

## Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

*The Soul Who Sins Shall Die*

**The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? 3 As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.**

The theme that runs through Ezekiel 18 concerns inherited guilt. The proverb in this reading addresses the problems of self-pity, fatalism, and despair in the lives of the people. In the face of the Babylonian captivity and exile there are questions on the minds of the people. Whose fault was this? Was it their forefathers? Were the people of Ezekiel’s day supposed to pay the penalty for someone else’s sin? And if so, then why should they even bother following the way of God? Ezekiel explains why this generation has to pay for sins. It is not because they are paying for the sins of the fathers but rather because they are still sinning themselves. (CSB)

Theologically, this chapter ranks as one of the most important in the Book. Its overall theme is individual accountability before God. A person’s ultimate judgment comes when he must face the heavenly Judge at death. Ezekiel addresses the issue through three examples or case studies (vv 5–9; 10–13; 14–17). Ch 18 has affinities with chs 3; 33. (TLSB)

**18:2** Ezekiel is not asking for a direct answer, but challenging his audience to defend their shallow attempt to deny their guilt. (TLSB)

*this proverb.* Cf. Jer 31:29, which indicates that the proverb arose first in Jerusalem. Jeremiah predicted the cessation of the proverb, and Ezekiel said its end had come. (CSB)

Jeremiah’s refutation is oriented more to the future time of the new covenant. (TLSB)

*concerning the land of Israel.* And about the fate of those who have suffered loss. (CSB)

*The fathers ... on edge.*† The proverb, though it expresses self-pity, fatalism and despair, and though it mocks the justice of God, had its origin in a false interpretation of corporate solidarity (see Ex 20:5; 34:7 and Ezekiel’s own words in chs. 16; 23). In La 5:7 the thought appears as a sincere confession. (CSB)

There is a tendency in each of us to blame someone else for our troubles. Ezekiel’s warning that Jerusalem would be punished because of the accumulated sins of the nation led the people to complain about being punished for the sins of others. They probably said it was all King Manasseh’s fault. He had been notorious for his “detestable sins” (2 Kings 21:10-15). (PBC)

The people accused God of being unfair. Behind their complaint was the idea they were not as guilty as their fathers had been and didn’t deserve what was about to happen. (PBC)

*set on edge.* The Hebrew for this phrase perhaps means “blunted” or “worn” (cf. Ecc 10:10), but it may refer to the sensation in the mouth when eating something bitter or sour. (CSB)

**18:3** *as I live.* A divine oath, revealing God’s unalterable intention. It is used often in Ezekiel (5:11; 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 20:3, 31, 33; 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11). (CSB)

God answered their objection. He created everyone. Each individual has a direct relationship with God. God expects each person to respond to his love with a life of love. (PBC)

**18:4** *The soul who sins shall die.* Or “Only the soul . . . ” Ezekiel spoke out against a false use the people were making of a doctrine of inherited guilt (perhaps based on a false understanding of Ex 20:5; 34:7). What follows is his description of three men, standing for three generations, who break the three/four-generation pattern. (CSB)

Summarizes ch 18. Since all souls were created by God, He guides their destinies and judges them. Death is the punishment for unrepentant sinners. Throughout ch. 18, life and death are used in their ultimate, beyond-this-world aspects. Gregory of Nyssa: “The death of the body consists in the extinction of the means of sensible perception, and in the dissolution of the body into its kindred elements: but ‘the soul that sinneth,’ he says, ‘it shall die.’ Now sin is nothing else than alienation from God, Who is the true and only life” (*NPNF* 2 5:126–27). Ambrose: “[The soul] dies to the Lord, through the weakness not of nature but of guilt. But this death is not the discharge from this life, but a fall through error” (*NPNF* 2 10:179). St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Who, then, is righteous, except he who returns to God, who loves him, His meed of love? . . . And he receives by one and the same Spirit both the reason for thinking that he is loved and the power of returning love, lest the love of God for us should be left without return” (*SLSB*, p 157). (TLSB)

Everyone is responsible to the Lord for his way of life. The Lord punishes the sinner for his own sins. God does not punish anyone for someone else’s sin. (PBC)

*soul.* “Life” or “person,” not used here to distinguish spirit from body. (CSB)

**25 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? 26 When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. 27 Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. 28 Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 29 Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? 30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”**

