

Repent and Live!

‡ **Sin brings death.** (vv.1-4)

‡ **The LORD dispenses justice.** (vv.25-29)

‡ **New life comes inside out.** (vv.30-32)

In the name of Jesus, our power and motivation to **Repent and Live**, dearly loved of God:

Many people are wondering why the Bible is such a gross and disgusting book. It tells some of the most vivid, violent stories about some of the most God-awful people imaginable. Yet the problem is not this Holy Book. What bothers modern readers more than anything else is that we are looking in the mirror. The older I get the more disgusted I get with what I see when I look at myself in the bright light of God's Law. It exposes everything about me that I hate, then condemns me unconditionally. God's Law makes me angry. It's like waking up to feel someone cutting on your leg, only to realize you'd been in a car accident. If you discover the doctor is removing a piece of metal, anger gives way to relief. We need to realize right away that this pain is for our good, that health and healing were on the way. Such is the Bible message, the Holy Spirit's call from God's Good Book for us today: **Repent and Live!**

‡ **Sin brings death.** (vv.1-4)

With another hurricane hard on the Gulf States, authorities were not only bracing for the wind and waves, but for the bad band of looters who appear like flies on a corpse whenever disaster strikes. Who can help feeling angry at how some individuals make a bad situation worse? Some might even say looters should be shot unless they're taking food or survival supplies. But imagine how upsetting it would be if authorities went after the children of looters. What if children were punished for the sins of their fathers?

Believe it or not, that's what Ezekiel's fellow Jews in Babylonian Exile were demanding of God. They were quoting this proverb with approval: *"The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."* If you know the Conclusion to the Ten Commandments, you might be able to figure out why. Remember at Mount Sinai how the LORD God spoke of *"punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation..."*? That sounds like this ancient Jewish proverb where the fathers eat sour grapes, but the children pucker up in a punishing overbite. Yet like so many who misinterpret Scripture, they left out the rest of the sentence. Our *jealous God* says He punishes *"the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me..."* When unbelieving children follow their parents' evil footsteps, God punishes the children for the evil they themselves are doing. But look what God really wants: He keeps *"showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."* (Deuteronomy 5:9f)

So God does not like this proverb. Instead, God says, *"Every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me."* Your body is not your own. Neither is your soul. God created both and still claims complete ownership. God refuses to punish children for the sins of the fathers unless the children do them too. God says, *"The soul who sins is the one who will die."*

‡ **The LORD dispenses justice.** (vv.25-29)

Once I asked a Baptist woman for one Bible passage to prove that children are not held accountable by God for their sins and therefore do not need infant Baptism. Strangely, she pointed to this eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel. Somehow to her this meant children have not reached "the age of accountability." But God says, *"The soul who sins is the one who will die."* Do infants and children die? Sadly, yes, they do. If God is not punishing them for the sins of their fathers, then for whose sins do they die? There is only one inescapable answer which King David understood very well. David

confessed, ***“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”*** (Psalm 51:5 NIV) And each of us must admit in the light of God’s Word that without doing or saying anything we deserve to die eternally in hell. Because of our sinful condition humanity’s death toll remains at 100%.

But that’s why I’m so very, very grateful that death is not the last word from God Almighty. It was never the intention of our loving Creator that storms should ravage this or any land. Death is a violent intrusion into God’s perfect creation, caused by the rebellion of our first parents, specifically Adam, and fueled by our own continual rebellion as we follow in their footsteps. When early Americans repented of their sins and sought God’s grace to save them from storms, famine and foreign armies, God graciously helped as He always gladly comes to the aid of those who ask. But when the children of those repentant sinners tear His Ten Commandments from their courtrooms and insist on going their own way without God, trashing God’s gift of marriage by divorce and homosexuality, God will not stand idly by and watch. God will not let His grace be trampled. And God refuses to let sinners die without doing His level, loving best to show them what He did so long ago to suffer our death and to give us His life.

When Ezekiel talks about this ***“wicked man [who] turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right,”*** he is describing the fruits of faith. These grow in the lives of everyone who hears and believes that God sent His Son Jesus to suffer and die in our place. When you’re so disgusted at your sins that you can hardly stand yourself, when you hate your life because without God it is no life at all, to hear how God raised His Son to life for our justification makes you feel like a convict set free from a death sentence you deserved. Maybe nobody else thinks it’s fair. But God the Judge of all is totally independent. And all of us who see our sin rejoice to see the beauty of our dear Savior Jesus. Hearing ***“Repent and Live!”*** is like being snatched from dark, swirling waters while a commanding voice orders, ***“Get into the boat.”*** Forgiven sinner are glad to hear the Gospel-call of God.

† **New life comes inside out.** (vv.30-32)

Here’s a lesson for Lutherans. God promises, ***“I will judge you, each one according to his ways.”*** He does not ignore our sins any more than you could ignore a storm branch blown through your living room window. You remove the problem; God removed our sins. Now He says, ***“Repent!”*** He’s calling all sinners to turn away from sin and make sure your life shows you believe in Jesus. Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone. Good works are necessary, not for salvation, but to show you have faith because ***New life comes inside out. “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. 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?”*** Repentant faith can live even in the eye of a hurricane.

Repentance is exactly what our country needs starting with every sinner here. God is speaking to you and me: ***“For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!”*** God earnestly desires that we keep coming to Him in repentance day by day. To ***“turn away from all [our] offenses”*** means first to be sorry for them, then to trust they are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. It’s as if a big bag of rocks has been taken off our back and hurled into the deep blue sea. Some of those rocks were guilt, some despair, some selfishness, but all ugly and sure to sink us down to the bottom of condemnation. But when Christ comes to live in our hearts by faith, selfish old worries and cares disappear. We no longer love created things instead of our loving Creator. Immediately the needs of my neighbor are more important to me than my own, beginning at home and stretching beyond the horizon to needy neighbors I may never meet this side of heaven. Instead of looting God’s stores of time and money for my own personal pleasures, I eagerly spend myself and all I have on others. Especially I want to share with them this wonderful Savior God who helps us throw off the burden of our sins every day. The mind of Christ gives us respect for God’s servants, my fellow members and workers in Christ’s kingdom. Loving faith rides high on the waves of our Savior’s service. ***New life*** cannot hide inside. ***New life comes inside out.*** Like the dear Savior who created it, ***New life*** is beautiful indeed. If you really want to enjoy God’s blessings, skip the sour grapes of sin and savor this: ***Repent and live!*** Amen.