

RELY ON JUST GRACE
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

EZEK 33:7-20
FEB 28, 2016

⁷ "So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸ If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

¹⁰ "And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' ¹¹ Say to them, As I live, declares the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

¹² "And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. ¹³ Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. ¹⁴ Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, ¹⁵ if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

¹⁷ "Yet your people say, 'The way of the LORD is not just,' when it is their own way that is not just. ¹⁸ When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. ¹⁹ And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by them. ²⁰ Yet you say, 'The way of the LORD is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."

It's not fair! Parents have heard that phrase more than once.

It is sometimes hard to decide what is fair.

A simplistic idea of fairness is that everyone ends up the same,
same size of desert, same amount of TV or internet time,

Another way to judge fairness is just everyone starts same,
starts at same point in race, has same opportunities.

But another way to judge fairness is by responsibility.

How much has been given relates to how much is expected.
Not only children have different ideas of what is right.

Political campaign shows differences in ideas of just & right.
It is just to make sure everyone gets what they need
no matter who pays for it,

or just to make sure everyone gets to keep what they have
or use what they have earned.

One principle of justice in our system of government
is that everyone is to be free to do what they want & feel.

But there is problem when your right to what you want
interferes with my right to what I want.

Christians have a different idea of what is right,
that instead of doing just what they want or feel,
everyone should do what God wants and says is right.

But different Christians disagree on what that is.

So people cry, that is not right or fair.

Ancient Israel also had objections to God's ways.

At time of Ezekiel, because of their disobedience,
God allowed Babylonians to take over,
even though they were more sinful than Israel.

Ezekiel's compatriots cry, God is being unjust.

God says, No, you are getting what you deserve.

In text, God cuts through all the red tape of who deserves what
by pointing out the redeemed are to live by God's law
but sinners can only be saved by God's grace.

So,

DON'T JUST HEAR GOD'S WORD BUT SPEAK IT
DON'T JUST BE PARTLY RIGHTEOUS BUT FORGIVEN
DON'T JUST GIVE UP ON LIFE BUT REPENT

DON'T JUST HEAR GOD'S WORD BUT SPEAK IT

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Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them
warning from me. ⁸ If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall
surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his
way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will
require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his
way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his
iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

One thing that may not seem fair to us

is being punished for what someone else does.

If someone in classroom does wrong, maybe talks too much,
should everyone loose privileges or recess time?

Yet when some people abuse rights and do wrong,
we all may give up some of our liberties in order to
enforce laws that keep them under control.

God tells Ezekiel he is appointed as a watchman.

A watchman is responsible for announcing what he sees
whether it is approaching danger or good things.

If people are hurt because he doesn't do his job,
he is held responsible.

If you know someone is about to commit crime
but keep quiet, you can be charged as accessory.

If you know there is fire, the right thing to do is warn others,
not just save yourself.

One thing that is basic in God's law is that we are responsible
for caring about other people because we are people of God
who cares about everyone.

One reason we are watchmen is because of what God gives us.
How much is expected relates to how much is given.

God says, Whenever you hear a word from my mouth,
you shall give them warning from me

God has given us his words. We know them from Bible.

We are responsible for speaking God's word that we know.

One way to recognize rightness of this is to think about
what if we never learned about the gospel
because those before us did not faithfully
preserve it and pass it on.

Now we are responsible for not just letting it die with us.

This means we are to share both law and gospel
with our children, passing it on to next generation.

but also for speaking out about it in public discourse.

If nation is destroyed when watchman didn't speak out,
what he has is destroyed too.

If society is ruined because when we don't speak out
we can't just say, Well I am doing what is right.

Where we live is ruined too.

When society is endangered by accepting wrong behavior,
we are responsible for speaking out about God's law,
saying clearly, this is what is right.

whether others want to listen to us or not.

But also, because of real danger of punishment for sin
we are to clearly speak Gospel of how God saves,
even though it may not be believed either.

At same time, we ourselves need to keep hearing law & gospel.

