

God's So Unfair!

A sermon based on Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"That's not fair!" Have you heard those words in your house before? It was something as simple as asking them to put their clothes away, and what should simply have taken two seconds turned into a shouting match and ended with the child, in his room, being punished, screaming, "It's not fair!"

It's not fair! I worked my butt off, never took sick days, went above and beyond the parameters of my job, showed a good attitude, everything, and they gave the promotion to that person? Really? That's not fair!

There's a lot of times in life where things seem unfair. Our government proposes or passes a law, and you can almost guarantee there's going to be some sort of outcry against it, how unjust and unfair it is. Why, just this past week, the city of Houston made the news because it, at the behest of its lesbian mayor, subpoenaed a group of pastors to hand over their sermons so the city can pore over them and try to shame the pastors who, in those sermons, "promote" bigotry and an anti-LGBT agenda...or, what it really is, calling homosexuality a sin, just as the Bible does.

Of course, those pastors and their supporters are saying that's not fair, that's against their 1st Amendment rights. But there's people on the other side, saying the same thing, "That's not fair that we aren't trying to stomp out their preaching against the 6th Commandment because we all need to practice more 'tolerance.'"

We don't need to get into who's right and wrong here, but it's easy to see the sense of entitlement, and then, when things don't go our way, we complain, "It's not fair!"

It's not fair! Can you believe the audacity of the people of Israel? Here they were, sitting in captivity in Babylon, away from their homes in Jerusalem. Obviously, it wasn't the ideal situation, and so, their reaction was to complain...against God. He was being unjust. He was being unfair.

But, didn't it maybe seem that way? After all, it's not like God woke up crabby one day and said, "You know, my children in Israel, they're being beyond naughty today. So I'm going to grab the Babylonian army, pick them up and move them to Israel, and just have them punish the Israelites and drag them off into captivity."

No, if you remember Old Testament history, you know the lead-up to captivity was gradual. Time after time after time God had lovingly yet seriously warned generations of his chosen people to turn...to turn from their sinful ways, so that it would go well with them and they would enjoy long life on the earth. If they didn't he was going to punish them. He even warned that they would end up in captivity if they failed to repent.

And we saw how sometimes, there was a momentary change with the people getting back on the right track of following God, but that never lasted long. The people of Israel always seemed to revert right back to their sinful ways.

And so, God carried through with his threat and punished the people at that time by destroying their homes in Israel and bringing them into captivity. But that wasn't the people Ezekiel was speaking to. That had been their rebellious fathers.

Maybe now we can begin to understand their frustration with God. Surely they felt as though they were experiencing God's anger that had been brewing for generations. They thought they were being punished for their parents' sins.

And so, they complained, "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Do you understand that proverb? It's not one we've probably ever used before. But the point of the proverb and the people was, "Our fathers are the ones who sinned, who made God angry, but we're the ones being punished for their sins. We're the ones who are left with the bitter, sour taste of captivity and God's wrath in our mouths. That's not fair!"

What do you think? Did they have a case? Did they have a right to complain against God? Well, let's look at God's response. Verse 4, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." Verse 29, "Is it not your ways that are unjust? I will judge you, each one according to his ways."

Looks like what we know to be true about God. He holds each person accountable for their own actions, whether righteous or sinful. And so, if they were being punished, it wasn't because of what dad or grandpa did. If they turned from righteousness, just like their ancestors had done before them, they too would be punished.

God certainly did not care for their groaning and moaning. He would not tolerate their complaining. What God wanted from the Israelites here was true repentance, "Repent! Turn away from all your offenses, then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed...Repent and live!" Do you see what that true repentance includes? There's no room for groaning, complaining, comparing, passing the blame. No, God wanted them to repent of their sins and turn to God in obedience. He wanted them to live righteously, live for him in that life so they could live with him in eternal life.

And brothers and sisters in Christ, that's what God wants for you, too. Now, our situation in life is vastly different from the Israelites. We live in a country where we have freedom. We're certainly not in captivity. I don't think any of us are reaping disaster or punishment supposedly brought on us by our parents.

Regardless of our situation, though, our God wants the same thing he wanted from the Israelites. He wants real repentance that leads to true obedience. He wants us to acknowledge and confess our sins, to trust in Jesus and his never-ending mercy, and then, in response to his loving forgiveness, he wants a change...in attitude and in action.

