

WHAT IS CURRENT IS WHAT COUNTS

EZEKIEL 18:21-32

“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.

Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord God, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?

“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?

When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies.

Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns

away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God.

"Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

The story is told of a German SS officer in the WW2.

His machine gun is in hand, as he stands over a Hasidic Jew. He's digging what'll soon be his own grave.

When the Jewish man finishes and lays down his shovel, he stands up straight, looks his executioner in the eye, and tells him, "God is watching what you are doing." Then the German soldier shoots him in the head.

This was the truth that Hitler refused to admit.

This is what tyrants and madmen throughout history have refused to admit. People deny truth that God is watching them. Yet this is reality for every man, woman, and child - God is watching what you are doing.

There is something deep within all of us that echoes this truth. We will all face a day of reckoning when we'll give an account for *what we did* and *the life we lived*.

And we look forward to this... not so much for ourselves... But when we see evil in the world, or we're personally victimized by evil, a sense of justice rises up within us. We hope and long for that day of reckoning.

It reminds me of the funeral home in South Carolina that opened a coffee bar in their establishment. They installed a fireplace, a television, some comfortable furniture... then offered wifi and Starbucks coffee...

A local news outlet ran a contest to pick a name for the funeral home's coffee corner. Here were some of the honorable mentions... ["The Grim Roaster, The Last Cup, De-coffinated, Perkatory, Bean Nice Knowing You, and See Ya Latte."](#) But here were the top two entries...

Coming in second, ["Still Above Grounds Cafe."](#) And the grand prize went to, ["Time To Meet Your Mocha."](#)

I like the winning name - it is exactly what the Bible says about life after death. Death is the time everyone meets their Maker. Hebrews 9:27 tells us, ["It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."](#)

God's judgment is a reality for every single human.

We are created beings. That means our lives come with purpose and intention - we'll answer to our Creator.

Of course, this is not how our modern world wants it to work... Actress Kate Bosworth starred in the movie, ["90 Minutes In](#)

Heaven.” The film was directed by her husband, Michael Polish. It’s about a pastor’s death and his supposed visit to heaven... Of course, not much in the movie resembles the Bible’s description of the place.

The movie has no King, or white horse, or throne. Not once does it mention heaven’s chief attraction, Jesus!

But when asked, the couple did say the movie caused them to think a lot about heaven. Michael commented, “Heaven means different things to different people. I would like my heaven to have a little more grass, maybe a white-picket fence, maybe some animals...”

Kate had similar thoughts, “I would love to have Mike waiting for me or me waiting for Mike with our dogs running around - that’s heaven... **Whatever heaven is for each individual... that would certainly be it for me.**”

Hey, what did we expect? A world that sees morality and truth as relative - that it’s up to each person to define their own morality - now has a relative view of life after death. Western civilization has come a long way from Dante’s vision of heaven and hell, or Jonathan Edwards’ sermon, “Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God.”

Amazingly, heaven is no longer defined by biblical definitions and descriptions. In most minds, heaven has been secularized. People think it’s a “*design your own.*”

The idea that **God is watching what you are doing** is no longer a popular concept. **But it remains the truth!** A judgment day is coming. After you and I die we’ll have to answer to the God and Savior who created us.

And the Bible sets out four different judgments. God judges **sin**, and **societies**, and **sinners**, and **service**.

First, is **the judgment of sin**. On Calvary's cross Jesus *endured our punishment and paid our penalty*.

Faith in Jesus now puts an end to all our sin. For folks in Christ, the cross is sin's final judgment. The Christian is now forgiven, and his sins are forgotten.

Second, is **the judgment of societies**. Throughout history God acts to bring justice and to punish evil.

Sodom and Gomorrah - the Exodus from Egypt - the fall of Babylon - the crumbling of Rome - the defeat of the Nazis - the collapse of communism have all been acts of God. Throughout history the providence of God has intervened at times and in ways to bring judgment.

And this should concern America! We've condoned the killing of the unborn, and redefined God's terms for marriage! *Don't think we can escape God's judgment!*

Joel 2 foresees the ultimate judgment of societies in Jerusalem's Kidron Valley. It's **the Valley of Decision**. Matthew 25 tells us God has *the final say* on nations.

The third judgment is **the judgment of sinners**.

Revelation 20 speaks of an ominous day - a day yet future - at the end of the age - when everyone who's ever lived will stand before **God's Great White Throne** and give an account of the deeds they did on Earth.

