

Ezekiel 14B

- I'm often annoyed by the way the world portrays devout Christians in the movies
 - The "cool" Christians are those who don't take their religion too seriously
 - They're vaguely religious, keeping their beliefs to themselves
 - They celebrate tolerance in the spirit of love
 - They even embrace other religions and even enjoy a little sin once in a while
 - That's the cool Christian
 - Then there are the evil, wacky Christians in the movies
 - We're the ones who actually believe the Bible
 - We dare to live according to what it says
 - We talk opening about the need to be forgiven of sin and the reality of hell
 - And we insist that unless you are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, you cannot see heaven
 - Those are the bad Christians, according to the movies
 - Of course, we know what's really going on here...
 - This is a spiritual battle, where the enemy is seeking to silence the Gospel and neutralize the witness of true believers
 - The world hypocritically calls for tolerance but will only tolerate Christians who hide their Christianity
 - They demonize Christians who actually live out their faith, because our witness prompts conviction and fear of judgment
 - So they try to pressure us into silence
- And yet, ungodly people often find comfort in an association with the godly as an insurance policy against bad things happening

- We're like a lucky charm for them when things go really wrong in their life
 - They may ask us to say a prayer for them
 - Or they desire our friendship or counsel because they feel we're "closer" to God and we can provide them some protection
- It's superstition born out of an ignorance of Who God is and How we find a relationship with Him
 - This misconception is not new...it's always existed among the ungodly and unbelieving of the world
 - And we'll see it at work among Israel today in chapter 14 as well
- Last week we studied the fourth excuse of Israel, the excuse that Israel's leaders were personally responsible for the nation's idolatry
 - The people said they need not fear the word of the prophet since God's judgment would fall only their leaders
 - They thought they would be spared since they were merely following the example of the elders
 - So they ignored the prophet's warning and went on sinning
 - The Lord's declared their excuse to be invalid by calling all Israel to repent personally or else face judgment
 - God said His mercy was available equally to all who repented
 - But likewise, His judgment would fall upon all who failed to repent of idolatry
 - That fourth excuse exposed a bias within the people of Israel, a false understanding of how God operates
 - They assumed that the behavior of one person could be the basis for God's relationship to an entire group of people
 - Just as they thought the Lord would let judgment for their bad behavior fall on a leader
 - In the same way, they assumed that the good behavior of one person in the group would be cause for God to overlook the sin of the group

- These are excuses for sin, and the Lord is setting them straight
 - Last week He corrected their misconception concerning leaders
 - And in the second half of the chapter He explains that another's righteousness will do us no good

Ezek. 14:12 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezek. 14:13 “Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast,

Ezek. 14:14 even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,” declares the Lord God.

Ezek. 14:15 “If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts,

Ezek. 14:16 though these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord God, “they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate.

Ezek. 14:17 “Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,’

Ezek. 14:18 even though these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord God, “they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters, but they alone would be delivered.

Ezek. 14:19 “Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it,

Ezek. 14:20 even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord God, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.”

Ezek. 14:21 For thus says the Lord God, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it!

- The Lord says if a country (namely, Israel) sins against Him in unfaithfulness to the covenant, then He will stretch out His hand against them
 - In response, He will bring various calamities against the land and the people
 - The calamities include four categories of disaster
 - First, in v.13 the Lord describes a famine so great it cuts off man and beast

- In v.15 he describes attacks by wild animals that run people out of the land
 - Those two would seem to go together, for as famine increases we would expect wild animals to attack humans for food
 - Then in v.17 the Lord warns of war devastating the country
 - And finally, in v.19 the Lord warns of a plague so great it leaves no one alive
- These four disasters are uniquely specific, and they draw our attention back to a certain chapter of the Law found in Leviticus
 - In other words, these warnings are not new information for the people of Israel
 - The Lord promised these outcomes in the covenant of the Law as penalty for disobedience and unfaithfulness
 - Specifically, in Leviticus 26 the Lord promised:

Lev. 26:14 'But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, **Lev. 26:15** if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, **Lev. 26:16** I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

Lev. 26:21 'If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins.

Lev. 26:22 'I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted.

Lev. 26:25 'I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands.

Lev. 26:26 'When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied.