And this is not just a one-time deal. Martin Luther even acknowledged when he nailed the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. The very first thesis was, "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent', He intended for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." God intends for our lives to be a continual cycle of repentance because, unfortunately, we never stop sinning.

But, does he get that...from us? Do you always like apologizing for what you've done wrong? I don't. To me, there's always two other routes to take.

One, to just dismiss the sin. "So what, I told a little lie. It's not a big deal. No one got hurt by it. Life goes on." "Who cares if I use that kind of language? It's just words, I don't mean anything by them. I don't see any reason to change."

Yeah, sometimes we dismiss the sin as no big deal. But the other route we take to avoid repentance? Playing the blame game. Don't our children still say, "But he hit me first!" We adults still rationalize, "She started the argument!" And young people still try to explain their ways with a weak, "But everyone else is doing it!"

You know what that is, don't you? Trying to minimize our own sins by turning the tables on someone else. Comparing our sins on the scale to someone else's, to show our sins really aren't that bad compared to...

Is that what God wants? To rationalize, "Yeah, God, my sins are bad, but...they're not as bad as..." "Yeah, God, I lust every once in a while, but I'm not like that Christian who got caught cheating on his wife." "Yeah, God, I know I was gossiping, but I was only repeating what she told me. I wasn't trying to maliciously ruin that person's reputation, not like she was purposely trying to do."

Is that what God wants? No, he doesn't want us excusing our own sin. He wants repentance. He wants obedience. And he threatens to punish every sin, no matter how big or small it may seem to be to us. "But God, you're being so unfair." "It's unfair of you to be so hard on us, to expect so much, perfection, out of us. We're trying my best here."

Of course, we could "thank" Adam and Eve for these unrealistic expectations from God, because they fell into sin first, but we're just as much to blame. But God's, he's not the one being unfair. It's really our ways that are unjust.

God gave me life...so of course, that means if I want to hurt my body or mistreat it or use it however I see fit, that's just? God gives me what I need, so then I have a right to not be content with what I have, but can lust after what I can't have and get frustrated that I may not be as well off as that person over there, that's just? God gave me salvation...so, of course, in my thankfulness I can walk all over Jesus and use his grace as a license to sin, that's just?

God is clear in verses 25,26 when he says, "Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die." God can't be any clearer than he is in verse 4, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." You want what's fair? We are the souls who sin. We are the souls who deserve to die. That's fair.

Thankfully, God's so unfair! Wait, what?!? Just listen to what he tells us in 1 John, "This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." That's unfair. Just listen to what he tells us in Romans, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." That's unfair.

There's a reason why Dave Ramsey, a noted Christian and financial guru always answers people's question, "How are you doing?" with "Better than I deserve!" There's a reason why you and I are doing better than we deserve. It's because God's so unfair.

He gives us his grace unjustly. He gives us his Son. In grace and mercy Jesus left the paradise of heaven to rescue us. And living a perfect life, being perfectly content after giving so much up, he suffered the

hell that we deserve. No fair! Through Christ's death on the cross he gives us free and full forgiveness for all our sins. No fair! We are sinless saints, God's dearly loved children, brothers and sisters of Jesus himself, through no work of our own, no labor of our own, no effort of our own, but only by Jesus work for us! No fair! Thank God!

Aren't you glad God isn't fair? I am. Because God's so unfair, we're saved. Because God's so unfair, we have heaven. We're better off eternally than we deserve to be. And because God's so unfair, we have the opportunity each and every moment of our lives in obedience to him...as Ezekiel wrote, to "turn away from all [our] offenses...to repent and live."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, every day, we have the chance to be fair to God, to respond to what the Lord has given us in Christ Jesus, to ask our Lord to help us live a life reflecting the righteousness that Jesus has given us.

On our own, we can't repent and live. But in a few moments, you're going to confess where that power to repent and live comes from. Ezekiel writes, "Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit." And so, we sing, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me in your free Spirit." That's unfair!

But thank God he's unfair. Because that means we're forgiven. Because that means we have heaven. And God being unfair makes us want to be fair to him. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we know what's fair. When we sin, we confess, we repent, we change, we turn from sin, we live in obedience to God. That's fair. And that's what we'll do because God loves us. That's unfair. But he loves us. Amen.