**18:25** *the way of the Lord is not just* – It seems that no matter what God did, Ezekiel’s fellow countrymen criticized him as unjust for punishing them, for forgiving sinners, and for condemning the righteous man who turned away from the Lord. (PBC)

The people still protest that the Lord’s ways are not fair, but arbitrary or unpredictable. It is the other way around—God acts consistently according to His rules of justice, while people are fickle and reject God’s revelation. Athanasius: “A servant would not dare to say, because I worked yesterday, I will not work today; and considering the past [I] will do no work in the future; . . . so let us daily abide firm in our discipline” (*NPNF* 2 4:201). (TLSB)

**18:27** *he shall save his life.* As throughout ch 18, the life Ezekiel refers to seems to be eternal life. Temporal life or death may or may not be included. (TLSB)

**18:30** *Therefore.* Concluding, summary oracle. (CSB)

*every one.* While the house of Israel as a whole was guilty, God's judgment would be just and individual. (CSB)

*Repent!* Second call to repentance (see 14:6). (CSB)

Two forms of the Hbr "turn," here repeated for emphasis. From the totality of Scripture, we know that this is possible only through the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

*lest iniquity be your ruin.* As the ESV note indicates, "ruin" is a free translation of "stumbling block," i.e., lest there be another relapse into apostasy. (TLSB)

**18:31** *get a new heart.* † What had been promised unconditionally (11:19; 36:26) is here portrayed as attainable but not inevitable (cf. Php 2:12 and 2:13). (CSB)

May be read as a condition: If you cast away ... then you will get a new heart and spirit. (Cf 36:26.) Chemnitz: "Just as there is an old and a new man, so the Law exercises control over the old man or his nature, coerces, crushes and mortifies it by outward discipline, punishments, and threats; but the consolation of the Gospel pertains to the new man and indeed produces the new man. For it is the ministration of renewal through which, when the man is outside he is brought low and when he is inside he is renewed from day to day" (*LTh* 2:664). (TLSB)

Hbr idiom is involved, which may be translated "get/acquire for yourselves" (cf 28:4; Dt 8:17; 2Sm 15:1; 1Ki 1:5). Sinners do not have a free will or ability to make their hearts new. (TLSB)

**18:32** *I have no pleasure.* Verse 23 is echoed in this final, grand summary, called by some the most important message in the whole book of Ezekiel. (CSB)

Repeats v 23 as a conclusion and as an invitation to repent and live as God intended before the fall into sin. Through His Son, God has provided the means for such a change of heart. See notes, 11:19; 36:26. Cyprian: "While God is provoked with frequent, yea, with continual offences, He softens His indignation, and in patience waits for the day of retribution, once for all determined; and although He has revenge in His power, He prefers to keep patience for a long while, bearing, that is to say, mercifully, and putting off, so that, if it might be possible, the long protracted mischief may at some time be changed, and man, involved in the contagion of errors and crimes, may even though late be converted to God" (*ANF* 5:485). (TLSB)

*turn and live* – God doesn't want people to be cut off from his blessings. He wants them to live. Man can't get a new heart and spirit on his own. The call to repentance expresses the need to acknowledge and turn away from sin, and to turn to God as the source of forgiveness. Christianity is not a movement, an organization, or an attitude. It is a relationship between God and an individual person based on Jesus Christ the Savior from sin. To attempt to base our relationship with God on ourselves without Jesus is to tell God that we think Christ's work is neither necessary nor beneficial. This chapter gives us a rich banquet of the gospel. Even when we think He is unfair for doing it. God still forgives. Our God, although just and willing to carry out His drastic threats and punishments, doesn't like doing it. He would much rather bless and give life. (PBC)

**Ch 18** God gives a clear, almost dogmatic, statement of how His justice operates. Life or death depends upon whether or not one believes and, as a result, lives out that faith. God severely condemns natural man's tendency to justify himself on the basis of his own supposed righteousness, or to blame God (or someone else) for unfairness. Ezekiel also beautifully asserts God's desire for everyone to be saved ("live"). • Lord, keep us steadfast in Christ's righteousness, which has satisfied Your justice and has given us new lives. Amen. (TLSB)

