**Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 (ESV)**

**1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? **3**  As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. **4** Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. **25**  “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **26**  When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. **27** Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. **28** Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **29** Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **30** “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. **31**  Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **32**  For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”

**“Time For Something New”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. If Jeremiah the prophet was in Israel looking from the inside out, then Ezekiel was at about the same time a prophet looking at Israel from the outside in. He was part of the second round of exiles swept away to the country of Babylon in 597 b.c. In just a little more than a decade later Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple would fall to the Babylonians in 586 b.c. Of course, before this time of great destruction God was always trying to save His people. Ezekiel would speak repentance to those near and far, but even while suffering few hoped in God’s new way of life that came for them.

The same old story happens to stick with sinful humanity in every time and place. God sends the preaching of His Word to save us from sin, death and the Devil. However, when self-deception no longer works because sin is too great, we quickly shift to some other self-righteousness to stand behind. It is what Adam did in the garden after God exposed His fall into sin. It is what the old Adam continues to do in every person still today. Generalities get us off the hook, but God deals in specifics because “the Devil” is always sin the details. The task is to save sinners so God’s Word comes from the outside looking into our lives. Just as His Word desires to dwell in each life so all can look out at the sacrifice of love made in Jesus Christ. God tires of the same old story and wants to give what is new.

“What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.” God saw the excuses sinners were trying to stand behind. Israel as a nation was losing ground to Babylon. Yet, none took personal responsibility for the situation. The saying going around only pointed the finger at the previous generation. Sour fruit came from bad decisions of the past making it worse for everyone else. Why blame those at the present who were only bearing the sins of their fathers? In order to take away such an excuse God declared, “Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.” Claiming to be creator of all, none could escape the true reason for judgment. It came from the same old sinful nature.

No one else could be more honest with His Word. God wants to get straight to the point. His Will is to save and why the Father sends His Son. However, the old Adam likes to play the “blame” game. It is the most natural and common way we shift our sin unto someone else. The TV has only made us better spectators to others that have caused our problems. Rather than dealing with the specifics in my life, we opt for generalizations that go off somewhere else. The sour grapes surely do not come from here. God says otherwise. As Lutheranism 101 states,

“Personally being accountable, accepting guilt, and submitting to God’s judgment—that is when we find it far preferable to shift responsibility, find an excuse, and avoid confronting the real source of the bad and the wrong: sin” (32).

Only God is honest enough to hold up the truth. It is the same old story, with the same old sin, and same old judgment because we still all die the same old death. Thank God, He is the honest one who saves by His Word. Without Him, we would keep playing the blame game that never gets us anywhere.

“Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.” God was aware how Israel liked to fight back. They wanted to prove their righteousness, which was far from right. If no one else was to blame, then they just put it back on God. His Way stood in the way. It was just not fair. Even more of a reason why the Lord made repentance based on faith in Him. Only His Word could turn them away from the old story of their sin. The road they were on was a dead end. They were just too shortsighted to see it. God was patiently warning His people. He was bearing with them to the end. The strength of Israel was in their weakness to hear what God said for the Psalmist declared, “The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.” Psalms 147:6 (ESV)

No one else could be more patient with self-righteous people. Rather than turning to our strength, looking to our ways, and the rights we deserve. The Father promises to make us righteous by His Son. Jesus “called out” the Pharisees because they would not submit to baptism. In other words, they would not submit to their need for the Savior standing right before them. This is the call of baptism into Jesus. The Spirit of this watery word turns us to back to Him day after day. God puts up with our accusations against Him Word because He knows our ways will be a dead end. To refuse repentance for my life is to refuse the redeeming Word Jesus has promised for me. As Luther states, “If you live in repentance, therefore, you are walking in Baptism, which not only announces this new life but also produces, begins, and promotes it”(Tappert 445:75). Beyond human morality or good person talk, turning from self to confess Jesus as Savior is salvation. This is the promise built on God’s patients. He “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” All who believe this righteousness has the God who binds Himself to our lives to save them.

“Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.” God provides the means for change. It would not come by the creativity, strength, or conviction of Israel. The best they had was the same old story. This is what led to their destruction by Babylon. Sinners wanted to “live in” their sins. Most had no desire for repentance because it meant God’s Word was right and everyone else wrong. To cast away sin would allow for something new to come into the life of every person in Israel. Their ways were not the center of attention for that would not change the death sentence. Later, Ezekiel proclaimed how God would work His grace saying, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26-27).

No one else could be more loving than to give new hearts and new minds. What everyone believes impossible God promises to make possible. He turns sinners into saints by way of the cross. God provides the means for change within His Word and Sacrament. As St. Jerome has said,

“…the mind must not fail to believe in the promised blessing and give way to despair; and the soul once marked out for perdition must not refuse to apply remedies on the ground that its wounds are past curing” (Ancient Christian Commentary 84).

None baptized into Christ is to imagine their sin more powerful than the Savior Jesus. None need fall to the trick that addiction, distress, fears, or whatever sin in life holds the answer to save. God is at work in our lives by the promise of His Son who has suffered all our ways to give by His one solution made right for every sinner. Such love of Jesus does change hearts and minds to look to Him in life for what He says. He let us face death with hope in Him who has risen from the dead. St. Paul gives the answer against the sour grapes saying, “Hold fast to the word of life.” It is this life that we hear, receive, and who stands on high. Every knee is to bow at the Name of Jesus. God tires of the same old story and wants to give what is new. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.