

Notes for Next Sunday

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32). The theme that runs through Ezekiel 18 concerns inherited guilt. The proverb in this reading addresses the problems of self-pity, fatalism, and despair in the lives of the people. In the face of the Babylonian captivity and exile there are questions on the minds of the people. Whose fault was this? Was it their forefathers? Were the people of Ezekiel's day supposed to pay the penalty for someone else's sin? And if so, then why should they even bother following the way of God? Ezekiel explains why this generation has to pay for sins. It is not because they are paying for the sins of the fathers but rather because they are still sinning themselves.

Epistle (Philippians 2:1-18). Paul couples the imperatives of a Christian life with a description of Christ, who makes that life possible. We are certainly not lords, nor have we any excuse for refusing to honor Jesus Christ as Lord. Yet the fulfillment of the imperative to live like Christ is supported by all that Christ gives freely: the encouragement, comfort, love, and mind of Christ, along with the participation of the Spirit. Paul's exhortation flows from the significance of Jesus' life and sacrifice. Like Paul, our labor would be meaningless and of no use to others if we lived crookedly and perversely as the world around us lives. But God is at work in us, moving us to hold fast to His Word of life, by which He extends His image and kingdom to others.

Gospel Matthew 21:23-27). This reading takes place on the Tuesday following Palm Sunday. After receiving the messianic praises of the crowd in his triumphal entry, Jesus had overturned the tables of the money changers and driven out those buying and selling in the temple (Mt 21:12). These things prompted the chief priests and elders to question Jesus' authority. The builders (chief priests) are rejecting the stone that is nevertheless the cornerstone (Mt 21:42). As a result of his teaching and actions done with authority, the chief priests and Pharisees will seek to arrest the Lord (Mt 21:46)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ”“The fathers 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 every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die. ²⁵“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. ²⁸ Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. ²⁹ Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ³⁰ “Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. ³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

18:2 The fathers ... on edge. The people accused God of being unfair. Behind their complaint was the idea they were not as guilty as their fathers had been and didn't deserve what was about to happen. (PBC)

18:4 The soul who sins is the one who will die. Or "Only the soul ..." Ezekiel spoke out against a false use the people were making of a doctrine of inherited guilt (perhaps based on a false understanding of Ex 20:5; 34:7). What follows is his description of three men, standing for three generations, who break the three/four-generation pattern. (CSB)

18:25 the way of the Lord is not just. It seems that no matter what God did, Ezekiel's fellow countrymen criticized him as unjust for punishing them, for forgiving sinners, and for condemning the righteous man who turned away from the Lord. (PBC)

18:27 he shall save his life. As throughout ch 18, the life Ezekiel refers to seems to be eternal life. Temporal life or death may or may not be included. (TLSB)

18:30 Repent! Two forms of the Hbr "turn," here repeated for emphasis. From the totality of Scripture, we know that this is possible only through the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

18:32 repent and live. God doesn't want people to be cut off from his blessings. He wants them to live. Man can't get a new heart and spirit on his own. The call to repentance expresses the need to acknowledge and turn away from sin, and to turn to God as the source of forgiveness. Christianity is not a movement, an organization, or an attitude. It is a relationship between God and an individual person based on Jesus Christ the Savior from sin. (PBC)

EPISTLE – Philippians 2:1-18

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2:1 any encouragement. This is a tender encouragement which addresses itself to the will of a Christian. Every true exhortation is based upon Christ, upon what He is and what He has done for us. (Stoekhardt)

2:1 fellowship with the Spirit. The fellowship among believers produced by the Spirit, who indwells each of them. (CSB)

2:2 like-minded ... same love ... one in spirit and purpose. Emphasizes the unity that should exist among Christians. (CSB)

2:4 consider others better than yourselves. View yourself conservatively: other people are greater in need or in wisdom. Such a perspective leads you to help or to be helped. (TLSB)

2:4 *your own interests*. We are to be concerned about our brother's affairs and interests in the same measure as we are interested in our own. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

2:5 *Your attitude ... the same as ... Christ*. ESV has “have this mind.” Paul presents the imperative to think with our minds as Christ thought with His. A soul regenerated in Christ's image (Titus 3:4-7) has the revelation of Christ through the Word. (TLSB)

2:6 *something to be grasped*. The Greek word means “a thing for self-glorification.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

2:7 *made himself nothing*. Lit. “emptied himself.” He did this, not by giving up deity, but by laying aside his glory and submitting to the humiliation of becoming man. Jesus is truly God and truly man. Another view is that he emptied himself, not of deity itself, but of its prerogatives—the high position and glory of deity. (CSB)

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶ as you hold out^a the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

2:12 *fear and trembling*. Not because of doubt or anxiety; rather, the reference is to an active reverence and a singleness of purpose in response to God's grace. (CSB)

2:15 *blameless and pure ... without fault*. Everything that is wrong with us has been forgiven by the Lord Jesus. According to our new nature, there is nothing wrong (1 John 3:8-9). (TLSB)

2:15 *shine like stars*. By God's grace the bright light of the gospel has dispelled the spiritual darkness that was by nature in Christians' hearts. Now God wants Christians, who have the light of life through Jesus, to be both light-reflectors and light-bearers in the sin-darkened world. As light-reflectors Christians should stand out from their worldly contemporaries as light shines in darkness. Their words and actions should cause people to see that believers belong to Christ and should lead those who observe them to glorify God. (PBC)

2:17 *I am being poured out*. The reference may be to his entire ministry as one large thanksgiving sacrifice. However, it is more probable that Paul refers to his present imprisonment, which may end in a martyr's death. His life would then be poured out as a drink offering accompanying the sacrificial service of the Philippians. (CSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 21:23-27

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 from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘From men’—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.

21:23 chief priests and elders. Their formal inquiry was but a smoke screen to conceal their secret machinations. They did not propose to consider carefully Jesus answer and to let this determine their future attitude toward His person. Their plans were fully formed in advance, and there could be no question of further inquiry or investigation. Jesus must be removed. (Ylvisaker)

21:27 we don’t know. Answer given by Jesus’ opponents is insincere and cowardly. Even worse is the fact that they deny the authority of God’s Messiah. (TLSB)

21:27 neither will I tell you. Jesus is by no means obligated to give a further reply. And He does not intend to throw that which is holy before the swine of Israel to be trod under foot. (Ylvisaker)