- In Lev 26 we find all four types of calamities mentioned here in Ezekiel
 - These curses were part of what God promised to Israel in the Law as repercussions for breaking His covenant

- And Lord reminds Israel of these judgment to make clear that He's simply acting in keeping with His word
- He's remaining faithful to His covenant even as Israel did not
- Because He's a covenant-keeping God
- Remember, the Old Covenant was a national covenant that obligated all the people of Israel to a single response from God
 - If the entire nation obeyed the covenant, then they all received the promises
 - But if the entire nation wasn't faithful to the covenant, the entire nation would see these curses
 - So God is only doing what He promised to do
- But then the Lord moves to making His point concerning associated righteousness
 - He says in v.14 that even if three especially godly men were living among them, nevertheless His judgments would still come against Israel
 - The three men were Noah, Daniel and Job
 - The Lord is speaking entirely hypothetically, because these three men didn't live at the same time in history
 - Noah lived thousands of years earlier, Job lived hundreds of years earlier and Daniel was still alive
 - By the way, Ezekiel's mention of Daniel refutes those who say Daniel's book was written long after the events he predicted
 - God chose these three men from history to emphasize the point that one man's righteousness has no bearing on another's fate
 - For example, Noah was a righteous man, but his righteousness couldn't save the world when the flood came
 - Daniel was a righteous man, but his righteousness couldn't save his nation when Babylon came
 - And Job was a righteous man, but his righteousness couldn't save his own family when the enemy came

- An upright man couldn't save the world nor a nation nor even a family
 - Their righteousness only served to save themselves
 - The rest suffered the penalty they deserved
- Few principles of scripture could be more important than this: we are each accountable to God for ourself
 - No matter how "good" someone is, that person will not be cause for God to overlook another's sin
 - You may have an especially godly mother or father
 - Or you may be married to an especially godly spouse
 - Or you may be best friends to Billy Graham or you might shine the pope's shoes or mow the pastor's lawn...
 - But none of that counts for anything when you stand before God for your judgment
 - There is only relationship we can have that will pay dividends for us at our judgement
 - That's our relationship with God through Jesus Christ
 - Jesus is the one true righteous man, the one man who never sinned
 - And because He was perfect, He pleased God the Father
 - No other human being can make that claim
 - Therefore, if we hope to be saved from the judgment we deserve for our sin, we need to receive credit for Christ's perfection in place of our sin
 - Placing faith in Jesus Christ results in God crediting us with Christ's righteousness
 - And God counts Christ's death as the payment our sin required
 - That's the only association that pays us dividends in Heaven
- That's what made Noah, Daniel and Job righteous in the first place
 - They were righteous by faith, credited with the righteousness of Christ, and their faith saved them

- In v.20 the Lord says these three men were delivered by their own righteousness, which refers to their saving faith in God's promises
- And that salvation wasn't transferrable
- Notice the Lord repeats this conclusion three times in the passage I read
 - In v.14, v.16 and v.20 the Lord says these men couldn't even save their own sons and daughters
 - Noah, Daniel and Job needed a Savior too
 - Every person is equally guilty of sin before the Lord
- In fact, if these three men HAD been living in the city, it would have only made the judgment that much more appropriate
 - In v.21 the Lord says how much more when He sends His four judgments against the city...
 - He's saying that if Noah, Daniel and Job were living in the midst of the city, He would be preserving them from judgment because of their righteousness
 - But then after preserving them and removing them from harm's way, how much more would the remainder of the city deserve what was coming?
 - So rather than saving the city, these men would only serve to convict the city all the more, since they should have seen their good examples and followed after them
- To quote Jesus in Luke 18:19, there is no one good but God alone
 - Therefore, none of us have any "spare" righteousness to offer another
 - We all obtain righteousness by our faith, and that righteousness is not our own, it's Christ's righteousness given to us
 - So we don't have anything to give to anyone else
- Yet among the unbelieving in the world, people still assume God works this way
 - The world likes to think they may earn God's approval one way or another

- And conveniently, the world thinks the standard for heaven is low enough that they can meet the requirements with just a little effort
- So when they come across someone who is especially devoted to serving God, the world assumes that person has an excess of heavenly credit
- They are doing way more than what's required to get into heaven, so they can afford to share that wealth with other people
- So by associating with that person, they're getting a heavenly insurance policy
- That thinking lies at the heart of the Catholic teaching on saints
 - They teach that certain people lived such a commendable life that they merited excess favor with God
 - And so their excess merit they can be shared with others
 - So when things begin to go wrong for a Catholic, they turn to these "spiritual" all-stars seeking comfort and protection
 - They pray to their favorite saint expecting a heavenly transfer of favor
- And this superstition is also evident in personal relationships
 - Have you noticed how unreligious people will sometimes seek out a committed Christian to ask for prayer in times of desperation?
 - Or maybe they joke about you putting in a good word for them with "the Man upstairs"
 - You find this happening especially in families where there's a lone Christian in the group
- I see this happening in my own family every year about this time, as Thanksgiving and Christmas roll around
 - The family I came from is not religious at all and so we never bother with saying a prayer before a meal
 - Except when I'm at the table and it's a holiday