## EPISTLE – Philippians 2:1-18

### Christ's Example of Humility

**So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

**2:1** *any encouragement* – Paraklyeesis is a tender encouragement which addresses itself to the will of a Christian. Every true exhortation is based upon Christ, upon what He is and what He has done for us. The Apostle calls upon the Philippians to be moved to action for Christ's sake. Christ must always be the chief motivation for Christian action. Christians undertake every project to glorify Christ. Christ ever moves them to humble obedience. (Stoeckhardt)

*in Christ.* Or "united in Christ." In Paul's teaching, this personal union is the basic reality of salvation. To be in Christ is to be saved. It is to be in intimate personal relationship with Christ the Savior. From this relationship flow all the particular benefits and fruits of salvation, like encouragement (see, e.g., 3:8–10; Ro 8:1; 2Co 5:17; Gal 2:20). (CSB)

If the Philippians and other believers are to stand firm against the enemies of the gospel that threaten them from without, they must first be firmly united among themselves. (PBC)

*comfort from his love.* The comforting knowledge and assurance that come from God's love in Christ, demonstrated especially in Christ's death for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (see Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8; 8:38–39; 1Jn 3:16; 4:9–10, 16). (CSB)

In this appeal of love the person admonished is to feel that the speaker is not trying to force his own will upon the person addressed, but rather that only his good and the glory of Christ is sought. (Stoeckhardt)

*participation in the Spirit.* The fellowship among believers produced by the Spirit, who indwells each of them (see 2 Co 13:14). (CSB)

"Fellowship" or joining together of the Holy Spirit with the believer, which comes about through the inspired Word. (TLSB)

Pneumatosis indicates that the fellowship here is not a natural one, but one wrought by the Spirit. (Stoeckhardt)

*affection and sympathy.* Christians are to have intense care and deep sympathy for each other (see 1:8; Col 3:12). All these benefits—encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion—are viewed by Paul as present realities for the Philippians. (CSB)

Paul speaks to the Philippians' hearts, reminding them of the gospel blessings that are theirs in Christ, then appealing to them on the basis of those blessings. (PBC)

Splanchna really means the heart as the seat of affection. The readers as believers are united by the Spirit, and so they are already filled with cordial affection and mercy and sympathetic regard for the very thing which the Apostle's exhortation here is driving at. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:2** *same mind ... same love*. Emphasizes the unity that should exist among Christians. (CSB)

That means they should love the same object in such a manner that one loves the other as he desires to be loved of the other. They should be animated by the same sentiment. Love shows itself in the agreement of thought and sentiment, however, in such a way that at the same time they agree with the will of God. The things in which they must all agree lies outside of themselves, and that is the Word of God. (Stoeckhardt)

*lone mind*. Not uniformity in thought but the common disposition to work together and serve one another—the “attitude” of Christ (v. 5; see 4:2; Ro 12:16; 15:5; 2Co 13:11). (CSB)

Christ is the head of His Body, the Church, which He calls to be of one mind and to think the same things. Scripture reveals to us Christ's mind. The Spirit gives us a renewed mind. Love will to extend the kingdom of God's grace to everyone. This is the single-mindedness of Jesus, of Paul, and of God's Church. (TLSB)

The Philippians had already brought much joy to the apostle. Their partnership in the gospel, their faith and love, their generosity all brought him joy every time he thought about them or prayed for them. But there was one more thing the Philippians could strive to do, Paul's says, that would truly make his joy complete. That one thing was to seek a greater measure of harmony in their dealings and relationships with one another. (PBC)

**2:3** *selfish ambition or conceit*. The mortal enemies of unity and harmony in the church (cf. 1:17; see Gal 5:20, where “selfish ambition” is listed among the “acts of the sinful nature”). (CSB)

*humility*.† This is the mind-set of the person who is not conceited but who has a right attitude toward himself. (CSB)

*count others more significant than yourselves*. Not that everyone else is superior or more talented, but that Christian love sees others as worthy of preferential treatment (see Ro 12:10; Gal 5:13; Eph 5:21; 1Pe 5:5). (CSB)

View yourself conservatively: other people are greater in need or in wisdom. Such a perspective leads you to help or to be helped. (TLSB)

In flourishing congregations, where many members are knowledgeable and gifted, there is always the danger of the more gifted members looking down on the less gifted, and of the less gifted envying the more gifted. And it is always characteristic of human nature to minimize one's own weaknesses and to exaggerate one's own strengths, while doing just the opposite when observing the weaknesses and strengths of others. (PBC)

