

SEPTEMBER 27, 2020 READINGS

Ezekiel 18: 1-4, 25-32

The One Who Sins Will Die

18 The word of the Lord came to me: ²“What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel:

“‘The parents eat sour grapes,
and the children’s teeth are set on edge’?”

³“As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. ⁴For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.

²⁵“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ²⁶If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. ²⁷But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. ²⁸Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. ²⁹Yet the Israelites say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?”

³⁰“Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. ³¹Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? ³²For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!

Matthew 21: 23-32

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

MESSAGE FROM ASHTON MCDONALD

We Can Do Nothing that is Bigger than God’s Forgiveness!

How many of you have read passages from the Old Testament and felt utterly hopeless? Me too! For example in the reading from Ezekiel it says, “He who sins shall surely die”. Rut Roh. I have two questions, do Christians believe in reincarnation? And do we have to die for each sin? The answer to the first question is it depends on the Christian, and the answer to the second is no, Jesus already did that. He died for every sin that has happened, is happening, and will happen. Coming back to the text, the death it speaks of is not of a physical nature, and this death is not a result of God smiting us. It is a result of our own actions deteriorating ourselves on a spiritual level. Towards the end of the text it says, God wants nothing more than for his children to live, he takes no pleasure in watching them die. When we feel hopeless at any point in the Bible, but especially in the Old Testament it is important to recognize that A. we are misinterpreting it, and B. we need to continue reading. The Bible is meant to inspire hope but it cannot give us hope if it does not give us the reason we need hope. The reason we need hope is because we are imperfect beings who are going to sin or as I like to say make mistakes. We should read on because the solution is there, God has given us a solution in Christ that has already freed us from our shortcomings should we repent. This is not meant to be scary but to be liberating, freedom exists and it is quite easy to attain. This is because we don’t attain it, God has already taken the actions necessary for us to live in His grace. All we need to do is say I messed up, If you're like me say I messed up a lot. I know I cannot fix these problems God, but by the actions of your Son Jesus I know that you have already put the solutions in place, and You offer me a life free from the old me living in your glorious grace.

One thing I hear a lot is, “I believe in God but I do not believe he can love me after all that I have done.” This is the sole reason I decided to become a minister. This could not be further from the truth. He loves me, and for those of you who knew me in my active addiction that was quite a task. God loves me anyway. A further way to clarify this is to point to a common misperception that God chose Israel because they were worthy, holy, and righteous. This is incorrect, on the contrary he chose them because they were not worthy, they were not holy, and they were not righteous. He chose them to show us that it does not matter how far down the scales we have gone, his love is waiting to embrace us should we turn to him. God is always here for us! The Israelites were greedy, murderous, adulterous, murdered in order

to commit adultery and that's only what king David did. Yes, King David the highly exalted, the one who's line Jesus came from lusted for a married woman, arranged that her husband be killed in battle, and married her after his death. Here is the point, David turned to God after being shown the error in his ways and God forgave him, and still had unprecedented love for him. The first son of that marriage did not live (we do have to face some sort of repercussion for our actions), however, in God's mercy Israel's wisest king was born from that adulterous union, and the line that led to all human salvation in Christ Jesus was established. God will not only forgive our mistakes he will use them to create unimaginable miracles. God's forgiveness is far greater than any sin we can commit. God will work miracles out of anyone who admits they were wrong and turns to Him for help.

If you haven't noticed by now I am feeding you with some theology before I enter into the personal part of the sermon. The last theological point I would like to make is that I have noticed a startling trend in Christianity. A lot of Christians place far more emphasis on evil than they should. This gives evil more power over their lives than it should have. Evil should have no power over anyone's life because it is a lie. Love is the only truth there is!

The Bible was not written to show us how to get to hell, which is why hell is seldom mentioned, it is written to show us that Heaven not only celestial but heaven on earth awaits us the second we turn to Christ to save us from the false sense of self we have created.

