



Sermon Series Weekly Devotionals

Week of February 4, 2018

EZEKIEL 17

1. **READ** ch. 17, the Fable of the Eagle and the Vine.

2. **REVIEW.** The king of Babylon (the first eagle) came to Jerusalem (Lebanon) and removed its king, Jehoiachin (the crown of the cedar) and took him to Babylon (the merchant city). [P.S. Jerusalem's best buildings were built with cedar lumber from Lebanon, and one of Solomon's palaces was called 'House of the Forest of Lebanon'.] Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar installed another member of the royal family, Zedekiah (the seed of the land) on the throne (the fertile soil with abundant waters), with the intention that this king should remain submissive (a low vine) and loyal to him (branches toward him). But Zedekiah foolishly repudiated the king's kindness, instead turning his allegiance (branches and roots) to Egypt (the second, less impressive eagle), thereby frustrating the Babylonian king's goals to make him a successful and prosperous part (full branches, fruit, magnificence) of his kingdom. And making him angry.

Zedekiah's foolish attempt to avoid the discipline of the Lord will doom him.

3. **MEDITATE.** You were young, but you hit your sister. "Come and get your spanking," daddy said. Did you accept the discipline, or did you run the other way? You became a teenager, and you were speeding. Lights flashed in your mirror, a siren wailed, the police loudspeaker said "Pull over." Did you do it, or did you foolishly try to outrun the cops? You became an adult, and you did something stupid that alienated someone you love. "I don't want to see you for awhile," she said. Did you bow your head and back off for awhile, or did you refuse to accept that discipline?

It's not only good for society that it catch the criminal, it's good for the criminal! The worst thing for a criminal is not to get caught, not to face the just consequences. For centuries, Israel sinned against God, and God finally said, "That's it. I'm coming down hard on you." Instead of accepting justice and discipline, King Zedekiah ran to Egypt to rescue him from God and Babylon. Stupid move, Zedekiah. A fatal mistake.

When you've done wrong, the Bible says there are only three things for you to do: (1) Confess your sin. (2) Accept the consequences. (3) Change your ways. Don't run.

4. **PRAY.** Do an *A.C.T.S.* prayer: *Adoration. Confession. Thanksgiving. Supplication.* You've done it before. But this time, don't leave out the C.

EZEKIEL 18

1. READ ch. 18, noticing how often you come across “he will die” and “he will live.”

2. REVIEW. In Ezekiel’s day the exiles quoted a proverb that allowed them to blame others for their own troubles. “We’re suffering the consequences of our parents’ sins,” they said. Like a mom who’s heard her children complain once too often, the Lord has had enough. “Not true,” God says. “You’re suffering because of your own sin. I hold each person responsible for his own sin.” (4,20) A righteous man who obeys me will live (5-9), but if he has a sinful son, that son will die (10-13). If this sinful person in turn has a son who obeys me, the son will live (14-17). The point is clear: God deals with each of us on an individual basis. So it’s time we stopped blaming our parents for the way we are.

Some readers get all confused here about salvation. Does this mean, they ask, that a Christian who sins will die eternally? Is obedience a requirement for eternal life? The answer is no. The Mosaic Covenant promised God’s people blessings and abundant life for obedience, threatened curses and death for disobedience. (Lev. 26, Deut. 28). That life and death are physical and temporal, here and now—not eternal life. The NT says the same thing (James 1:15; Eph. 6:2): the more you obey God, the better life you will have; the more you sin, the more you come under God’s judgment—like Israel here, and death hovers over you.

3. MEDITATE. Think about the impact that parents can have on their children. It’s massive and life-long. God is not blind to that. And yet, he will not allow us to go our own way and then blame it on our bad upbringing. Years ago a psychological trend seeped into the church—to blame parents for their children’s sins, and to blame others for our own. Are you taking full responsibility for the words you use and the choices you make?

