

MAYHEM

Finding God in the Chaos of Life

SERMON STUDY GUIDE | PART 4: | 3.18.18 | FOLLOW THE STORY ON FB @FACEBOOK.COM/THESTORYHOUSTON

The purpose of this series is to learn how to preserve in hard times by growing:

- more mature in faith
- more aware of our spiritual blind spots
- and deeper in biblical literacy (especially the Old Testament)

To achieve this purpose, we're exploring the book of Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet who lived during the time of the Babylonian Exile (c. 600 BC). Ezekiel has been called the Prophet of Doom, because of his gloomy proclamations. We often think of Old Testament prophets as fortune-tellers, but keep in mind that the primary function of the Hebrew prophets was not making proclamations about the future but telling truth about the present even if it was less than rosy. The question we should ask ourselves when we read Ezekiel is what does it say to us in the present.

Today we are looking at God's view of justice, particularly as it relates to the final judgment. A desire for justice settles in at the youngest of ages. If one child gets one more toy than another, the cry is, "Unfair, unfair!" Something within us cries for justice at every turn in life. And there is plenty in this life that gives reason to wonder where God is when injustice seems to abound.

What in your life has had you cry, "Unfair, unfair!"?

Do you find the Bible to be relevant when you experience or see injustice? If not, why not? If so, in what way do you find it speaking to injustice?

Has there been a time in your life when others have accused you wrongly of being unfair because they did not know all the facts of the case? Is it possible that we would see some of the injustices in the world a bit differently if we had all the facts on the table?

Israel cries, "Unfair, unfair!": Ezekiel 33:10-20

"Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"' Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' "Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins,

will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.' If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right—if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.

"Yet your countrymen say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just. If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so. Yet, O house of Israel, you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to his own ways."

In this passage, who is said to be right with God and who is said to be on the outs with God? Does this seem fair to you?

The first man described is one who is said to have lived a largely righteous life. What reason is given as to why he turned to evil in the end? Do you ever find yourself justifying behavior because you've done plenty of good already?

The second man was warned that his wickedness would end in death. How did he respond? Romans 6:23 states that the wages of sin is death. Do you see your own sins as worthy of death? If so, how have you responded?

In Ezekiel 33:17, God says that it is not his ways that are unjust, but the people's ways that are unjust. The implication is that God operates using a different scorecard than we often do. What kind of scorecard would you say God uses, and how would you say you are measuring up?