Lowliness, or humble-mindedness, is also a key New Testament concept, a distinctive mark of the committed Christian. Lowliness is the opposite of the selfishness and pride of our corrupt and sinful

natures. First century society placed little value on lowliness. It regarded it, in fact, as the equivalent of cowardice and equated pride and self-assertiveness with manhood. The non-Christian world today thinks in the same way. Books and classes offering assertiveness training and ever more effective methods of exercising power and “looking out for number one” are tremendously popular and profitable. But the attitude of a heart changed by God’s grace is no longer “me first and everybody else after me, if at all.” Rather it is an attitude that humbly and lovingly places the interest of others before one’s own. (PBC)

Paul is advocating a false modesty? He does not want talented believers to deny their special gifts or hide or neglect them. A humble child of God, no matter how many or how few his gifts may be, will strive to put the best construction on everything the neighbor does. He will happily acknowledge and respect whatever gifts the neighbor has, be they many or few. In everything the humble Christian will strive to give the neighbor first consideration. (PBC)

A Christian is to esteem the other as higher and wiser than himself, as he is conscious of his own weakness and shortcomings, while the in the neighbor he observes much merit and superiority. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:4** *own interests.* These are proper, but only if there is equal concern for the interests of others (cf. Ro 15:1). (CSB)

We are to be concerned about our brother’s affairs and interests in the same measure as we are interested in our own. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

With God’s providence as our foundation, we relinquish concerns for ourselves in order to care for others. (TLSB)

Harmony becomes practical among Christian in helpfulness, when each believer strives to do those things that serve and help the neighbor in every possible way. The world’s way is to look out for oneself. It considers the needs of others only when it sees some ultimate advantage for itself, but believer’s concern for their neighbor’s interest will supersede concern for their own. (PBC)

### *Lights in the World*

**14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.**

**2:14–17** Some things involved in working out our salvation. (CSB)

**2:14** *grumbling.* Being discontented with God’s will is an expression of unbelief that prevents one from doing what pleases God (v. 13; cf. 1Co 10:10). (CSB)

A problem indicative of the sinful human nature, which is selfish and unbelieving. (TLSB)

When God commands something, we should have no more questions about it as to whether God really wants us to do it. (Stoeckhardt)

*disputing.* Over debatable points that do not need to be settled for the good of the church (see 2Ti 2:23; Tit 3:9). (CSB)

Willing and acting according to God's good purpose requires the correct attitude of the heart. Grudging obedience is not really obedience at all. In the course of our lives as Christian we are often called on to do things that do not come naturally to us, things against which our selfish natures angrily rebel. We are often asked to do things which we know will bring scorn and ridicule from our non-Christian friends and associates. We are to do all these things, Paul says, without murmuring and complaint. There is to be no second-guessing of God, no grumbling about what God expects of us, no rationalizing or calculating about how we might escape our responsibilities or get by with doing less. (PBC)

The apostle mentions one point in which their sanctification may find expression: Do everything without murmurings and hesitations. The Christians of Philippi, like the believers of all ages, should do the will of God in all things, do all that God expects of them, even when the flesh is not pleased with it, even when questionings and criticisms want to arise in their hearts. There should be no bickerings and questionings whether this or that is really necessary, whether it is necessary to be so strict in observing the Word of God, whether it really is the Christian's duty to take part in all the enterprises of the Church. The ideal condition of mind is that which simply, sincerely does what is needed. (Kretzmann)

**2:15** *blameless and innocent... without blemish.* Not absolute, sinless perfection, but wholehearted, unmixed devotion to doing God's will. (CSB)

Everything that is wrong with us has been forgiven by the Lord Jesus. According to our new nature, there is nothing wrong (1 John 3:8-9). (TLSB)

Christians are to lead a clean life, and so be spared from disgrace. It is this that God desires, and that should also be the purpose of all Christians. If Christians walk in this way, then they are obedient children of God. (Stoekhardt)

The result of such behavior is: That you may be irreprehensible and innocent, guiltless children of God in the midst of an iniquitous and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding up the Word of Life to a glorification for me upon the day of Christ, that I may not have run in vain or labored in vain. The goal of sanctification cannot be reached at one step, it must be reached by a gradual process. Christians must strive more and more to show and prove themselves irreprehensible, without reproof. (Kretzmann)

*of God* – God provides regeneration so that by His Word and Spirit we are a new creation according to the inner person. This nature, generated by God Himself, is inclined to live as His child. (TLSB)