4. PRAY. Imagine yourself kneeling before God’s throne, and speak words of adoration. Next, stand on your feet, and take responsibility for your words and your actions.

EZEKIEL 19

1. READ ch. 19, with its two riddles (lion, vine).

2. REVIEW. The first riddle is full of amazing historical detail about lions and ancient lion-hunting. A momma lion has two cubs that grow up to be predators who prowl the land of Israel (v. 9). Not satisfied with ordinary prey, they hunger for human flesh. Neighboring nations weary of their roaring and slaughter, and join forces to trap one, dragging him off to Egypt; then the other, carting him off to Babylon. These lions of Judah (Genesis 49:8-9) represent two of the final kings of Judah—Jehoahaz (taken to Egypt) and Jehoichin (taken to Babylon). Israel sighs with relief to see them gone.

The second riddle is about the “vine of Judah” (Gen. 49:10-11), from which more than one ruler sprouts. Not satisfied with her natural role as a grape-producer, she has become a huge tree. Yahweh, angry at her arrogance, punishes her by uprooting her and subjecting her to the wind from the east (Babylon), and deporting her to that desert land. Both riddles reveal how God feels about violent, unjust, and arrogant leaders, even if they are his own people, royal descendants of David to whom he has given eternal promises.

3. MEDITATE. Consider all the privileges and promises God has given to you, as his child. And yet, that is no guarantee that on this earth, God’s face will always shine on you. For you can think of fellow-Christians who possess the same privileges and promises—who, like Ezekiel’s lion and vine, prospered for awhile, but then became arrogant—who by disobedience have squandered their place in the sun of God’s favor, and now suffer.

4. PRAY. “Lord, keep me humble, not arrogant but content to stay ‘in my place’. When I am given leadership, keep me gracious and kind, not a roaring lion that others wish to silence. Keep me in your favor, so that your face shines on me. Amen.”

EZEKIEL 20

1. **READ** ch. 20, sifting out the single most stunning thing in this chapter—God’s motive for *not* wiping his people out. Four times he mentions this surprising motive.

2. **REVIEW.** God tells the history of Israel in this chapter, with a different spin than we read elsewhere. Up ’til now, the Bible has told us that the history of Israel began with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God tells it differently now, in order to emphasize Israel’s rebellion from the start. Israel began in Egypt, God says, when I chose her for myself. But even there, she chose idols over me (5-9). I almost destroyed her. But concerned for my reputation, I didn’t. Instead, I brought her out of Egypt into the desert, and gave her gifts (10-12). But again, she rebelled, and I was tempted to wipe her out. Again I restrained myself, for “my name’s sake,” and gave her another chance (13-20). But the same cycle happened again in the wilderness (21-26), and again in the Promised Land (27-29), and now it’s happening here in Babylon (30-31). Enough is enough, says God. I’m not going to let you sink to the level of other nations in paganism and idolatry. I’m going to purge you, transform you, and bring you back to myself (32-44).

Did you discover God’s motive for not giving up on his people? It’s not mercy or grace—not compassion for them, or their need for forgiveness. Instead, God’s concern is himself—his reputation! “For my name’s sake...for the sake of my name...my holy name...for my name’s sake” (9, 14, 39, 44). His passion is for his name, his glory.

3. **MEDITATE.** Sometime in your life, someone told you that your #1 priority in life should be to glorify God. They quoted: “I created you for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7) and “do all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31), and added the first words of the Westminster Confession “Man’s chief end is to glory God...” Well, guess what. God’s glory isn’t just *our* #1 priority, it’s *God’s* #1 priority, says Ezekiel, and Isaiah agrees (48:9-11). So let this grab you: God is God-centered, not man-centered; so shouldn’t you be? God’s passion for his glory is priority one to God; so shouldn’t my passion for God be priority one in my life?

4. **PRAY.** Ask God to help you be more God-centered, less man-centered. Ask him to show you how to be more passionate for his glory and reputation.