

## Ez 18, Phil 2 – The Blame Game

In our Old Testament lesson the people of God are playing the blame game. “The fathers have eaten the sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” “It’s not fair,” they are saying, “They did the thing, we get the effects of it. They sinned, we are being punished. That’s not fair, God.”

God says “Enough! Tired of it. Stop blaming the previous generation. It’s your sins, it’s your fault, it’s your punishment.”

Things don’t change, so us millennials blame you boomers for gobbling up our social security and you say we should just get a job. And on and on it goes. But don’t miss the fact that this is not, or at least God is not taking this as, just generational squabbles. He is taking this as a theological statement. If you think you are getting an undeserved deal, you are criticizing the judge and arbiter of all that is good. You are criticizing God. And he isn’t having any of it.

And so you want to blame your problems on your parents, ok fine, what are you going to do about it? Sit and whine at God about how unfair your life is? Tell me how that ends up. And you’re going to ignore that they kept you alive, for better or worse, through years of vulnerability. So you’re going to blame your spouse, your friends, the checkout lady that make you so mad? Well guess what, it’s your anger. It’s your sinful outburst, deal with it. You’re going to blame the clothing or internet

on that lustful eye of yours? It's your eye, move it. You're going to sit there and stare at what everyone else has and pine, and grow green with jealous envy and bitterness? It's your stuff you're ignoring, how about a "thank you" for once? You're going to sit there and whine about how unfair it is when people treat you poorly, then turn around and do the same things "but it's different because... blah blah blah," then wonder why no one likes you? It's your mirror, look in it! You're going to complain that you got cancer or whatever, and how could God let that happen to you? Well did the seven year old ask for it either? Got a thought to spare for them? Or maybe a thought on how you could find some courage, or daresay, show some courage?

And I get it, those are all mean things to say. And when they come up in counseling they usually give the person someone else to blame, their mean and terrible counselor. But they are true. And you may be thinking, "Pastor you still don't get it, that person did cheat me, and they were intentionally rude to me, and there was abuse growing up, and life isn't fair!" I'm not denying that. I am not condoning abuse. And I would certainly never say those things don't impact us. We champion families all the time as God's best case scenario for the world, and if that is broken it's gonna hurt and it is going to impact our kids. I am saying that our text today is not going to let us use those as excuses to sin or to grumble against God as if he is a capricious sprite or unjust – which to say or think is in itself a sin.

To say God is unfair because you lack what others have is to despise what he has given you. To say God is unjust because he let you be cheated by that person is to despise the gifts he has given you for free. To say God is unjust because you have a sickness or pain another does not have is to say he is too stupid to use evil for our good. And to go around blaming everyone else for your problems is inaccurate and hypocritically prideful because it implies that you don't cause any problems for anyone else, which, spoiler alert, is certainly not true.

And so what are we - sinners who go around causing problems for ourselves and others – what are we to do? I think the first suggestion today is to stop playing the blame game. Some things are our fault, some aren't. Accept that. And then maybe we can help each other share and lift the mutual burdens we place on each other. What might that look like? Maturity?

“ But Pastor, should I just let them cheat me!?” This isn't to say we don't have decisions and actions we can make in these instances for the good of us and our neighbor (who they might cheat after us), but these texts aren't an exhaustive list as to what to do in each situation, they are instruction on, what is our attitude in the midst of them? Whine? Complain? Scream? And most notably, Curse God for his unfairness? We don't want our two year olds doing that when they don't get their way, yet we do them when we don't get ours. It's time to grow up.

I think we get a picture of this in Philippians 2. If Paul wanted to play the blame game. He could have. He could blame the government for tossing him in jail. He could blame the Churches for not feeling bad enough about his imprisonment, for not sending him enough messages and gifts in prison even after all he did for them – “not even so much as a thank you”. He could blame them for not being brave enough, “why is no one else in there with me, those cowards!”

He could blame God because, “Hey, God, I was just doing what you told me to do-how unfair of you to treat me like this!” “Aren’t you in control of all things? Didn’t you release the apostles from prison before, why not me!? That’s not fair, God.”

But is that what Paul is saying in Philippians? No. Maybe that’s because Paul’s suffering was never not a part of the deal. Paul persecuted the Church, his sin, his fault. And Jesus told him “I will show you how much you must suffer for my name.” And Paul says, “Yep, this is fair.” Or perhaps not, perhaps what was fair for Paul was condemnation and eternal separation from God for what he has done. Perhaps a prison sentence in Rome is less than fair. Maybe it’s a mercy compared to what he owes.

What about us? What do we owe? “Life” is not fair. It isn’t. But that’s a whole lot different than saying God is not just, isn’t it? So let’s be careful.

Maybe you suffer because you are a sinner! Maybe not. But are you going to stand before the King and blame him for it?

The King who didn't have to come to sinful parents. Who didn't have to deal with our problems. He didn't cause them. We did. Why should he have to fix them? And the government was corrupt for him too, his friends were useless and one a backstabber. The guards were fools who had no idea who they were hitting , mocking, and spitting on. And he had no reason to deserve it. It was completely unfair. And he had everyone else to blame. Blame the romans, blame the jews, blame judas, blame peter, blame you, blame me. That's why he died right? And he still went... for you.

To give you an unfair gift of life eternal. To wash you clean, to make you his own. To see you through the ups and downs of this "unfair" life, to the unfair fruits of the resurrection of Jesus – to life eternal.

And so Paul who last week told us "to die is gain, and to live is fruitful labor" – well, here he is offering instruction, exhortation and encouragement from an unfair jail cell to people like the Philippians and you and me with all our unfair problems. And the encouragement isn't to throw a fit, but to stand firm and in every circumstance rejoice in the unfair gifts of God.

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy?” Well is there any of that? Yes there is! Flowing from a cross and empty tomb to you through word and sacrament. Folks, so lets complete the joy, lets be in the same mind of the truth and hope we have.

We don’t have to be rivals, we can count others more significant than ourselves because we know we are loved and valued so much that God would die for us!

What is popularity or fame compared to that! We can do things without grumbling because we know that things don’t always go our way, no, but Jesus is risen and we have life – what an unfair gift! Who are we to begrudge someone else a gift when we have received so much.

Indeed they can pour our blood out like a drink offering, and we, like Paul can face such things unafraid and with mature hope in eternal life. The dishes may be dirty, you may be out that money, your freedoms might be infringed, you might be disrespected, you might be sick, you may be on a deathbed while the wicked prosper and are healthy... But Jesus is risen, eternal days are yours. No one can take that from you. Because he has come to you in Word, and in Sacrament. It happened, it’s real. Which means our hope and our joy and our courage in every circumstance can be real as well. God be praised. Amen.