

17th Sunday after Pentecost

9/27/20

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Why Are Your Teeth on Edge?

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

The text is Ezekiel 18:2

² "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? (Eze 18:2 ESV)

Today's passage is a proverb about fathers eating sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. The question for this sermon is do you know either the meaning of the parable or why the LORD says in verse 3:

³ *As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. (Eze 18:3 ESV)*

This proverb can be understood as being true. What it was used for was to conclude that children's teeth are set on edge because of the sins of the parents. Every land, every race, every age, has seen its truth. We often look round and see how true it is that a person is weighted down in the race of life by the folly, by the extravagance, of his father. I recently saw a movie in which a young woman changed her last name. Why? Her father was in prison as a convicted murderer and when businesses learned her last name, they would not hire her.

In our society there are those who feel burdened by the sins of their father in enslaving people. They says, "Are we not bearing the weight of our fathers' sins? We are enduring the pain of our teeth being set on edge because of the follies and the sins of past generations." The question then is why does God use the prophet Ezekiel to denounce what appears to be true?

God denounces the people using this proverb because it is used in an untrue sense, and for an untrue purpose. After the death of King Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms. Ten of the 12 Israelite tribes formed their own kingdom, Israel. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained in the south, forming the Kingdom of Judah, with the holy city of Jerusalem as its capital. But, as described in Ezekiel 1:1-24:27, the two kingdoms wavered in their loyalty to God, Yahweh. They indulged in the worship of other deities, constructing false idols in direct disobedience of their own god. Yahweh was patient with his people, imploring them to repent. But they didn't and within a few centuries, both kingdoms were overrun by foreign invaders—the Assyrians and the Babylonians-- and their inhabitants forced into exile.

This proverb is used by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in an attempt to declare that they are not responsible for their captivity in Babylon. They contend that they are being punished for the offences committed by their forefathers, particularly for the sins committed in the time of Manasseh, king of Judah: see 2 Kings 23:26; Jeremiah 15:4. In 721 BCE, the Assyrian army captured the Israelite capital at Samaria and carried away the citizens of the northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity.

The virtual destruction of Israel left the southern kingdom, Judah, to fend for itself among warring Near-Eastern kingdoms. After the fall of the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom of Judah blamed the sins and crimes of Manasseh as the reason why they were suffering under Babylonian captivity. The Jewish people were very prone to plead their innocence, however great their crimes were. In 586 BC Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians and the people blamed their suffering on the sins of the former tribes of Israel taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

So while the proverb about the children suffering because of the sins of their father such as the family of David after his sin with Bathsheba, the proverb was now being used by those in Babylonian captivity to make others responsible for their sufferings and captivity even though they themselves has also worshipped other gods. And yet as Lamentations 5 verse 7 records these sinful people complained:

⁷ *Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities. (Lam 5:7 ESV)*

Yet, Old Testament prophets spoke against using this proverb to take away responsibility for personal sins. For example Jeremiah 31 (29f) ways:

²⁹ *In those days they shall no longer say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."*

³⁰ *But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

Therefore when those in Babylonian Captivity because of their own sins of idolatry and other sins used this saying, here is what they meant by the word of tis proverb

The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

The land of Israel — The two tribes, not the ten.

The fathers have eaten sour grapes — The sins of our fore-fathers taken by the Assyrians are responsible for our sufferings.

Have eaten — Have sinned.

The childrens — We their children, who were unborn at the time of their sins now suffer for their sins.

Now how is Ezekiel 18 applied to us. I recall when I was around 10 years old I was chasing my brother in the house. He ran to his bedroom and closed the door. I slammed into the door and it cracked down the middle. I tried to fix the crack with scotch tape but when our parents got home and saw the crack, I blamed my brother for closing the door so quickly. We also try to shift responsibility from ourselves to others.

But do you realize what we are saying when we do not take full responsibility for our sins with proper repentance? We actually are casting a shadow upon the mercy and grace of God. For every soul, for every nation, there is a glorious destiny; and for men to shelter themselves from their duty by declaring that a hard fate has bound them about with its fetters of iron, and that there is no escape for them; that their whole life is shipwrecked and ruined; that they are the last miserable inheritors of the fatality due to the sins of others, is to declare that they have lost faith in the power of God. It is to take a solemn truth and wrest it to their own destruction. Life is the prerogative of man, and the power of taking upon them a new life is never denied to those who look God in the face, to those who grasp firmly the weapons of life, and turn to their duty as men.

It is not our part to live forever in the north pole of life, and declare that it is all bitterness, and a blasted fate; it is not our duty to live in the sunny south, and to declare that our life is all sweetness and sunshine. Your lot and mine is cast in these moderate poles, where we know that law rules, and love rules above our heads, sweet love beneath our feet, sweet Gospel, both strong, both sweet, both the offspring of God, both heralds of encouragement, to lift up our energies, to exert ourselves in the toil of life, and to be members of the family of God.

We can actually smile when we confess our sins responsibly because we know what is coming after the confession from our merciful and gracious God Who died so that we will never really die and Who lives so that we will live eternally because as even Ezekiel prophecies, there is a new covenant when God will forgive our sins and take us to heaven as He promises. Amen...May the peace of God that passes.....

Prayer of the Church 17th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 21A) 27 Sept 2020

Make us to know Your ways, O Lord, that we may walk in the path of salvation made known in Your Word. Hear our complaints and quiet them by Your merciful deliverance, that we may respond with trust and thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Encourage us, O Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not lose heart but, being of one mind and one will, may serve You with gladness, doing the works of Your Kingdom and speaking Your Word of witness throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Help us, O Lord, to hold fast to Your Word and bless us with a faithful full time pastor who will preach and teach Your eternal Gospel, that we may rejoice in doing Your will. Guide those considering church-work vocations, and bless them as they are formed for Your service. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Show us Your compassion, O Lord, and in Your mercy grant healing, comfort and peace to all those who suffer. Deliver them from all their afflictions, pain, sorrow and fear. We especially pray for _____ and all those we name in our hearts before You. *[Brief silence]* Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guide us, O Lord, that with all our hearts, minds, bodies and resources we may serve You. Give special blessing to the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and to the many ways they bring the good news of Your salvation and the works of Your love across our nation and world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

*Unite us, O Lord, that we may be of one mind and one will in doctrine, witness and service. Bless us as we come at Your bidding to receive the body and blood of Your Son at His table. Grant that what we receive in this Holy Communion we may keep in holy hearts and holy lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Grant to us all good things needful for this body and life and profitable for our salvation, and keep from us all things harmful, that sustained in time of want and guarded in time of prosperity, we may endure to the day of our Lord's coming and be judged worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forevermore. **Amen.**