

“Repent and Live!”

(Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 – Pentecost 19 – October 4, 2026)

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 – ¹*The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,* ²*“What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? ³As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. ⁴Behold, 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.... ²⁵Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? ²⁶When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. ²⁷Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. ²⁸Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? ³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord GOD. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!”*

Dear Redeemed in Christ Jesus:

When a person is faced with the ugliness of his guilt, there is a tendency to make excuses, to try to pass the blame. This has been true from the time sin entered the world. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam explained to God: *“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”* In other words, the fault lay with Eve, and maybe even God, who had given such a wife to influence Adam. Eve explained: *“The devil made me do it”* (Genesis 3:12-13). To this day, their children tend to make excuses and pass the blame for sin. Our sinful nature proudly seeks to protect its honor.

In our text, God demands that every sinner accept responsibility for his sin and repent. It is not God’s will that anyone die in sin, but that he confess his sin and receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus. God’s message today is simple: **“Repent and Live!”**

1) God demands that every sinner repent

First, God demands that every sinner repent. At the time of our text, the people of Israel were living in denial, passing the blame, not taking responsibility for sin. God asks: *“What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The*

fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?" (vs. 2). They mean: "The punishment we're getting is the fault of our fathers; we don't deserve this!"

As Ezekiel spoke God's Word to them, they were in captivity in the land of Babylon. God was calling them to repent of their sin that landed them there. They had turned away from God to false gods. They had been like an adulterous spouse turning to other lovers. Through Ezekiel's prophecy, God dashed any hopes they had of returning home to find Jerusalem and the temple intact. These would be destroyed because of their idolatry. It was a slap in the face to show them the seriousness of their sin and lead them to repent.

But even now, they feel their captivity is the fault of others before them. Oh yes, it was the fault of King Manasseh who, 40 years earlier had done abominations and led Judah into sin with his idols (2 Kings 21:11). Then the grandfathers and fathers of these poor Israelites had been willing to follow the lead of Manasseh and other evil kings after him. So they complain: "It's not fair! It's as though our fathers ate bad grapes, and we are the ones whose teeth feel bad for it. We're not like our fathers; we deserve better treatment!"

Don't we hear the old argument all over here, the passing of blame? A person can spend his whole life denying personal responsibility for sin. A child may try to excuse himself by saying: "He did it first!" And we remind him gently: "Yes, but you did it too." As a youth, he may try to clear his conscience by saying: "Well, everyone was doing it!" And we remind him, "Yes, but God's Word still says it is wrong." As an adult he may rationalize, "It's my father or mother coming out in me! I was born this way. It was my upbringing. I got my bad habits from them. I can't help my temper, my laziness, my substance abuse, my immorality... I'm a product of circumstances beyond my control." God says: "Yes, but *you* are the soul who has sinned."

When faced with the ugliness of our sin, do we feel the urge to defend our honor by making excuses and passing the blame on someone else, anyone else? To what extent might we go? Do we become desperate enough even to try pinning our problem on God?

As God points out, the people are really blaming Him as they say: "*The way of the Lord is not fair*" (vs. 25). Isn't a lot of our sin rooted in questioning God's justice? "God, why did You let those hardships come into my life? It led to my breaking point. That is why I strayed in sin. God, the people You put in my life influenced me. You have something to do with the way I am. I can't help it. I'm really not so bad. God, how about You?"

In His righteous anger, the Lord thunders against this self-righteous, self-excusing, God-blaming spirit He sees in the people: "*'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. 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'*" (vs. 4).

On Judgment Day, there will be no chance to pass blame between generations, family, friends, or enemies. In perfect justice, God will deal with individuals. Here is how it goes. God says: *“When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die”* (vs. 26-28).

Here we see that no one will benefit by saying: “But God, wasn’t there a time in my life when I did put You first? Remember, I grew up in a Christian home! Remember how I served in Your church!” If a person is feeling secure in the way of sin and unbelief, no faith he may have had in the past will save him. If he is called to account before God and found in a state of impenitence: *“the soul who sins shall die.”* It is not that his sin was unforgivable. No sin is too big for God to forgive. He has paid for all our sins on the cross by the blood of His Son. But if a person goes on living in impenitence, he is saying: “God, I don’t need Your forgiveness. I’m fine just as I am.” So tragically, his soul dies; he goes to hell.

This is not what God wants. No matter how badly we have sinned, God invites all: *“‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore turn and live!’”* (vs. 30-32).

2) God gives sinners life through faith in Christ

God spoke harsh judgment through His prophet only because He loved them and wanted to save them. He wanted them to repent and live, particularly through faith in the coming Savior of sinners, Jesus Christ.

In the book of Ezekiel, we hear God promising forgiveness, peace, and life through the Savior He was going to send. In chapter 34, God spoke of the Savior as a Shepherd like David, who would gather His people into one flock and lead them in the truth of His salvation. Along with faith in the coming Savior, in chapter 37 God promised to raise spiritually dead people to new life by His Spirit, like raising a valley of dry bones to life. In chapter 36:25-28 God says: *“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”*

God has “*no pleasure in the death of one who dies,*” but wants all to repent and live. See how seriously He takes the salvation of every sinner. When God sent His Son into the world, it was not just to take a rubber eraser to innocent little mistakes on our record. He did not come just to erase scribbles and blemishes other people put on our record sheet. He came because each of us had a sin-blackened record of our own guilt, our life of sin. But God took that sin-blackened record of each of us and read it over His Son’s head on the cross. Jesus was declared to be the soul who had sinned, the soul who must die, because He bore all our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). The holy Lamb of God, who lived without any blemish of sin, shed His precious blood to cleanse away the black stain of sin covering our hearts (1 Peter 1:19). In Baptism, Jesus sprinkles His clean water on us with His Word of forgiveness. He presents us holy and without blemish before His Father (Ephesians 5:26-27). God has put His Spirit in us and given us a new heart of faith in Jesus.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ empowers us to repent. If we only knew God as an angry Judge, ready to hammer us for our sins, who would want to confess his sin? But God calls us to repent in view of the forgiveness and eternal life He has already won for us in Christ. In repentance we confess our sins, trusting His promise that: “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). As we sing in the hymn:

I lay my sins on Jesus, The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us From the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus To wash my crimson stains
White in His blood most precious Till not a spot remains.

By the new heart and new spirit God gives us, we do not want to live in denial of sin, making excuses, passing the blame. That is not the path of life. But by faith we say: “Lord, I confess my sin, knowing You have taken the whole load of my guilt and punishment on Yourself. ‘*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*’ (Psalm 51:10). Let me walk in newness of life, in the joy of Your salvation.”

With such repentance and faith comes life. Jesus says: “*He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life*” (John 5:24). Already, God gives us spiritual and eternal life through faith in His Son. As His redeemed, restored, and forgiven people, we can look forward to our Savior taking us home to live with Him in the joys of heaven forevermore.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.