- There's that awkward pause before everyone eats as they all look at me helplessly expecting me to pray so they can eat
- Because God hears my prayers since I'm so "spiritual"
- That's the same kind of thinking we're talking about here
 - Though Israel was unwilling to obey God, they expected the Lord to be merciful to them because a few Jews among them were obedient
 - Like their reasoning for their fourth excuse, they assumed history supported their assumption
 - Last week I mentioned that the history of Babylon's attacks on the city of Jerusalem may have given the people reason to think that their leaders alone would be judged
 - But as I said, they had selective memory, because they overlooked that many Jews besides the leaders were caught up in the destruction
 - And perhaps the people have again drawn the wrong conclusion from their history
 - Perhaps they remembered the account of Abraham saving Lot from Sodom's destruction
 - In that account, Abraham asked God to spare the city if ten righteous people could be found
 - That story seemed to suggest that God saves cities if there are any righteous living in them
 - If that's what they thought, then they conveniently overlooked the outcome for the city of Sodom in that story
 - While the Lord fulfilled His promise to Abraham concerning For and his family, in the end the city of Sodom was destroyed and all the ungodly with it
 - Only those who were willing to obey the voice of the Lord spoken through His messengers, the angels, escaped the judgment
 - So though a righteous man lived in the city, in the end the city still received judgment
- In Jerusalem's case, the city would be judged and nothing was going to stop it

- The die was cast, because the people had violated the covenant
 - But even still, we've been watching the Lord giving warning after warning
 - He's told the people time and again through Ezekiel that this judgment was coming
 - And He's told them how to survive the attack by repenting
 - If they did as He asked, they would survive and be given safety in exile
- In that way the Lord could both be faithful to His promises in the covenant to judge Israel's unfaithfulness and yet He can also be merciful to His people
 - Despite His patience and mercy, the people continue to make excuses for why they should ignore Ezekiel's warnings
 - Remember this pattern when you reflect on what the Lord is preparing to do in Jerusalem
 - The Lord has been merciful and patient with His people, and yet He is also faithful to His word
- That's what a good father does...He keeps His word while looking for every opportunity to show mercy and grace
 - When my kids used to get into trouble and we had to discipline them, sometimes they would expect us to overlook their mistake
 - They wanted to avoid punishment, of course, but as parents we had to balance maintaining respect for our authority
 - So I would tell my kids, "You did the wrong thing, and now I have to do the right thing in disciplining you. You can't expect me to do the wrong thing also."
- Nevertheless, we looked for every way we could to show mercy and restraint in that discipline, depending on the degree of repentance the child demonstrated
 - More repentance, more mercy
 - Less repentance, less mercy

- But in all cases, we had to keep our word to bring some kind of consequences, otherwise our word quickly meant nothing
- That's how you should see the Lord responding here to His covenant people
- In fact, notice how the chapter ends

Ezek. 14:22 “Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it.

Ezek. 14:23 “Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it,” declares the Lord God.

- In spite of everything the city has done in worshipping idols and setting up abominations and failing to repent, still the Lord will preserve survivors
 - In fact, the Lord says that the city would see the conduct of these people and that would bring them comfort in the calamity
 - The Hebrew word translated conduct and actions literally means evil actions
 - So the Lord is saying that the exiles will see the kind of people who will join them from Israel
 - Evil people will be preserved through the judgment
 - And as these evil people come to Babylon in captivity to join the rest of the exiles, they will testify to what they did
 - And they will explain how the Lord preserved them nonetheless
 - And then the people of Israel will take some comfort in see the big picture
 - They will understand why the Lord brought everything that He did against the city and the people
 - And they will appreciate the Lord's mercy and kindness and restraint in the face of His righteous judgment
- Moreover, the Lord says in v.23 that they will find comfort in seeing that His judgment wasn't in vain

- The Lord is alluding to the change of heart He knows this judgment will bring to His people
 - The exiles will cease their rebellion in idolatry
 - They will acknowledge their wicked past
 - And they will commit themselves to remaining faithful to the covenant in the future
- Earlier the Lord said that not even Noah, Daniel and Job could save their sons and daughters from the coming judgment
 - But now in v.22 God says He would save both sons and daughters
 - By His mercy He would preserve a remnant within Israel
- What Noah, Daniel and Job couldn't do, God did
 - Righteousness couldn't spare the guilty
 - But a righteous God could, but responding to their repentance with grace
- This is our relationship too...before coming to faith in Jesus, we were no better than Israel was
 - We engaged in different sin, but it made us just as unholy and just as deserving of judgment
 - We too may have thought that we would escape judgment by our own righteousness
 - Or perhaps that of our parents or spouse
 - But they couldn't save us... and we couldn't even save ourselves
 - But God can save us
 - The Lord is prepared to save those who throw themselves on His mercy, who acknowledge their sin
 - And who accept the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ are receiving the righteousness that can't be found any other way
 - And in the end, that person will be saved from judgment