*crooked and twisted generation.* A description of the unbelieving world (see Ac 2:40; Eph 2:1–3; cf. Mt 17:17). (CSB)

God created us to live in perfect harmony with Him, His creation, and one another at every point of contact, in every way. Since the fall, our human nature contradicts that design at every point, nothing matches or fits right. (TLSB)

In the midst of a world steeped in every form of sin and shame they must guard against all contamination, not only to be without reproach on the part of others, but actually innocent of wrong-doing, able to meet all criticism as unjust aspersion. Christians should avoid all offense and be guiltless in this world. (Kretzmann)

*shine as lights.* The contrast, like light in darkness, that Christians are to be to the world around them (cf. Mt 5:15–16). (CSB)

By God's grace the bright light of the gospel has dispelled the spiritual darkness that was by nature in Christina's hearts. Now God wants Christians, who have the light of life through Jesus, to be both light-reflectors and light-bearers in the sin-darkened world. As light-reflectors Christian should stand out from their worldly contemporaries as light shines in darkness. Their words and actions should cause people to see that believers belong to Christ and should lead those who observe them to glorify God. (PBC)

This is an important theme for John and Paul. Light may be directed or reflected. We reflect God's light (His truth and grace) by receiving it and directing that light to shine on others. (TLSB)

There should be a plain and unmistakable distinction between the Christians and the children of this world. They should stand out from the unbelievers, as the light stands out from the surrounding darkness. The entire life of the believers will offer a splendid contrast to all works of darkness and will be a constant reproof to wrong-doers. But not only are the Christians to shine as lights in their good works, in obedience to the will of their heavenly Father and in all subsequent works of faith, but they are also to be the torch-bearers of the Word of Life. The Christians should present to the world, extend before the eyes of the children of this world, the Word of Salvation for their acceptance, that it may serve to enlighten them also unto eternal life. (Kretzmann)

**2:16 holding fast to the word of life** – Christians should also hold forth the Word of life to the unbelievers, and this is done by living a pure life. The good conduct of Christians is also a sermon through which many are won for Christ. If Christians walk carefully and are seriously concerned about their soul's salvation, they also at the same time become helpful to lead others to eternal life. (Stoekhardt)

This means the Holy Scriptures. God gives life through the Word, as creation and the Gospel show. (TLSB)

*proud.* Not out of pride or a sense of self-accomplishment, but because of what God has done through Paul (see 1Th 2:19). (CSB)

Paul enjoyed a warm and affectionate relationship with the members of the congregation at Philippi. He had founded the congregation and was still its spiritual counselor and friend. (PBC)

This they do through the works of the divine life in them. Their entire behavior before the world will be a sermon in words and deeds. Their entire life will show what the Word of God is able to accomplish. The mere existence of believers in this world is a missionary factor. And all this, in turn, redounds to the honor of the apostle on the great day of Jesus Christ, the Day of Judgment. He wanted to be able to point to the Christians of Philippi with pride, as a result of his missionary efforts in Christ Jesus. It would show that his efforts had been crowned with success, for the Philippians would present visible, tangible evidence. Note: The Christians of our day may well keep this word in mind in their relation to their pastors, that they may be a credit to the teaching which they have received, both here in time and on the great day of Jesus Christ. (Kretzmann)

*day of Christ.* Day of Judgment. (CSB)

*in vain.* Cf. 1Co 9:24–27. (CSB)



When he stands before the Lord on judgment day, he wants their lives to be evidences that his apostolic labors were not in vain. Paul had labored strenuously for the Philippians. What a wonderful testimony to the effectiveness of Paul's efforts their faith and Christian lives would be in the judgment. (PBC)

Paul uses the term "walk" to describe the Christian life. Life is active, with a path to follow, and a goal. Because Paul's life was vigorous, he ran rather than walked. He labored because of his confidence in the Word of God. (TLSB)

**2:17–18** *I ... rejoice ... you too should ... rejoice.* Christian joy ought always to be mutual. (CSB)

**2:17** *I am being poured out.* The reference may be to his entire ministry as one large thanksgiving sacrifice. However, it is more probable that Paul refers to his present imprisonment, which may end in a martyr's death. His life would then be poured out as a drink offering accompanying the sacrificial service of the Philippians. (CSB)