As Christians breathe easy, this is the judgment we'll escape. Our sin was judged on the cross - *by what Jesus*

did... But reject Him, and you'll be judged by *the deeds you've done*. This is the judgment no one wants.

We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Thus, our choice is either to fall on *God's mercy now*, or stand on our *own merits then*. *And I choose mercy!*

There is a judgment of **sin**, of **societies**, of **sinner**s, but there's also **the judgment of service**. And this is a judgment the Christian won't escape. For as well as being a child of God, we're also *"God's fellow-workers."*

You have a role to play in what God is building in the world. The foundation is Jesus, but each of us adds to the construction. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, *"Let each one take heed how he builds..."* Our work will be inspected by the Master Builder. Christians will be judged by what they've done in service for their Lord.

Yet here in Ezekiel, the prophet discusses *how we're judged...* *When and why* are separate issues, but Ezekiel 18 deals with the *how we're judged*. And here's what we learn, **what is current is what counts!**

Twice in the book of Ezekiel, here in Chapter 18 and later in Chapter 33, the Prophet tells us that all God's judgments are based on our *current, present* state.

When God judges us, He looks at what's *trending...*

If you don't have a grasp of internet jargon and the blogosphere you might not be familiar with the term **"trending."** It refers to the trendy pic, post, video.

What's trending is what's happening on the web - what's getting the most hits at any given moment. And it varies sharply from day to day - even hour to hour...

Facebook, You Tube, Google - as well as, most news gathering websites - all have a "*What's Trending*" page. The idea is to keep us up-to-date and current.

Yet realize, this is what God looks at when he judges a person. The Lord analyzes *what's trending* in my life.

Not where I was yesterday, or where I hope to be tomorrow. It's not *my past history* or *my future intentions* that capture God's attention. It's where am I right now. God is concerned with my current position - my present trajectory. What's *trending* in my heart...

This is the case, *whether God is examining the legitimacy of our faith... or whether He's looking at the sincerity of my service... or whether He's scrutinizing a nation... or whether He's looking at a person without Christ and exposing their deeds both good and evil...*

As we learn in our text, *how God judges us* is essentially the same... He analyzes a person's *current* condition - that which is *trending* in that person's life...

Let's go back through our passage verse by verse, and take a closer look... Verse 21 begins, "**But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.**"

None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.”

Ezekiel starts with a beautiful example of God’s mercy and grace. Envisioned is a man who has racked up a long list of sins. He’s got a rap sheet a mile long.

But if that man *“turns from all his sins”* and throws himself on the mercies of God, and is willing to let God take over his life, and make the changes God desires... then God will forgive him freely and fully. *“None of his transgressions shall be remembered.”*

It reminds me of the thief on the cross. Luke refers to him as a *“criminal.”* The Greek term means, *“one who uses violence to rob openly.”* This wasn’t a white collar criminal being punished for a case of credit car theft.

He was a bandit - *capable of murder and mayhem.*

He was a thief who terrorized people - held them up at gunpoint... an evil dude... Yet when he asked Jesus for mercy, Jesus granted him mercy! That’s what God does! That very day, the thief joined Jesus in Paradise.

God is rich in mercy, and makes it readily available to everyone who humbles themselves and asks!

There’s a legend from the Middle Ages. A woman was expelled from heaven, and told she’d be allowed back, when she brought God the thing He valued most.

She returned with drops of a martyr’s blood... and coins from a widow’s offering - and a tattered Bible from which a

faithful pastor preached - even the dust off the shoes of a missionary to a distant land.

But none of these items got her readmitted...

Then one day she was watching a little boy play by a lake, when an older man rode up on horseback.

After observing the boy the man thought of his own childhood innocence. That's when he saw the reflection of his sad, hardened face in the surface of the water.

The man was overcome by what his sin had done to him. In that moment, he wept tears of repentance.

The woman quickly scooped up a few tears and took them to heaven where she was received with joy. God treasured the tears of a repentant heart. And He still does. *When we turn from our sin, God takes us in.*

Because God's forgiveness was paid in full - and His grace is so great it sent Jesus to the cross - no one is beyond the hope of redemption. Unlike car crashes, God never *"totals out"* a life - *says it can't be repaired.*

At least when it comes to our repentance, what Yogi Berra said was true - **"It ain't over until it's over."**

As long as a person has breath to breathe, they can turn to God and live. God is always willing to forgive!

