

“God’s Justice for Each”

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### **Opening Prayer**

Good Morning, and welcome back out here to Pleasant Corners for Celebration Sunday! We are blessed to have some special music, and while normally for Celebration Sunday we would have a big meal and decorations and such, this is still a wonderful joy to worship as we are. Traditionally, Celebration Sunday has been a call back to how the Lord has been at work through our churches here for over 150 years. Although this year has been a trial for all of us, there is still so much to celebrate and be thankful for both in our churches and outside of them. We shouldn’t forget, as awful as the world can seem, that we are blessed to live in prosperity, that we are blessed to be able to worship freely, that we are blessed with the health and lives we have been given, and most importantly we are blessed to know our eternal home. The Lord who reigns, Jesus, alone is more than enough reason for us to rejoice this morning. This month we have been working our way through the book of Ezekiel. While honestly it is a difficult book to read and is filled with harsh words for those who do not repent, there is still much to celebrate within its pages. Today’s message, on how God gives justice applicably to each, is in fact a reason for us to celebrate... especially as it relates to Jesus. However before we get to deep into that, we first should rehash the basics behind this scripture.

The book of Ezekiel was written between the years of 573 and 591 B.C., at the beginning of the period known as the Exile for Israel. The purpose for this book is fourfold. In it Ezekiel preaches that repentance is needed, that God is greater than all, that judgement comes for those who trust in anything other than the Lord, and that in the middle of

condemnation there is still a future and a hope for those who repent. While destruction and exile did come as a result of the nation being unrepentant, the Lord does provide clues as to His coming salvation for them from the Babylonians... and us from our sin. To best understand Ezekiel, whether you are reading along with us (as hopefully you are!) or if you are just listening to these messages on Sunday, it is important to look at the big picture. This isn't a beginner's book and it is filled with imagery, prophecy, and Jewish-centric teachings. These things can make reading this book discouraging, which is plainly why most don't ever touch these scriptures. However, if we focus upon the big points, repentance and self-correction and God's justice and the like, then we can better understand why this was written and how it still holds merit to us today. In other words, if you get lost or confused, keep pressing on and try to gain just a couple of nuggets of truth. If you do that then you will be well on your way to understanding Ezekiel, and the next time you read through it you may just find that it is even more understandable. With that in mind, our readings for today all came from one chapter, Ezekiel 18, and they all dealt with the major point that we each reap what we plant. Each of us is responsible for ourselves.

Ezekiel 18 begins with a false proverb that God means to disprove. "What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, declares the Lord God, you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore." This proverb about sour grapes may sound foreign, but it is still alive and well today. We have our own sayings about this such as "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" or "The sins of the father are visited upon the son." We all know that there is some truth in this. We each have traits from our parents that

we have inherited (or learned), and we all have negative aspects in our lives that we didn't choose but were forced upon us by the previous generations. That second phrase that you may have heard, "The sins of the father are visited upon the son" actually comes from Deuteronomy 5:9... although it is only half of the proclamation there by the Lord as He also proclaims prosperity for thousands of generations for those who follow Him. The point here in this false proverb that has a kernel of truth (the most dangerous type of false saying by the way) is to pass the buck. We do this all the time, and we often unjustly accuse those who do not deserve it and make excuses for those who do not deserve them. For the Jews in Ezekiel's time, the point was that they were simply the products of unfortunate birth. Their fathers had sinned greatly, and so of course they were going to be destroyed, of course they were going to sin, of course this was going to happen. The sin, the argument was, was not theirs but their ancestors... and it makes the Lord out to be a tyrant, and it comes from faulty understanding of scripture. For us we often get caught up in that same mentality. My parents were alcoholics, or my parents were never around, or my parents were great, so therefore it is no wonder I am the way that I am. We can all probably think of a time where we heard or thought ourselves about a kid who was acting irresponsibly, and we blame the parents for their actions... no matter the age. Again, there is some truth to this false proverb, but it is not the ultimate decider of our actions. That is the big picture in this chapter, and the Lord says that He judges each for their own character.

"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die. But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness... if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully... he is righteous and will surely

live,' declares the Lord." Ezekiel's message to the Israelites, who are entering exile, is that the punishment that is coming is fully for their actions. Their fathers may have sinned, but the punishment they are receiving is from their own sins. Additionally, and more importantly, there is hope in this that if they turn towards righteousness if they repent of their sins if they cling to the Lord... then they will be preserved.

"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die." There is a beautiful piece of scripture Beloved. The Lord here, well before the birth of Christ, is already proclaiming salvation for those who turn towards Him and follow Him. It calls to mind Matthew 18:21-22 where Jesus answers Peter on forgiveness. "Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" The Lord, it turns out, practices what He preaches when it comes to forgiveness. For the people in Ezekiel's time, the clincher on this teaching comes at the end of the chapter in verses 30-32.

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord God. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, who dies,' declares the Lord God. 'Therefore, repent and live.'" Beloved, most of those who heard this calling from Ezekiel did not return... but some did. There are hints that even in Babylon in exile

those who called upon the Lord and followed Him were preserved and even thrived! (The story of Daniel is a good example!) But for those that despised the Lord's teachings, they reaped their own sins. Believe it or not, while this seems like a tough teaching, it is actually one worth celebrating today on Celebration Sunday with Communion. For us, to repent and live, we must cling close to Christ. If we do that, then the Lord promises to preserve us both now and into eternity.

Beloved, you do not have to be defined by your mother, your father, or even your old actions. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" does not have to apply to you. By Jesus's sacrifice for us upon the cross we are given a choice about whom to follow and about what defines us. It can be the things of this world, which comes with a boatload of issues and regrets and consequences... or we can be defined by He who died for us.

Beloved, if you call upon Christ as your Savior, then you have much to celebrate today even in the middle of this crazy year. You have eternity to celebrate, an eternity that was paid for by the blood of Jesus. Today we remember that great sacrifice that Jesus, God in human flesh, made on the cross so that hell would not be our eternal destination. Today through the act of communion we remember, confess, and celebrate that the Lord has taken our guilt from us. The words that the Lord spoke through Ezekiel become true for us when we repent and turn to Him. If you have not yet made a decision to follow Jesus, what better time is there than now? If you have made that commitment, to follow the Lord with all your heart and mind and body and strength, then you rightfully should celebrate God's faithfulness today. Beloved, we again are judged by God for our own actions... with the sole exception being Christ's redemption of us. Praise Him that we can know what our

eternity is going to look like, praise Him that we know where we go, praise Him that we can have hope even in 2020, and praise Him that we have been redeemed. Let us pray.

**Closing Prayer**