Paul had been instrumental in bringing the Philippians to faith and to constancy in the same. That is a savory offering and acceptable to God. To help others to believe is the best service anyone can render. Therefore Paul is also willing to seal this his offering and service with his blood. (Stoeckhardt)

To impress this last fact upon his readers, the apostle adds: But if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all; in the same way also you rejoice, and rejoice with me. In and by his imprisonment Paul was being poured out like a drink-offering. But at the same time he was offering a sacrifice, a twofold sacrifice. The first sacrifice is that of the Christians' faith. He had succeeded in working faith in their hearts and in strengthening this faith to the present state of growth in sanctification. That was a pleasing sacrifice in the sight of God. The consequence was that the Philippians were now living a sacrifice in service, a true ministry. The apostle assumes that he himself will be offered upon his sacrifice. He may suffer the death of a martyr because of his preaching the Gospel. He knows that he will soon be liberated from the present imprisonment, but that merely places his martyr's death at a somewhat greater distance. The final disposition of his body is even now pretty sure: martyrdom looms up before him. But even should this take place very soon, it cannot hinder the fruits of his labor. He has cause for rejoicing at the faith and Christian life of the Philippians, he is happy in the thought of what has been accomplished. (Kretzmann)

*like a drink offering.* The OT background is the daily sacrifices in Ex 29:38–41. (CSB)

Wine or oil was poured out in the OT sanctuary (Nu 28:7). (TLSB)

In the OT rituals the drink offering was poured out next to the altar on which the burnt offering was sacrificed. Paul regarded believers' lives of obedience to the gospel as living sacrifices (Roman 12:1) to the Lord. His own martyrdom, should it occur, would be a willing sacrifice on his part, a sacrifice poured out next to the sacrifices of the Christian lives of the Philippians. (PBC)

*offering of your faith.* Genuine faith is active and working (see note on v. 13). (CSB)

The last two phrases above might literally say, "the sacrifice and service of your faith." Faith produces a sacrificial attitude (cf. vv. 4-8), which frees us to lay down our temporary physical life in the interest of eternal life (Romans 12:1-3)

**2:18** *be glad and rejoice* – Far from hindering his labors on the Philippians' behalf, his martyrdom would crown those labors. Viewing it in that light the apostle could find joy even in the prospect of such a death, and he wanted the Philippians to find it, too. (PBC)

Paul would impress upon his readers that they also have all reason to rejoice with him over the fact that the Word had borne fruit. We see here obedience to God forms the main thought throughout. (Stoeckhardt)

And in the same way his readers should rejoice in their faith, and rejoice with him, as it behooves good Christians, in the love of Christ. (Kretzmann)

**2:12–18** Paul’s exhortation flows from the previous section revealing the significance of Jesus’ life and sacrifice. Like Paul, our labor would be meaningless and of no use to others if we lived crookedly and perversely as the world around us lives. But God is at work in us, moving us to hold fast to His Word of life, by which He extends His image and kingdom to others. • Dear Lord Jesus, please work in us to will and to do Your good pleasure, that we may be blameless in this crooked generation and blameless in the day of Your return. Amen. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Matthew 21:23-27

### *The Authority of Jesus Questioned*

**23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” 24 Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 26 But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” 27 So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.**

**21:23-27** Today’s *Gospel* takes place on the Tuesday following Palm Sunday. After receiving the messianic praises of the crowd in his triumphal entry, Jesus had overturned the tables of the money changers and driven out those buying and selling in the temple (Mt 21:12). These things prompted the chief priests and elders to question Jesus’ authority. The builders (chief priests) are rejecting the stone that is nevertheless the cornerstone (Mt 21:42). As a result of his teaching and actions done with authority, the chief priests and Pharisees will seek to arrest the Lord (Mt 21:46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

One might even suggest that, from the point of view of Matthew’s telling of the narrative, when Jesus is able to reach back all the way to the ministry of John and indict his opponents on the basis of their obduracy, this underscores the enormity and consistency of their opposition to the reign of God that was announced and enacted by John in his own role and manifested in power and mercy by Jesus, God’s Son. (CC)

**21:23** *he was teaching* – Tuesday of Holy Week was a long day of preaching and teaching and confronting the leaders of the Jews. (PBC)

