**“Turn and Live”**

Psalm 25:1-10

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Philippians 2:1-4, 14-18

Matthew 21:23-27

 Pentecost 17

From Ezekiel 18: “Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. **Cast away from you** all the transgressions that you have committed, and **make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!** Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone; so **turn, and live**.”

**Grace** to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

It’s well-written that the rise and fall of civilizations follow an **eight-part series of cycles of attitudes**. First (and from out of the scrap-heap of the bondage of a previous period and after morality and respected-authority and rule-of-law falls), repentance for its ills **begins a healing process**, growth then coming from a mostly better attitudinal spirit. The Roman dynasty, for instance (as well as every other one prior or since) began **that way**, with some initially **noble-seeming** **cause** which got **rallied around**. What history shows is that each new civilization got fostered by none other than God’s permission … and (even more) His sanction and hand of guidance. What destroys that **favoring**, however … what eventually kills any **civil** civilization … is **settled-in participation in Godlessness**. What rises (and has always) out of that fall is **punishment for it** and an opportunity for a **new start** **for those who repent**.

Some of the woes of the “fall” start early (even in the updraft). Abundance (at the pinnacle of the society’s success) begins to make people lazy. Everything can look fine but the foundations of virtues are crumbling. Ideals are from a more remote time, so being lost in memory, and the apathy of lost passion comes from the complacency of laziness toward wisdom and discipline and appropriate priorities, and sacrifice (even the sacrifice of God … the Gospel), gets yawned at / considered **owed**, and **not something necessary, so gracious and merciful**.

This rise and fall of **civilizations** doesn’t happen, however, without the rise and fall of **individuals**. Both Ezekiel and Jesus point out the accountability of **people**. And **we may be** in the throws of the falling of American civilization. But we should never consider that as just a **cultural** problem. **Cultural breakdown (if it’s occurring) is the result of the breakdown of its citizens**. And an **American** problem is a **world** problem. The **dominant iconic civilization that we have been** stands to let down **all of** humanity that **needs us Godly**.

**Text**

Ezekiel’s chapter 18 is embedded as, almost, the **focal point** for the entire message spoken through the rule change of a civilization. His message spanned the last of that nation’s **final fall** and then his knowledge of a **rising and gracious renewal upon repentance**. He, certainly, cites every warning shouted-out for the hundreds of years that led up to it, so he wasn’t the only voice of reason, but **he** rode **through the crash himself** as warning turned to **reality** in destruction and captivity.

Chapter 18 puts the responsibility for that squarely where **accountability** demands it: **on every individual of Judah**. **They** had let this happen by living asleep and forgetting 800 years of blessings from God (worldly influence positive and divinely led which they proclaimed **down to their very being**. First, they **allowed** worship, though, to be **fractured into factions (like denominations claiming to simply disagree on God’s demands)**. Next, their own **worship in their own temple (and their homes and heart) they let be stained by lies and apostacy**. To go through a short list of their problems: there were idolatries where homage to **self-image** was what was championed rather than an homage to the **accurate image of God** (mis-identifying Who God really is) and then the reshaping of worship practice for entertainments sake encouraged by inappropriate leaders so much so that God called them **all** “**useless**” in chapter 14 of the book.

What the people there **said** about life under God and what they **did in it** were two different things. **Talking a good talk** (saying they “loved the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind, and neighbors as themselves”), **idols (of various kinds / entertainment, their kids, recreation)** were **what** they **really loved**, mostly only wanting to **satisfy themselves** (with an idea **about** God and thinking of others as not much more than a **means to the end for their own interests**.

Jesus **also** told a story about the **same hypocrisy**. Right after He demanded that followers **heed** John’s baptism of repentance and renewal for their forgiveness into obedience, He **illustrated the difference between** **doing that** **(repenting and changing their ways)** and only **talking about it**:

“’What do **you think is fair … to be expected?**’” He asked the chief priests and elders of the people. “’A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” And he answered, “**I will not,” but afterward he** **changed his mind and went … he CHANGED HIS MIND AND WENT**. And he went then to the other son and said the same. And he answered, “**I go, sir,” but did not go**. Which of the two **DID the will of his father?**’ They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God **before you**. For **John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him**. And **even when you saw it**, **you did not afterward change your minds and believe him**’”, which **is what is expected!**

**Application**

From Egyptians to Israelites to Assyrians to Babylonians to Greeks to Romans to the English and, then, onto America, dynasties have risen and fallen, replaced then, but **(SOMETIMES) replaced with themselves forgiven and renewed by God after repentance**.

The **fact is**: “**I will judge you, O house of America” (to paraphrase for a different generation and dynasty still spoken to by God)**, “everyone according to his ways, declares the Lord God. **Repent and turn from your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.** **Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!** **Why will you die? For I have no pleasure in the death of ANYONE, declares the Lord God; so TURN (REPENT), AND LIVE**.” …..

Israel, by the way, **was** restored and renewed after repentance. Doing that, God **delivered them and reinstated them** **to have** (and there’s nothing better that could ever be said of a civilization than this) Jesus come to them. He came to be **of** them and **salvation was (in Him) “at hand” (in their midst)**. So, by all evidence, upon repentance **WE TOO would be restored and renewed**. From violence and dissentions, from unfaithfulness and mistaken faithfulness, we can (and are invited to / expected to) **repent and live**. In other words, **we COULD BE** a civilization / a people / **WE THE** **PEOPLE** … **that are God’s people** …

… and may **that be our course** and **our countries course**; **a course that this entire world repents to gain**. In +Jesus name. Amen. And may the peace of God that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds **IN Christ Jesus**. Amen.