

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated. All right, we got some challenging things going on here in the book of Ezekiel. "The righteousness shall not live by the righteousness. The wicked shall not live by the wickedness. They shall not die." It's all a little bit confusing and convoluted, but let's kind of get into it and what is it saying? First of all, the main point that it is saying is that it is God's grace that saves. It is not the righteousness that you perform. It is not how good you are and how many good works you do before God that saves you, that should give you comfort. It is the grace of God.

And if you fail to live up to God's grace and you fall and you do wicked, then why should you expect anything but God's wrath? On the converse side, if you do wickedness and you seek the grace of God, you can be assured that he will grant you his forgiveness and his grace. In other words, it's not about what you do or fail to do, it's about what God has already done for you. That's where your confidence lies. That's where your hope lies. Now, before we get too much further into it, I do want to speak about what was at the very beginning. Ezekiel was told by God that if somebody is sinning and I tell you to speak to them and you do not, their guilt is upon you. This is not telling each and every one of us as Christians that we are to find everybody who is doing something evil and condemn them and tell them that they're evil and doing wrong.

That's not our jobs as Christians. Our job as Christians is to show love and grace. Now, as a pastor, that is kind of part of my job. My favorite part of the job actually. Yeah, no, but that is what I am called to do as the spiritual head of this congregation. I am called to point out sin. That is my job because I have spiritual authority over you. But if you do not have spiritual authority over someone, it's not your job to beat them up with the law. The law is already working in their hearts. The conscience of man, and they already know if they're listening, if they're paying attention, you don't need to hammer it home even harder. Okay? That's not your job. That's the job of the Holy Spirit and those who have spiritual authority over them. Your job is to love them.

Your job is to seek the will of God in your life so that they can see God's work in you and give glory to God. But the thing of it is, if we are righteous, we still have a temptation. We each and every day are tempted to fall away. Even though we've been given the freedom of the gospel, we each and every one of us have the possibility of walking away from God if we do not pay attention to his word. The Israelites Paul is talking about here in his book, the Israelites were freed from slavery, literal slavery. They saw all the miracles of the plagues going on. They passed through the Red Sea.

They were defended from the armies by God drowning the armies of Egypt. So they were not in fear or pursuit. They got to the Promised Land. God continued to guide them by a pillar of fire and a pillar of smoke. They saw all these miracles and marvels and wonders. They get to the promised land, send the 12 spies in. They come back, oh, these people are huge and mighty. The land is wonderful, but the people are strong.

And I know God said to go in here, but I think maybe we should stay over here. It's nice and safe. They saw all the miracles of God and they did not trust him and trust his word. And so what happened? God said, fine, you like the wilderness so much. Let's spend 40 years here until you all die, and then I'll raise up the next generation. And they continued in the wilderness. They didn't learn their lesson. They continued to rebel against God, idolatry, sexual immorality, grumbling, complaining, testing God. These were people that had seen the mighty hand of God firsthand and did not hold fast to his word, but fell away.

So there is an admonition that we are hearing here, that we as Christians are called to hold fast to the promise of God, not to get complacent in our own self-righteousness. I'm sorry. Not to get satisfied with our own behavior and think this, I'm doing good, I'm doing good in and of myself. I'm better. I'm holier because I go to church on a regular basis. I give my money to the church. I serve other people. I do good. Therefore, I'm okay. That's going to get us into trouble because it's not... The point is not what we do. Again, the point is what God has done for us. He has saved us. He has redeemed us. He has adopted us and grafted us in that family of Israel, in our baptisms. And as a result of that, we are called to serve and called to do good. It is true. We as righteous people who have been redeemed by Christ are called to serve one another, love God with all of our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves. These are good and right things put in their proper place.

We do those things not because we have to, not because God demands it, but because God has already saved us and given us his blessings. And as a result, we want to thank him for the marvelous deeds that he has done. And so we are called to bear witness to God's faithfulness, to preach to the wicked because God doesn't want anybody out there to be damned. That's not his desire. He wants them to know the promises.

He also wants us to know the promises and to put our reliance upon him and his word because that is the only thing that sustains us in this life. Even when things get tough, even when there are trials and tribulations and temptations, we know that nothing God gives us is more than we can handle by His grace. He will always give us a way out. And where is that way out? It's in the word of God. We find our strength in the Word of God. We find our path through temptation in the Word of

God. We find our encouragement to serve one another in the Word of God. We find our hope in his word.

And if we're struggling, if we're thinking about what is going on, why are these things happening to me? Remember this, no evil has befallen man that is not common. If you seem to have more hardships than somebody else, it's not because God hates you more than he hates somebody else. God doesn't hate anybody. He loves all people. There is sin and evil in this world. And sin and evil happens, unfortunately sometimes to people that we don't think deserve it. But the fact of the matter is nothing that happens in this world that befalls us, the trials, the tribulations, the injuries, the death, the heartache. Nothing befalls us in this world that can keep us from the word of God.

And what befalls us in this world is far less than what will befall us in the next if we reject his word. And so he calls us to hold fast, to focus upon the word of God. That is where our hope resides. And since we are his children, he calls us to bear fruit. And if we're struggling to bear fruit, don't worry, God will come around and put a little manure on us. It's what it says. The fig tree doesn't produce fruit. What's going to happen? He's going to dig around and put a little manure on it, and hopefully that'll help the tree grow and produce fruit.

Well, what is that manure in our lives? It's the trials that we face. We grow stronger in our trials when we are confronted with challenges. We can either give up and give in to them or we can look to God. And instead of saying, God, why me? Rather say, God, what are you teaching me? What am I to learn here? How can I learn your steadfast love and see it happening? Let me open my eyes so that I might see how you are working here.

The manure may stink and the trials of our life may stink, but they serve a purpose with God. They strengthen us. They nourish us because they drive us to His word and they strengthen us for the journey ahead so that we might seek to live out our righteousness in this world, trusting in Him to forgive and renew. Because we are in the last ages. We are in the last days. He's coming soon and he wants us to receive him with joy, to anticipate the coming. After all, he has solved the one problem that nothing else can. Money, science, health, wealth, power. None of that can solve the one problem that all of us have. We are going to die.

We are. It's a fact. The only thing that can save us is the word of God. And that's what we cling to. That's what we hold fast to. And as we cling to the word, we are encouraged to love our fellow man and to serve them so that they might know that even their wickedness is forgiven in Christ, just as our wickedness is forgiven in Christ. Hold fast to his word and may his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.