DON'T JUST BE PARTLY RIGHTEOUS BUT FORGIVEN

¹² "And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. ¹³ Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. ¹⁴ Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, ... ¹⁶ None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

We who know what is right need to warn others about sin.
or we will deserve to suffer along with them.

Once we have done that, and when we ourselves
live according to God's word better than others,
does that mean we deserve to be saved? No.

That is another thing that doesn't seem fair to us.

Our righteousness doesn't give us credit with God.

I have cards from stores that give points for purchases
but you have to get minimum number of points
in order to be able to use them.

So if I don't shop there enough, they are useless hassle.

The only way my righteousness would give me any credit
is if I was totally righteous my whole life.

If I sin before I die, I lose all my points. Is that fair?

If you turn water on in one bathtub for one minute
and turn on water in another bathtub for two minutes,
when you turn the water off, how much more water
is there in the second bathtub?

But If you turn a light on in one room for one hour
and turn a light on in another room for two hours,
when you turn the lights off, how much more light
is there in the second room? Both are totally dark!

This is the way it is with our righteousness.

Righteousness is obeying God, but if we don't continue,
it is not righteousness.

This is why Paul writes to Corinthians,

let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Both today's gospel and epistle emphasize all need to repent.

We can never rely on self confident self-righteousness
The only real righteousness is righteousness of Christ,
the only one who completely did right his whole life,
This righteousness is given to us by God's grace
through faith when we repent and are forgiven.
Once again, fairness is being responsible for what we are given.
When we are forgiven & saved, when we know God's word,
we are responsible to live according to it in doing right.
And we save ourselves a lot of misery and grief
and receive great benefits from doing so.
But even though we are expected to live in doing right
we must never expect to live by doing right.
It is not unfair that the righteous can still lose everything
because God always promises grace to those
who deserve nothing.

DON'T JUST GIVE UP ON LIFE BUT REPENT

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Ezekiel has warned people of Israel God will punish them
for their unfaithfulness and rejection of his ways.
and so their kingdom will surely fall to evil enemies.
Their reaction is same as some children when punished:
all right then, since I can't be good enough, I give up,
I quit even trying to do right because it is hopeless.
Those who sin often don't see how they can live without
doing things they want. They don't trust God's providing.
But then, when called to repent, they don't see how
they can live if God's warnings are true.
They don't trust Gods' grace.
But God's providing and his warning & his grace are all true.
God doesn't want us to die but to live
and so he keeps on giving us life.;
It may seem unfair to us that those who keep doing wrong
keep getting second chances,
that those who waste all they get keep getting more.
But what is fair is that this is true for all of us.

Rom. 3:23-26 says, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God is not fair, he is fantastic.

God is not only just, he is the justifier of the ungodly. When Israel sins and suffers, they wonder, How can we live?

God promises, "as I live, I will forgive the repentant. We have hope not because of the way we live but because God lives and keeps his promises. and so Jesus lived as one of us to keep God's law and died in our place to give us new life.

So once again, we are responsible for what we are given.

God gives us the offer of grace and forgiveness in order to turn us to repentance and faith in him.

God has given us his powerful word and sacraments which cause life in those who are spiritually dead, and turn those who are stuck in sin.

No matter how righteous and no matter how sinful we are we need to keep coming to receive what he gives us, We need to keep relying on just grace. because God is just but God is gracious.

DON'T JUST HEAR GOD'S WORD BUT SPEAK IT

God has made us watchmen by giving us his word. We need to speak it to others but also need to keep hearing it ourselves.

DON'T JUST BE PARTLY RIGHTEOUS BUT FORGIVEN

God gives us a righteous way of life. We need to live in it but we cannot live by our own righteousness.

We are never good enough to not need God's grace.

DON'T JUST GIVE UP ON LIFE BUT REPENT

God has given us his warnings but also his promises. They are for the worst of sinners and for us.

Jesus who lived & died for us keeps on giving us life because God wants us to live, to live in righteousness and to live forever with him.