*