All sin is, is a false sense of salvation. Starting with Adam and Eve we see that they thought the apple would lead them to knowledge, and that knowledge would save them. It did not. However, before God gave them the repercussions, he gave them the solution in Genesis 3:15 when he stated that Jesus would overcome evil. God has our solution planned before we even create the problem. We live in a society full of various forms of "salvation". We have all succumbed to some form of these false salvations. We thought the right brand would make us better, only to find out it was obsolete two weeks later. We thought a gallon of ice cream and a chocolate cake would solve our sorrows, only to step on the scale and feel more sorrowful. Some thought that being a CEO and massive quantities of money would make them feel more secure only to find out that it left them wanting more at the expense of their family and loved ones. If you are like me, we thought that drugs, people we were attracted to, prestige, and crime might relieve this inner yearning for something better, only to go to jail where we learned we were physically and spiritually killing ourselves. On top of this some thought we could satisfy our inner hurts by hurting others to the extremes of murder and other heinous offenses only to find ourselves the recipients of similar extremes. There is a void in the center of every human being, and everyone feels the need to fill it. The beginning of the solution is when we realize it was never ours to fill. This void is God's to fill. However, when we get so far gone we can easily believe the lie that God does not love us. We can feel that we have gone too far. I can tell you with 100% confidence that the feeling we experience at that point is a lie that comes from the other guy. Are your sins worse than David's the one who's line God used to bring Christ through? Are your sins greater than Paul the murderer of Christians, blasphemer of Christ, who God transformed to write the majority of the New Testament? Even if they are, God forgives them period and point blank. Jesus said the Father can forgive all sins. In looking at today's text, when Jesus speaks of the son that told his father he would not work but then thinks it better to work, He is speaking to us in our moment of doubt. He is saying that we have constructed a false sense of self. We feel we are junky, glutton, T.V. addict, sexually immoral, money addict, work addict, violent, or even murderer. This is incorrect. We allowed ourselves to be tricked by the lie into doing these things. But God did not create us to do these things. God is giving us the opportunity to be like the son and turn away from who we thought we were and into who God created us to be! In those days a son was expected to follow in his father's footsteps. That parable was meant to inspire a feeling in prostitutes, tax collectors, thieves, and murders that they could still do the good will of God and be helpful to others if they recognize their sin and turn their lives over to God. God does not say that Jesus died to free us only from some less

severe sins. He died to free us from all sin. He loves us no matter what we have done. He wants to run to you as he did the prodigal son who spent all of his inheritance. While we are confessing he is preparing the celebration that will be our lives after letting God have the reins.

When we look at the void long enough with an open-mind we will find there is a light that is within each and every living being. Some of us tried to turn it on with massive amounts of chocolate cake, others with designer brands, the most money, the best job, or the best wife/husband or partner. Others tried to turn it on with the most sex, or the most porn. Still more tried to turn it on with the most cigarettes, booze, or drugs! There are even people who try to turn it on with violence, theft, and even murder. I want to stress that the victims of these offenses went through terrible things, and deserve their due healing process. They are held in high regard in God's eyes. They will receive unprecedented favor, and will be given the ability to help many people along their journey. I plan on preaching a sermon on this as well. However, back to the redeeming light. This light was never meant to be turned on by humans, or by any external or material force. It was meant to be turned on by God. But he cannot turn it on if we are constantly trying to turn it on ourselves. Have you ever battled with a two year old over a light switch. I was cranky two year old in my addiction. I digress, only God can turn it on. The most beautiful thing about this light is when we let go of all those short circuited light switches and ask The Master Electrician God to turn it on, it shines so bright that those old switches become irrelevant. God does not see the ways we tried to satisfy ourselves when we turn to him. Yes, he loves to hear us admit it, but not for any sadistic or personal pleasure. But because when we admit we were wrong, it shows that we realized their destructive values and their futility. When we turn to God, he is happy we turned to him. I tell you even the most heinous of mistakes will be forgiven, and better yet God won't even see them when he thinks of us. He will only think of his son Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit - that bright light that has overwhelmed our very being. We are no longer junky, no longer that person who has a lot of Gucci, no longer that guy who sacrificed his family for money, no longer violent, sexually immoral, and no longer victim. We are bright children shining brighter than our dark pasts. Rich in love and mercy, free from chains, rising high on Eagle's Wings! God lifts us up when we stop trying to lift ourselves up. Go ahead, try to lift yourself up. Take your hands to your feet and lift yourself up. Did you fall? Weird. When we surrender, God forgives us period and point blank. Freedom is not conditional, Jesus did not die for some of our sins! He died for all of them! His merciful grace has cleaned our slate before we even committed the sin! God loves us all, another beautiful thing is he will transmute our sins, and turn them into blessings. Addicts bring about recovery for many, violent people advocate for peace, the sexually immoral teach others healthy sexual behaviors, cake eaters buy carrots. No I am just kidding, overeaters found programs that establish healthy eating patterns! God does not hold our sins against us. It has been my experience that he is counting on us to sin before we turn to him. Because, I would not be where I am today if I did not first live the life of a homeless, thieving addict. His love transforms us into beautiful joyous beings full of his infinite capability! I love you all but not as much as God does!

Joys and Concerns

Sid in the VA hospital with COVID

Trudy, Nancy and all other shut-ins separated from loved ones

Diane finished her radiation treatment

Prayers for essential workers, caregivers, scientists and researchers, and first responders

Wisdom for leaders

Our church, our community, our nation, our world

Those affected by fire or hurricanes

Rain in the west to help clear the air, water our ground, and put out the fires.

Benediction Prayer:

Dear God,

As we go about our week please let us carry with us the understanding that nothing we have done affects the ever powerful love that you have for us. If we stray to the right or to the left you will meet us in the middle with open arms ready to recenter us and bring about a beautiful life that is better than our wildest dreams! Help us also to follow your lead and love others no matter what they have done in order to further your kingdom of love here on this planet! May your love and light surround each and every one of us on our journeys! We thank you for everything! We love you and all that you are! In Jesus' mighty name, Amen!