*chief priests and elders* – Their formal inquiry was but a smoke screen to conceal their secret machinations. They did not propose to consider carefully Jesus answer and to let this determine their

future attitude toward His person. Their plans were fully formed in advance, and there could be no question of further inquiry or investigation. Jesus must be removed. (Ylvisaker)

Leaders continue to watch Jesus closely, hoping to find grounds to accuse Him. Within a few days, they will have succeeded in their plan to do away with Him. (TLSB)

*By what authority ... ?* They had asked this of John the Baptist (Jn 1:19–25) and of Jesus early in his ministry (Jn 2:18–22). Here the reference is to the cleansing of the temple, which not only defied the authority of the Jewish leaders but also hurt their monetary profits. The leaders may also have been looking for a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people or raise suspicion of him as a threat to the authority of Rome. (CSB)

Chief concern of Jerusalem leaders. (TLSB)

*hē exousia*: In Matthew’s Gospel, authority (*hē exousia*) flows from the power of Jesus’ Word: the Lord Jesus taught the people “as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Mt 7:29). Authority is particularly wielded by means of the Word (Mt 8:9). That Word of Jesus has authority to forgive sins (Mt 9:6). But this authority that comes from Jesus has also been given “to men” (Mt 9:8). Jesus gave the Twelve authority both to heal and to cast out demons in his name (Mt 10:1). In the final words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, he announces that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18), immediately before instituting the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Office of the Ministry, with the promise that he would be with his disciples to the culmination of the eon (28:19–20). Thus the Word of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, Baptism, and the presence of Jesus all stem from this authority that Jesus has and gives.

Now Simon Magus sought to use this authority for his own enrichment (Acts 8:19). But authority is always to be used with humility, lest we “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12; see also 9:18). The authority that has been given to the pastoral office, therefore, is to be used for edification (2 Cor 13:10). All human and demonic authority that contradicts divine authority will be done away with at the Last Day (1 Cor 15:24). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

“By what authority [*exousiai*] are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” This is the question put to Jesus by the chief priests and presbyters; it is also a question put to men in the pastoral office today. “By what authority do you say, ‘I forgive you all your sins?’” Questions of authority, power, and rights can cripple congregations, turning pastor and people against each other. Key to understanding Christology, Sacraments, and the purpose of preaching is the *exousia* of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The leaders’ interrogation of Jesus demonstrates their prideful hearts. This is a danger faced by all Christians. Ps 26:2 teaches us to pray, “Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.” Thus we learn from this Gospel to beware lest our hearts become prideful and we concentrate on our own authority instead of Christ’s. Luther writes regarding the sinful nature: “ ‘The subtle poison of ambition is just under the surface. This sin has often tripped even those who have grasped God’s Word purely.’ From this sin all heresies have arisen; ‘ambition is the mother of all heresies and sects.’ . . . Against this secret villain we must pray God daily to suppress our self-esteem” (LW 12:188). Thus we also learn from this text that what we need is not self-esteem, but humility before Christ, who tries our hearts and knows how full they are of ambition, pride, and selfishness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

When they demanded to know by what authority Jesus was doing “these things,” they were evidently referring to the cleansing of the temple, which happened the day before. Jesus had a great sense of timing. Since there were many pilgrims in town for the Passover, this would normally have been a busy

and profitable week for the money changers and the merchants. When Jesus disrupted business at the temple, that must have been something like shutting down a shopping mall at the beginning of the third week of December. If the chief priest were counting on getting their cut of the profits, it is no wonder they were so upset. (PBC)

**21:24** *I also will ask you* – By asking the Jewish leaders His counter question, Jesus is not just engaging in a “power play” to ward off His enemies. If they had answered His question, they would have had their answer to who He is and what He had come to do. Jesus’ question really is a call to repentance, an eleventh-hour invitation to believe in Him as Savior. This final call to repentance and faith is at the heart of the parable Jesus now tells. (PBC)

The challenge comes from the chief priests and elders, but he refuses to answer; on one level, they are challenging him. In reality,, however, the rightful King and Son of David, the rightful Messiah and Lord, turns the tables on those who challenge him and confronts them with his own demand for repentance. (CC)

**21:25** *baptism of John*. John the Baptist came, announcing the advent of the Kingdom and calling for repentance. (TLSB)

*from heaven, or from men?* (“Heaven” was a common Jewish term for God, often substituted for the divine name to avoid a possible misuse of it (see Ex 20:7). Jesus’ question implied that his authority, like that of John’s baptism, came from God.) Lk 20:3. (CSB)