That's Ezekiel's point in verse 23, **"Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?"** says the Lord God, **"and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"** God is always ready and willing to forgive.

He never takes pleasure in the punishment of the wicked. God is not some vindictive egomaniac who gets his jollies from watching people fry in hell.

God loves people - all people - even the slimiest and grimiest... He pleads for us to turn from evil and live.

In the NT, 2 Peter 3:9 echoes Ezekiel, and reveals God's heart, "The Lord is... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

An old rabbi once told the story of the celebration in heaven when God divided the Red Sea, and delivered the Hebrews out of the hands of the Egyptian army.

The Sea parted for the Hebrews to walk across on dry ground. But when the Egyptian army chased them, God released the standing water and Egypt drowned.

When it happened, heaven erupted with joy! Israel was victorious. Angels were cheering and dancing...

That's when one of the angels asked his supervisor, Michael, "*Where is God? Why isn't He here celebrating with us?*" Michael the archangel replied, "God is off by Himself weeping. You see, the Hebrew people were saved, but thousands of Egyptians drowned today."

When the wicked die, God takes no pleasure in their death. He grieves when anyone dies in their sins.

Then Ezekiel proposes another scenario, "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live?"

All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.” Just as a sinful person can change, so *can a righteous person*. People start out following God, then later they digress into rebellion.

As a consequence they suffer God’s punishment.

It’s like a neglectful pilot who falls asleep and crash lands the plane. When the pilot gets judged he can’t offer the excuse, “*at least I had a good take-off.*”

A pilot is judged on *his landings*, not *his take-offs*. And so is a Christian. A real faith is a continuing faith.

Let’s say, as a young man you followed God. You lived for Jesus and trusted in Him. But life didn’t turn out the way you’d hoped... You lost a loved one... Your business soured... Dreams died that weren’t realized...

With all your love and service and devotion to God you thought He owed you. *You’d scratched God’s back and now He needed to scratch yours*. And when He didn’t, *or at least in the way you’d hoped*, you turned your back on Him. You renounced your faith in Christ.

It’s not an uncommon scenario. Not because God isn’t trustworthy, but because people often trust Him for stuff He never promised. They think God owes us life, liberty, and an abundance of happiness... *Not true!*

God loves us, but He doesn’t shelter us from hardship. Instead, He uses the tough stuff to grow us.

People shoot their faith in the foot with erroneous expectations. They pray for what God never agreed to grant - then they get upset when God doesn't supply.

So when a person renounces their faith, and becomes a skeptic, *how then does God judge them?*

This is Ezekiel's point, God looks at the current state of that person's heart. Not their former service - not what's been... but *what's trending in that person's life?*

Listen carefully, say you walked the aisle at 10 years old, and prayed the sinner's prayer... then you walk away from the Lord for the next 35 years... *you're foolish if you assume you're right with God.*

You can't ignore God for a lifetime, live in rebellion, then expect Him to determine your destiny based on a 35 year old commitment you haven't attended to for 35 years. God looks at *what's trending...* not what was...

But likewise, say you've spent the last 50 years raising hell and bucking God - but today, you confess your sin and sincerely repent, *God will forgive you fully!*

Again, it's what's current that counts!

If you're married you know how this works. *Real trust is current trust. Real love is current love.* It doesn't matter how good my marriage was 20 years ago. The verdict is still out today... *Do I love my wife **today?***

A wife isn't going to be satisfied if her husband's love isn't current and up-to-date. If my love is nothing but fumes from

yesterday's devotion - it's not real love. My wife cares about *the current state* of our relationship.

And so what, if yesterday, your marriage was awful, if you're still breathing there's always hope for change! *What couple doesn't want a better marriage today?*

Here's Ezekiel's point, **yesterday's experiences don't matter in tomorrow's evaluation.** What if you and I were best friends 30 years ago, but out-of-the-blue you call me, and ask for a job recommendation.

I could speak to what you were 30 years ago, but until we catch up - until I learn of your current life and character - *how can I give you a hearty endorsement?*

And this is how God chooses to judge us... Meat that's frozen can't be cooked. Bread that's stale can't be eaten. Both have to be fresh. And this is how God looks at our devotion - **what counts is what is current.**

Yesterday's experiences are important to us only in that they create a momentum - forwards or backwards.

