

The Sunday School Lesson

by Bessie Wilbon

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezekiel declares that one's misfortune may be the result of his own sin. But no one likes to say, "It's my fault."

The overpowering army of Babylon swept down on Judah, and tiny Judah had no strength to resist. In return for freedom and safety, the king of Judah agreed to pay tribute to Babylon. But after three years he rebelled. A few years later the kind of Babylon weakened Judah by taking away its king, along with ten thousand of the statesmen, military men and blacksmiths. We can imagine that the king blamed his advisers for this disaster, and his advisers blamed the king or each other. Common people hated to pay taxes to far-off Babylon, so the officials may have claimed that popular demand forced the rebellion. Or perhaps they blamed Egypt for failing to send troops to defend Judah. The Bible does not record these efforts to pin the blame on someone else, but our text does reveal another effort that was popular among the ten thousand captives in the land of Babylon.

Ezekiel was God's prophet in Babylon. He was called to deliver the word of the Lord to ten thousand captives, whether they would welcome it or not. Directed by the Lord, he took note of a popular effort to shift the blame.

THE LESSON

"The Lord spoke to me and said, 'What is this proverb people keep repeating in the land of Israel? The parents ate the sour grapes, but the children got the sour taste.' As surely as I am the living God," says the Sovereign Lord, "you will not report this proverb to me, the life of the parent as well as that of the child. The person who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:2-4). "But you ask, 'Why shouldn't the son suffer because of his father's sins?' The answer is that the son did what was right and good. He kept my laws and followed them carefully, and so he will certainly live. It is the one who sins who will die. A son is not to suffer because of his father's sins, nor a father because of the sins of his son. A good man will be rewarded for doing good and an evil man will suffer for the evil he does. If an evil man stops sinning and keeps my laws, if he does what is right and good, he will not die; he will certainly live. All his sins will be forgiven, and he will live because he did what is right. Do you think I enjoy seeing an evil man die?" Asks the Sovereign Lord, "No I would rather see him repent and live. But if a righteous man stops doing good and starts doing all the evil, disgusting things that evil men do, will he go on living? No! None of the good he did will be remembered. He will die because of his unfaithfulness and his sins." (Ezekiel 18:19-24). "Now I, the Sovereign Lord, am telling you Israelites that I will judge each of you by what he has done. Turn away from all the evil you are doing, and don't let your sin destroy you. Give up all the evil you have been doing, and get yourselves new minds and hearts. Why do you Israelites want to die?" (Ezekiel 18:30-31).

Biting sour grapes and having your teeth set on edge is an unpleasant feeling, to say the least. Likewise, unpleasant was the feeling of being captive in Babylon, but the captives used this proverb to say their captivity was not their fault. Their fathers, their ancestors in former generations - had done wrong, and now the present generation was suffering the consequences - or so they said. There was reason enough to say their ancestors had done wrong. God's prophets had made that plain a century earlier. Isaiah said the people of Israel would be captives in Babylon. Now ten thousand of them were captives, and they said it was because their fathers had sinned. But in truth they themselves had continued the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel made that plain among the captives, and Jeremiah proclaimed it among the people who were still living in Judah. The fathers had sinned, yes; but God sent the present generation into captivity because of its own sin.

The captives would no longer have any occasion, any reason or excuse, to use that proverb, for the Lord was going to make it plain that the meaning they gave it was false. They could not truthfully blame their fathers and not themselves for their captivity.

In one sense, it is correct to say that God's people are those who accept Him and try to do His will, while those who rebel against His rule are not His people. But in another sense, all souls, all lives, all people, belong to Him because He made them. In this sense, even the most rebellious are His. All people ought to do His will; all are in His power; all must face His judgment. His rule is the same for all. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. This was made plain to the very first man on earth. It is reaffirmed in Christian teaching, but Christian teaching adds that a sinner can accept the gift of life instead of the wages of sin.

God's way is never less than fair; sometimes it is much better than fair. Fair warning has been given ever since creation, and the way to do right has been made plain. But if that fair rule were rigidly enforced, every soul on earth would die, God makes a way for sinners to escape death, and that is much better than fair.

Long ago, centuries before Ezekiel spoke, before Israel entered the land of promise, Moses put a challenge before His people. "I have set before you life and death blessing and cursing: Therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live; that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for He is thy life." The challenge still stands. Therefore choose life. Amen.

First Mt. Calvary

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September 10th at 7:30 p.m.

