



## EZEKIEL 18:4,25-32 | Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Sunday, August 10, 2014 – Pentecost 9A

<sup>4</sup> For 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.

<sup>25</sup> “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? <sup>26</sup> If 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. <sup>27</sup> But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. <sup>28</sup> Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. <sup>29</sup> Yet 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?

<sup>30</sup> “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. <sup>31</sup> Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? <sup>32</sup> For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

"Did you really mean it?" said the mother to her son. "Or are you just saying it?" "I meant it!" exclaimed the boy. Well, your actions didn't really show it," replied the mother. Thus goes a familiar scene in many homes with children. Did you really mean it when you said you're sorry? Did you really mean it when you said you would do it? Did you really mean it when you said I love you. Words have an innate ability to be able to be said without much thought. How often have we just let things slide off our tongues without batting an eye at what we were really saying? And it doesn't matter how young or how old you are: actions always speak louder than words.

This was true for the Israelites. The northern kingdom of Israel had fallen. Their wickedness and rebellion against God had warranted complete annihilation. The Assyrians, God's tool for his justice, wiped the people of Israel off of the earth for their sins. And then Assyria turned their eyes toward Judah. Under King Hezekiah, Judah resisted the attack, with the help of the Lord. After a decisive victory, under the encouragement of the prophet Isaiah, Judah pledged themselves once again to follow God and his decrees. Good King Josiah led them as a wise and righteous ruler. And life seemed to be good for the Israelites. But it didn't last long. Even with the calls to repentance from Amos, Zephaniah, and Joel, it wasn't one generation later where we see Israel running away from God... again. Under the beckon call of the prophet Jeremiah to return to the Lord, we see Jerusalem destroyed. At the same time, Ezekiel, already a captive in Babylon, was informed that his wife would die. The delight of his eyes would be taken from him just as the temple, the delight of Judah's eyes, would be taken from her. He was not to mourn openly for his wife, as a sign to his people not to mourn openly for Jerusalem. Judah had not lived up to the promises they made, and judgement would be pronounced.

But the appalling thing is that there were some in Judah that claimed that God was being unfair to them. They accused God of being unjust and unrighteous in that he was not acting as the forgiving and

loving God that he had promised himself to be. What an appalling claim! Here was Judah, a people who had been warned by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, and now Ezekiel that a life of repentance had to be lived, not just spoken. How many times would they need to be reminded that with sin comes consequence. But with repentance comes life. What Ezekiel spoke was right on with what God had preached for ages: The soul who sins will die.

This isn't the first time that mankind has been warned. In fact, this warning goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, where God warns Adam and Eve that death is the result of rebellion against his commands. God had intended human life to be never-ending. So by introducing death as a punishment God was doing something undesirable to him. Death is the consequence and the punishment of sin. It originated with sin. And sin is any rebellion or lack of conformity to God's holy will.

Did you really mean it? This morning, when you confessed your sin before your God, did you mean it? Or were they just common words said so frequently that they just kind of fell out of your mouth this morning? Did you mean it last week when you confessed the same sins? Did you mean it when you begged for forgiveness from God this week? Or were you just paying lip-service to a God who demands more than mere words? Has your life been a life of action and not empty phrases and unkept promises? Because that's what God wants...no, that's what God demands.

Repent! Don't point the finger. Don't look to others around you and play the "unfair" card with God. Are there people around you who commit sins? Of course. Israel's neighbors were not the shining example of holy living. Are there individual around you who may deserve punishment more than you. Probably. Israel's fellow inhabitants of earth had been defiling the name of the Lord for generations. But the command is clear and concise...and very personal. Repent and live! Everyone is responsible to the Lord for his or her own way of life. The Lord punishes the sinner for his or her own sins, not for the sins of others. And so the call to repentance is for you today. Repent and live! Mean it! Don't just say it! Live it!

It's a hard pill to swallow, isn't it. By turning from our rebellious ways we admit that we have not only sinned, but that we have rebelled against our Lord. In many countries, including our own, treason is punishable by death. To confess to our rebellion means that we must throw ourselves in front of the throne of our Lord and trust in him. We are not to speak in cloaked terms or try and hide anything. God commands us to cast all of our transgressions and sins off of us and before him. It's daunting. We might die! in fact, we deserve to die. But we won't.

Our Lord does not desire our deaths. That's why he sent his Son. You see, God is not just a God of words, but of action. When God spoke those words of condemnation to Adam and Eve and promised death to all generations thereafter, he meant it. And he's followed through on it ever since. But more words were spoken in the garden than just condemnations--a promise was also given. And God wasn't just paying lip-service to two people who felt immense guilt over sin. God intended to follow through, and he did. Jesus came to earth to make right what man had done wrong. And he just didn't appear, declare that sins were forgiven, and leave. He backed up his claims and his promise with some very powerful actions--his own suffering and death. It was then that sins were atoned for, it was then that mankind was reconciled with God, it was then that death held no threat over us. But God wasn't done. It would have been enough to have simply spoken the declaration of sins forgiven and death defeated, but once again he proved it with some awesome actions. He rose his Son from the dead to declare the deed done. The battle was won. Death had been defeated. And God's promises were fulfilled through action!

So, dear Christian, repent. Do not fear for your life. Do not fear that God will not forgive. God has already forgiven. He invites to to confess, to be contrite, and to trust that he truly doesn't desire your death. He wants you to show it through action. Live as a forgiven person, seeking to serve him out of thanks for all he's done for you.

Let's confess our sins using the Order of Private Confession on page 154 of the hymnal:

M: In the name of our God, to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hidden.  
Amen.

**M:/P: O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy,  
and in your faithfulness, come to my relief.  
Do not bring your servant into judgment,  
for no one living is righteous before you.  
Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails.  
Do not hide your face from me, for I have put my trust in you.  
Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.  
Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.**

**P: Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a troubled and repentant sinner, confess that I have sinned against you in my thoughts, my words, and my actions. I have not loved you with my whole heart; I have not loved others as I should. I am distressed by the sins that trouble me and am deeply sorry for them.**

*Here the penitent may confess specific sins.*

M: Jesus says to his people: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." His death paid for the guilt of your sins and the sins of the whole world. Do you believe this?

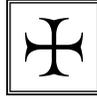
**P: Yes, I believe.**

M: Because of the promise of our Savior Jesus, I forgive you all your sins. Be assured that you are a dear child of God and an heir of eternal life.

**M:/P: O Lord, my God, I called to you for help, and you answered me. I thank you for the love you have shown me in Jesus Christ, my Savior. Through him you have rescued me from the guilt of my sin and given me the peace of forgiveness. Help me fight against temptation, correct whatever wrongs I can, and serve you and those around me with love and good works. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.**

M: Go in peace. The Lord be with you.

Dear Christian, He declares you innocent, forgiven, and free. He's taken action for you! You're forgiven and at peace with him! And God truly means that. Amen.



*Soli Deo Gloria!*

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