As I walk with God, and add to my faith what makes it grow - **virtue, and knowledge, and perseverance, and kindness, and love** - it makes my current faith stronger.

Whereas, if I flirt with sin, and compromise with the world, my faith starts *trending* weaker and weaker.

But God's evaluation is on *my current condition.*

What I did years ago, even yesterday, is of no value today if it doesn't translate into a current faith...

And the years you spent in rebellion to God - though those years were wasted, and wore you down - it still doesn't mean you can't turn around your destiny today!

God cares about the current attitude of your heart!

In 1966 the best pitcher in baseball was Sandy Koufax. It was his 12th season in the Big Leagues.

His first eight years were mediocre. But 1966 was the last of four seasons where Koufax dominated hitters the way very few pitchers have, before or since.

When Koufax retired that same year, he was hailed “the greatest pitcher of all time.” Someone nicknamed him, “the left arm of God.” No one cared about his first eight years of mediocrity. It was those last four years of excellence - *what was current* - that folks remembered.

Whereas, two years later in 1968 another pitcher had the best season in the last 50 years. Denny McLain of the Tigers won 31 games that season. He had a 1.96 ERA, and was named the American League's MVP.

But when McLain retired in 1972 few people recalled the success he'd achieved just a few years earlier. For in his last four seasons he played for five different teams - he had 18 victories and 36 losses - he battled alcohol, and a gambling addiction. He ended up in jail.

Though his overall statistics were comparable to Koufax, because of his unsavory status at the time of his exit from the game McLain was shunned. Koufax is in *the Hall of Fame*, McLain is in *the Hall of Shame*.

And this is more than just a tale of two athletes. It illustrates Ezekiel's point. *It's not how you start that matters - it's not even your overall stats - it's where you stand at the moment of judgment!* In the case of Koufax and McLain, when history rendered its verdict..

For us, it's where we stand today - for today is the day God could decide it's time for us to be judged...

One truth is for certain, when that day does come, a career full of godliness can't make up for a closing season of indiscretion... Nor will a lifetime of evil stop God from being gracious if you repent at the end...

In God's eyes, **what is current is what counts!**

This is why a big part of the Christian life is endurance and perseverance. I call it, ***stick-to-it-ness***.

In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul spoke of the Christian life as a race. **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** As in any race, the goal is to finish. Nobody ever won a race they didn't finish.

And this is true of the Christian life. You can get off to a quick start - run well for three-quarters of the race - but if you tire - give up and drop out - you've failed.

This applies spiritually. Colossians 1:23 tells us that in Christ you've been reconciled - you're considered blameless... **"if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel..."** Faith is the baton that has to cross the finish line. If it's dropped somewhere along the track - you forfeit. As Paul said, ***"I kept the faith."***

Once my dad and I were playing golf. I'll never forget the occasion - we were on the 9th Tee Box at Mystery Valley - when we were joined by another golfer.

They were talking when he asked Dad, *“What do your sons do for a living?”* Dad replied, *“They’re both pastors.”* He was ecstatic, *“Wow, I bet you’re proud.”*

My dad replied, *loud enough for me to hear*, *“So far.”*

And this is Ezekiel’s message **“what you are is what you are so far, right now”** You’re righteous if you trust Jesus, today! If you deny your faith, or throw it away, yesterday’s faith can’t compensate for what you lack right now. *The faith that matters is today’s.*

Verse 25 goes on, *“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?”*

At the time, the Hebrews around Ezekiel were in the midst of God’s judgment. They were being punished for their idolatry. From Babylon they were moaning, and groaning, and complaining that God was unfair.

They were a bunch of cry-babies.

Wade Bradshaw pastors a church in Charlottesville, VA. Recently, Bradshaw’s observations about modern culture were quoted in the Washington Times.

He commented, *“It used to be skeptics of Christianity would ask, ‘Is there a God?’. But now these same critics say, ‘What I know about God, I don’t like.’”*

As in Ezekiel’s day, people today are arrogant!

Because the Almighty God doesn't ascribe to their political correctness - and says certain behaviors we enjoy are wrong - and dares to make His own rules without consulting with us... we think God is unfair.

People today are good at *buck* and *duck*. They either defy God's authority, or they dodge Him all-together.

But if we don't trust God enough to do life His way, how can He prove Himself to us, and win our allegiance? *Who's being unfair?* Not God, but us!