Jesus asks the same question concerning John that His accusers have just posed about Him: what was the source of His authority? (TLSB)

The question that Jesus asks is not merely a debating tactic. The validity of the ministry of John is directly related to the authority with which Jesus was teaching and acting. John proclaimed Jesus to be the very Lamb of God (Jn 1:29); John announced that a mightier one was coming who would baptize with fire. Since John conferred upon Jesus messianic status, the question is put back to the chief priests and elders. This is the case also with us: each of us must answer what we think about who Jesus is (see also Mt 16:15). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The Baptism of John the Baptist was, in fact, a means of grace, with power to give the remission of sins (see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 288). John “went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). This text literally states that John’s Baptism was “into” (*eis*) the remission of sins. Like the Sacrament of Baptism instituted by Jesus, John’s Baptism worked regeneration and repudiated the works-righteousness of the Pharisees. The Baptism of John functioned much like the Old Testament sacrifices in that it offered the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, although preceding in time the actual crucifixion of the Messiah. Thus the Baptism of John was not merely “from man,” but “from heaven.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The eyes of human reason cannot see this; the heavenly nature of the Sacraments can only be discerned through the eyes of faith, as Luther sang regarding the washing of Holy Baptism (*LSB* 406:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

“From heaven or from man?” Jesus asks this question of the chief priests and presbyters regarding John’s Baptism—but it could well be asked about the key points of our faith: What about Jesus? Is he merely a man, or is he also from heaven (i.e., true God)? What about the Sacraments? Are they from heaven or from man? What about the Bible? Is it from heaven (inspired) or from man (ethical teachings, myths,

legends)? The question that Jesus asks is not simply to demonstrate his ability to stymie them. The question is there so we also can answer it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

*they discussed it among themselves* – If they would accept His testimony, they could not deny the Messiahship of Jesus; for John had witnessed unmistakably both as to His person and His work. The acceptance of Jesus could not be separated from the recognition of John. Both would stand or fall together. If they denied that Jesus was the Messiah they must refuse likewise to acknowledge John as a prophet, and brand him as an impostor. But John had unfortunately already gained a niche in the consciousness of the people as a true prophet. And the Jews were exceedingly proud of their prophets. (Ylvisaker)

*not believe him?* They admit to rejecting the divine origin of John’s message. In this rejection, they proved more hard-hearted than the common people. (TLSB)

**21:26** “We are afraid of the crowd.” Josephus discusses the great popularity of John the Baptist:

Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII 5 2, trans. William Whiston, 1737) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:27** *we do not know* – They are struck by the power of the truth but they will not yield to the truth; so they reply that they do not know. Nor do they dare to speak derisively of John for fear of being stoned by the people. (Ylvisaker)

Answer given by Jesus’ opponents is insincere and cowardly. Even worse is the fact that they deny the authority of God’s Messiah. (TLSB)

*neither will I tel you* – Jesus is by no means obligated to give a further reply. And He does not intend to throw that which is holy before the swine of Israel to be trod under foot. But even if Jesus had nothing more to say in answer to the inquiries of the deputation from the Sanhedrin, He has many truths to present to them and to others who have gathered about Him, and He now proceeds to the attack. The symbolic discourse in the following is preeminently polemic in character, and is directed especially against the obdurate leadership in Israel. (Ylvisaker)

“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” When Jesus refuses to answer, he is not casting doubt on his authority. Rather, by refusing to submit to their interrogation, he is implicitly asserting his true authority. The point of this text is not the skillful use of language or debating technique by Jesus; rather, it demonstrates that the chief priests are rejecting the authority that has come from heaven and thus demonstrate that they are repudiating the function of their office by rejecting the one who is from heaven. Their thinking is shown to be from men, from below. “You do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (Jn 5:38–40). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:23–27** When His opponents challenge the source of His authority, Jesus exhibits a wisdom that powerfully attests to His status as one sent by God. Like Jesus’ opponents, we sometimes challenge the Lord’s authority and attempt to stand in judgment of Him. But God rightly judges us, not vice versa. Jesus

willingly submitted to the authority of those who falsely accused Him and unjustly condemned Him to death. By His death, He won our salvation. • Give us grace always to submit to Your authority, O Lord, for it comes from heaven and so can lead us there, where we will reign with You forever. Amen. (TLSB)