Ezekiel 33:7–20

**“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 8If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 9But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.**

**10“And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’ 11Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?**

**12“And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. 13Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. 14Again, though I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, 15if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 16None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.**

**17“Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just. 18When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. 19And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this. 20Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”**

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

**For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3and all ate the same spiritual food, 4and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.**

**6Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” 8We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**

Luke 13:1–9

**There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”**

**6And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ 8And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”**

Karma

Maybe it's just part of our sinful human nature, but people like answers to all their questions, and we tend to never be satisfied until we have those answers.  We want answers; especially when our questions sound like this: "Why did this happen to me?  Is God punishing me?  What can be done to make God happy and prevent this from ever happening again?" Sadly, it's when these questions come up in life that a lot of faithful people begin to offer up some very unfaithful answers.  So what does an "unfaithful answers" sound like?  The unfaithful answer leaves God out of the answer.  The unfaithful answer substitutes a false god for the one, true God.  The unfaithful answer wrongly blames God.  It's truly sad when faithful people provide unfaithful answers to life's problems.  So again what does that sound like?  Turn your ears to the Gospel lesson for this morning and you will have your answer.

**"Do you think that those Galileans who died were worse sinners than any of the other Galileans?  Do you think that those eighteen Judeans who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell were worse debtors (that's what the Greek word is) than any of their fellow Judeans?"**

What Jesus is confronting here with this line of questioning is that false and unfaithful line of reasoning; that wrong and faithless answer called "karma."  Karma, in a nutshell, says, "If you do good, good will be repaid to you.  If you do bad, then bad will be repaid to you."  This, my friends, is what Scripture calls works-righteousness, and it is deeply ingrained into every man, woman, and child descended in sin from Adam.  This works-righteousness is the very backbone of all false religions in our world today.  This is also why most Christians will not use the word "karma" to describe their beliefs, despite the fact that they do very much believe in karma.

Now, I'm not saying that this Christian notion of karma is the backbone and foundation of a Christian's faith, but it is often the "default setting" in the machinery.  This is the place we often end up at when life hits turbulence.  When life is cruising along and all is well, faith is also well.  It's easy to be faithful when things are good, right?  "Good things are obviously happening to me because God is so good and gracious to me; me an imperfect, but good and faithful person."  However, when things take a turn for the worse, many a faithful Christian defaults to this false notion of karma.  "What have I done to deserve this?  What can I do to fix this?  Why is God punishing me?  How do I make things right?" Sound familiar?  Looks to me like karma has a foot in the door of those faithful.

So what is Jesus’ response; **'Unless you repent you will likewise perish.'** Hmm, this does have a certain ring of karmic threat to it.  Do good or else! Look closer though. Listen, He flat-out rejects any notion of karma.  **"Were those people who suffered and died worse sinners than anyone else?  Did they get punished because they were worse sinners than any of you?**  **NO!"** It doesn't get any clearer than that!  I've said it before and I'll say it again: God is fair and equal across the board.  He doesn't play favorites or bend the rules for anyone.  All have sinned, equally, and the wages of sin, across the board, fair and square, is death.  All are also equally redeemed in the blood of Jesus.  He died for everyone, across the board, not fair at all, but thankfully all squared up with our heavenly Father.

So what is Jesus saying that sounds like karma.  **"Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."**  This language of repentance and perishing, does this sound like a threat pertaining to physical suffering and death?  If this were the case, the world would be a pretty empty place if everyone who didn't repent of their sins was immediately struck down and physically killed.  You see, this is where the original Greek provides the answer we seek.

The Greek word we read as "perish" (apolumi) is used throughout Scripture to speak of eternal death.  To perish—to apolumi—is to suffer the eternal pains of hell.  It does not simply mean "legally dead" or "having no pulse or brain activity."  In fact, when Christ speaks of faithful people passing away, He speaks of them "falling asleep" or "entering into rest."  Believers rest in peace until Christ's second coming.  Unbelievers perish—eternally.  Big difference!

