

The Dynamics of God

Ezekiel 33:7-20

The Third Sunday in Lent, March 7, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

God has a thesis to prove to you. The thesis is simple: His ways are just.

Ordinarily God would not have to prove anything to anyone. He is the one who says that things are and they are. He said, "Let there be light" and light was there. If that is the case, He can simply declare that something is just and it is just. He can simply declare that something is righteous and it is righteous. He has that kind of power. He is the Creator of heaven and earth. He could simply declare His ways to be just and they would be just. He could simply declare His ways to be righteous and they would be righteous. He is God after all.

But today God wishes to submit His ways to scrutiny. That is one of the funny things about believing in Jesus. This almighty God of ours submits Himself to scrutiny. He will allow His ways to be put to the test. What He wants to prove to us is simple: My ways are just. In spite of the fact that there are people out there who say that My ways are not just, they are, nevertheless, just.

God offers His first set of evidence.

First of all, let us take the example of a wicked person. Let us say that this wicked person robs from his neighbors. He defiles his neighbor's wife. He charges his neighbors usury. Let us say that he will not give back what he has taken in pledge. Let us say that he oppresses the poor. In other words he takes advantage of them economically for his own gain.

Now let us say that this evil man turns from his evil ways. Let us say that he quits robbing people. Let us say that instead of oppressing his poor neighbors he becomes generous towards them and helps them in their time of need. Let us say that he begins to respect the marriage bed and his neighbor's marriage. Let us say that he no longer charges usury. He no longer is interested only in his own self gain. Let us say that he renounces violence.

God says that such a person who turns from evil and does good will live.

God also offers the example of a righteous person. This person does not defile his neighbor's wife. This person does not rob the poor or charge usury. This person gives back what he has taken in pledge. This person does not engage in works of violence. He looks out for the widow and the orphan. This person is generous to those who are less fortunate than himself.

Now let us say that such a person begins to trust in his own righteousness. He says to himself, "I am a pretty decent person. I am square with God. Now I want to live how I want." He therefore turns from his righteous ways and does evil. He begins to commit adultery. He begins to charge usury. He begins to oppress his neighbors for his own gain. Since he had previously acted righteously everyone trusts him. That makes it easy for him to take advantage of them now. He starts to keep what is given to him in pledge. He starts to commit acts of violence.

God says that such a person who trusts in his righteousness and turns from it and does wickedness will die.

That is God's first set of evidence that His ways are just.

So you cannot say to yourself or to God that we are rotting away in our sins! You cannot say that to God. You cannot say that there is no hope for me. I have already done so much evil and so much wickedness that there is no way for me to live. That is not true. Turn from your wickedness and you will live. You cannot say any more that you are decaying under your sins and there is nothing that you can do

about them. We would like to believe that there is nothing that we can do about them so that we have some kind of excuse on the day of judgment. We want to be able to stand in front of Jesus and say, "Well, we were so bad that there was nothing that we could have done about it." That will not fly. You can do something about it. You can do something about it because the way of the Lord is just. Turn!

The Lord does not delight in the death of the wicked. He does not get some kind of good feeling by putting to death the wicked. He does not take delight in judging you. He does not take delight in punishing you. Do you really think that the Lord likes to be mad all of the time? When you read the oracles of doom from the prophets, does God sound like He is getting some kind of pleasure from doing all of this? Do you really think that God enjoyed sending the flood to destroy the whole world except for believing Noah and his family? The Lord does not delight in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked may turn and live. Turn! Turn from you evil ways! Turn from your evil ways and live!

The second thing that God offers as proof that His ways are just: the watchman.

It is not just that God has these principles: a righteous person turns from his righteousness and does evil and dies and an evil person turns from his evil and does righteousness and lives. It is also that God sends someone to us to warn us! If it is that we turn from our wickedness we will live, then God also has the decency to warn us so that we will turn from our evil ways and live.

The main person that God has sent into our lives for this purpose is Jesus. Jesus does not hesitate to warn us. "Do you think that the people upon whom the tower in Siloam fell were worse sinners because they suffered in this way? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those people whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices? Do you think that they were worse sinners because they suffered in this way? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you too will all perish." There is your warning from Jesus. It is a statement from our Lord that is easy to apply today what with earthquakes in Haiti and now Chile. Jesus makes those earthquakes into warning signs. They are His warnings of the coming divine judgment. In His divine judgment at the end Jesus will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. So Jesus gives us little shakes in advance to remind us of His power and His coming judgment and to remind us to turn from our wicked ways and repent. Turn! Turn from your evil ways and live! Why shall you die?

Then Jesus sends other people into our lives to warn us on His behalf. The primary people that Jesus sends are our parents. They warn us to turn from evil and do good. They are under direction from the Lord to do so. They speak with His authority. They speak for our good. They themselves are under an obligation. All watchmen are under obligation.

The obligation goes like this. If a watchman whom Jesus has appointed sees evil going on under his watch and does nothing to rebuke it, the people committing the evil will die for their sins, but God will seek their blood from the hand of the watchman. On the other hand, if a watchman sees evil going on under his watch and he rebukes it, if they repent everything is fine. If they do not repent, they will die for their sins, but because the watchman rebuked them, God will not seek their blood from his hand.

Now take the vocation of parent. That means that evil goes on among your children and you do not rebuke it or correct it, your children will die for their sin and God will seek their blood from your hand. If you rebuke it or correct it and your children do not repent, they will die for their sin, but you will have saved yourself. If you correct or rebuke them and they do repent, then everyone is saved.

The vocation of parents extends to their own children. The vocation of preacher extends only to the congregation to which he is called. But in regards to the congregation I am under the same obligation of watchman as parents are to their children. Mine is in regard to those things that the Word of God

teaches. Parents are in regard to all things. Mine covers many people. Parents cover only a few people entrusted to their care.

And just a word on other vocations. You rebuke where your vocation requires you to do so and not outside of the vocation. In other words you don't go hunting down sinners to rebuke who are outside of the realm of your vocation. There are preachers who do this and they embarrass themselves and their Lord. Teachers correct the students entrusted to their care and in regards to what God has given them to teach. That is often easier said than done, but then all vocations are easier said than done.

So God has appointed watchmen in your life. And God has appointed you to be a watchmen for others all according to your vocations. Your vocations come from God anyway.

In this way God provides warning for yourself and for everyone else. He is ultimately fair and just because He provides such warning. The warning is simple: an evil person will die for their sin, unless they turn and do righteousness. A righteous person will live, unless they turn and do evil.

This is the proof that God offers that His ways are just. We cannot say that His ways are unjust. Our ways are unjust. Our ways would not provide any warning. We like to see people zapped. And our ways hold grudges. Sometimes people turn from their evil ways and we don't forgive them. Those are our ways, but they are not God's ways.

So turn! Turn! Why should you die! Turn from your evil ways and do good and you will live.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.