Rev. J. E. Floyd, pastor of Gold Hill Baptist church will be the guest speaker at the initial sermon on Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m.

Starting Monday, September 11th, at 7:30 p.m. Rev. C. David Stackhouse, past or of Tabernacle Baptist Church will be the guest evangelist for the week.

Rev. James Hawthorne is pastor.

MT. MORIAH PRIMITIVE

Sunday September 10th the members of the Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church, located at 747 West Trade St., will observe the 16th Appreciation Day for their past or, Elder Thomas W. Samuels.

At the 4 p.m. service, Elder N.E. Rodgers, pastor of the Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in Statesboro, Ga., will be guest speaker. Elder Rodgers serves as Bible expositor for the Primitive Baptist Convention, USA.

A reception in the church fellowship hall immediately follows the service. The public is invited to attend.

Man's Fearful Heart

By J. L. Little

We are living in the last days just before the SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. It is the most fearful time men and women have ever known or faced. This is what my subject is about at this time: "Men's Hearts Falling Them For Fear, or Man's Fearful Heart." Over and over in the Scriptures, the Lord told His people: "Fear Not." Then why do men and women live in fear? It's simply because you do not know the Lord as your Lord and Saviour. "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth DISTRESS OF NATIONS, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts falling them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." (Luke 21:25,26)

Everywhere you turn today men are fearful of world conditions and the things that are coming on the earth. Go in any nation and you'll find the same unrest and distress, and men and women are asking what will happen next. Talk about future events and people are scared to death. You are fearful of the great four sins of the last days (Rev. 9:21)

Then all over the world men in government, especially in Washington, DC, are afraid of what Russia is going to do. You are afraid of Russia's bombs. Then fear is gripping the hearts of men because of the population explosion and the lack of food to feed the additional billions of mouths between now and the year 2000. Everywhere we turn we come face to face with the drug trafficking, murders, stealing, and the sin of adultery on every corner. Look at the incest that is abroad in the land today. And everyday the whole world scene grows worse and worse. If you think things are getting better, you are just blind and deceived. But, note that the Lord said: "LOOKING AFTER THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE COMING ON THE EARTH..." Instead of your heart looking for the Lord, you are looking after world conditions. That is why you are fearful and dying of heart failure. You worry day and night about what is going to happen next because you are not saved. Some of you church members are the most fearful. You say you are saved but you have more fear in your hearts than the men in government.

The world today is ruled by unsaved men. That's why we are in the mess we are in. Just think! What kind of world would we have if all our city, state, and federal officials were saved? If you could walk through the halls of government tomorrow and each government official you talked to was praising the Lord for saving such a sinner as we are. What a different country we'd have to live in. That's right.

Not a heart of fear such as the unsaved have, but a heart of love for Christ, supremely. Then there flows out from the new heart God has given you a general love for all mankind. But now you are fearful of world conditions because you don't have a new heart which only can come from God. Let me say this; by nature, no sinner can hunger after the Lord, by nature you cannot desire holy things. Your nature is of the Devil, all it can do is hate. The world is grappling with the sin of hatred because it will not have Christ rule over it.

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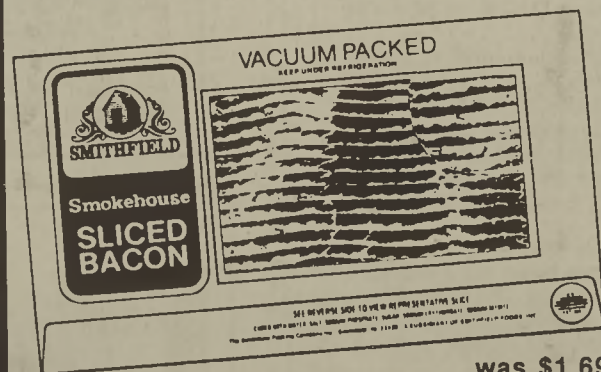
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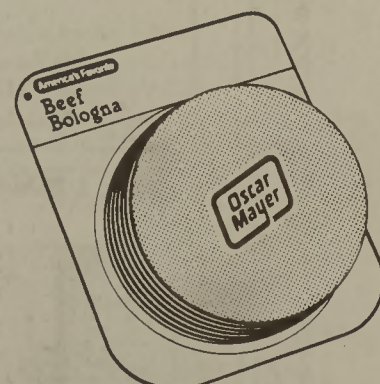
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