Here, Jesus is addressing the issue of faithlessness.  Jesus knew those people's hearts.  He knew their faith, or lack thereof, to be more specific.  "If you do not repent; that is, turn back from your sin to the life and forgiveness that is known only through faith in Me, our heavenly Father's promise of redemption in the flesh, you will also perish, eternally, just like those other people who died without faith."

Jesus is simply telling it like it is.  In fact, if you think about it, it's Jesus acting, once again, out of unconditional love and compassion.  He's warning these proud, thick-necked people of the eternal danger that awaits them if they continue in their proud, impenitent, works-righteous ways.  Scripture tells us quite clearly that God desires the death, the apolumi, of no man.  God desires that all men have life and have it abundantly in Christ.  His words and His actions are living out these Scripture truths!  "Repent; turn away from your sin and turn back to Me.  I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.  No one comes to the Father except through Me."

This is why Jesus immediately launches into the parable about the fruitless tree.  Many people think this parable as a separate teaching.  Thinking that Jesus said what He had to say and now He's teaching on something else.  But that's not the case.  He's teaching these folks and us about the reality of their sinful, faithless and fruitless condition before their heavenly Father's eyes.  Sure, they were doing all these wonderful things, wonderful in man's eyes.  However, without saving faith, all these things amounted to nothing.  In spite of all these man-pleasing works, without saving faith they perished.

With this little parable, Jesus is teaching about Himself and His ministry of reconciliation and life and redemption.  God chose and planted them and us to bear abundant fruit. They basically failed.  God looked to His vineyard of people for the fruits of faith and found none, again and again and again.  So enough already.  God's a good steward.  If this tree won't bear fruit, tear it out and make room for another tree that will bear fruit.  This is where the vinedresser, the master's servant, steps in and intercedes on behalf of the fruitless tree.  "Give me a chance.  Let me work with this tree.  I'll give it everything it needs to bear fruit.  If after all this it still refuses to bear fruit, then go ahead and chop it down and be rid of it.  It's obviously dead already."

Right here in this parable, my friends, is where the whole notion of karma suffers yet another mortal wound from our Lord of Life.  Why are good things happening to some people, especially rotten, sinful unbelieving people, while others continue on in pain and suffering and misery?  Is it karma?  No!  In fact, if it weren't for God's long-suffering patience and mercy and compassion, there wouldn't be a vineyard at all.  This world, God's vineyard, would be a desolate wasteland!  "Sorry, you're not bearing fruit so down you go, into the eternal brush fire that is never quenched."

The fact that bad things happen to you doesn't mean that God is punishing you and you deserve them.  I know it sounds strange, but it's not God's punishment you're feeling when things are bad.  God judges and punishes no man until the day he passes without faith from this life into eternity.  What you're feeling and seeing when things are bad on this side of eternity is the symptom of sin; the result of sin that has infected this entire fallen world.  God is the cure; not the cause.

And the flip-side to this reality is also every bit as true.  The fact that bad things happen to others while life is good for you doesn't mean that God is rewarding you and you're squeaky clean and without blemish.  Don't mistake God's patience for His approval!  Repent!  While you still have air in your lungs and sky over your head, repent and turn back to the way of Christ's cross.

Finally, no matter what you think your situation is, good, bad, or at least better than the other guy, make no mistakes: before God you are a sinner who deserves nothing but eternal death and punishment.  That's not karma.  That's the wage of sin.  However, because of Jesus Christ, you are also completely redeemed and forgiven.  You have life, abundant, eternal life, because of Him and His all-atoning death.  That's not karma, that's grace, God's free and unmerited grace for you, for me, and for all mankind.

Faith alone in God's grace alone because of Jesus Christ alone.

Repent, turn, and bask in this glorious light and abundant life of Christ's all-redeeming, life-giving cross.

AMEN