All our bucking and ducking of God brings consequences on us we can't blame on anyone else. We're responsible to God for the decisions we make.

Ezekiel writes in verse 26, "When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies." He reaps the fruit of his own choice.

"Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die." Again, one of the ways you and I were made in God's image is our ability to choose.

Of all His creation, God gave humans the ability to make moral choices. Unlike plants and animals, man is a self-determinate being - the captain of his destiny.

In an era of genetic engineering and sophisticated biochemistry, people are being told that their destiny is irrevocable. Nobody can escape their genetic make-up.

We're nothing but a mutation of inherited genes.

"I was born this way," is the familiar refrain. Even if it's a deviance that God forbids, or it's damaging to our lives, we're encouraged to accept it, don't fight it.

But this is not what God says about us! We were created in His image and given a free will. We don't have to be enslaved by inbred tendencies or past programming, with God's help we can break the chain!

Verse 29 tells us, "Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?" "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God.

"Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?" God doesn't relish judging anyone. It's God's will for us all to follow Him.

Perhaps you're an alcoholic, from a long-line of alcoholics... maybe you have a same-sex attraction you've had for as long as you can remember... God's will and ways still apply to you! *And you can change!*

You might feel that you're trapped - you're boxed in a destructive lifestyle - you feel powerless to escape.

But at the very core of your personality you can be something different than you were before. You can be the person God has always intended for you to be.

Ezekiel encourages us in verse 31, “*get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.*” The Bible teaches we’re all born in sin. We’re all born warped. We’re twisted.

But we can be *born again!* You can get yourself a new heart. Ezekiel says in Chapter 36, God takes out our *heart of stone* and replaces it with a *heart of flesh*.

A heart of flesh is sensitive to God and to others.

Did you know that in one square inch of human flesh or skin, there are 19,500 nerve endings, along with thousands of sensor cells that measure heat, cold, pain, and touch. Your flesh is amazingly sensitive, and this is the kind of heart God wants to give to us. A heart that’s sensitive to God's concerns and to other people.

My garage is full of rags. They absorb spills and sweat. They add grip. No matter the job a rag comes in handy. But Yesterday, *I found this rag in my garage...*

As you can see rags can get crusty and rigid and hard. And when a rag stiffens it becomes useless.

You want a rag to be soft and supple... And this is how God wants a heart. In fact, He promises to replace *stiff hearts* with *soft hearts*. He works this miracle in us!

I love how emphatic God is... He knows this is what we desperately need. Not self-help, or behavior modification, or positive thinking, or vague meditation.

God shouts, *“get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.”* God wants to change us inside out. And the miracle of a new heart is *ours for the getting - just ask!*

Ezekiel closes the chapter in verse 32, quoting God again, *“For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live!”*

Once a burglar was casing a house he intended to rob. One morning he saw the family loading suitcases in the car. It was obvious they were leaving town.

That night, he broke into the house. He came in through a window in the basement. It was dark and he was trying to find a light switch, when suddenly he heard, *“Shame on you! I see you and Jesus sees you!”*

He thought someone was in the house. Again the voice, *“Shame on you! I see you and Jesus sees you.”*

Finally, he got to a light switch. When he turned it on he saw a parrot in a cage. This time the bird squawked louder, *“Shame on you! I see you and Jesus sees you.”*

The burglar just laughed at the helpless parrot, but when he turned to go upstairs, at the door to the basement was a large, ferocious-looking doberman.

That’s when the parrot shouted, *“Sic-em Jesus!”*

Which brings me back to my opening thought. As the rabbi said, *“Jesus is watching what you are doing.”*

There will be a judgment for all of us. Hopefully, you’ve been to the cross. Your sins are covered. You won’t be judged according to your deeds, *but by faith.*

Yet there still is a judgment for all of us. Every Christian will appear at the judgment seat of Christ.

The works we've done for God will be tested *for quality - for motive!* And we'll be rewarded accordingly.

And here's **how** we'll be judged... **it's the current that counts.** Is your faith in Jesus *up-to-date?*... Is your love for Him *trending?*... Hopefully, you're not trying to ride out the future on victories from the past.

That strategy gets a person in trouble with God!

And here's a glorious truth... If you're *not current*, you can *get current* today. Start trending *towards God*.

“Get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.”

Rededicate your life to Jesus this morning. Renew your faith. With God, **what is current is what counts!**