

Repent and Live

7/14/24

Some years ago, professional basketball player Latrell Sprewell of the Golden State Warriors became angry at his coach, P.J. Carlesimo, during a practice session, and started to choke him, for which act Sprewell was suspended and later traded. When he subsequently apologized, he said, "I think it's fair to say I had a bad day.....That's not me." (Telushkin, 157)

This is a story told by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin in his book titled, *A Code of Jewish Ethics – You Shall Be Holy*. He uses this story as an example of how people try to sugar coat something they had done wrong. A big part of Jewish ethics and teachings is about "how to repent". This is an important issue for serious Jews who believe and love God. People don't like to own up to the wrongs they have committed. I stopped a lady last week at the park who blew past to traffic signs that stated "Do Not Enter" because it was a one way street. When I stopped the sixty-five-year-old female subject, I asked her if she saw the signs. She stated she did, but she didn't want to drive the long way around (long way was 50 extra yards). She was not sorry for what she had done. Her excuse was she had made a mistake and it was no big deal. This is the world we live in. We have turned "sin" into just a "mistake". Rabbi Telushkin states this in his book about how one should repent toward God for the wrong they had done against Him, "The first step is to admit that we have done wrong. If, for example, we have acted dishonestly, we must acknowledge this and not refer to what we did as a "mistake". A mistake is an accident, while a sin is a choice. (Telushkin, 157)" Just like that basketball player, most people will choose their words to minimize and negate the wrongfulness of their behavior. The coach was the one who was having a bad day. We have watered down sin so much in our culture today to the point where sin is only a mistake and it is no longer a big deal. Sin is not a mistake; it is a choice. Sometimes we sin not knowing it till the Holy Spirit shines light on it and even then, we have a choice to make – ask forgiveness and stop the sin or continue with the sin. In the Old Testament, "repentance" was a requirement when sin was done against God. It didn't matter if it was a rich or poor person, "repentance"

was required when someone sinned against God and that requirement is still required today as we live in the New Testament times. The Old Testament does a great job in showing us what this looks like.

As we continue with Ezekiel, who is a priest turned prophet to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, we can learn about what it means to repent and why it is needed. The people of Judah or we can say Israel are being punished for their continued disobedience or sin against God. Everything has been taken from them and they were living in darkness. When we sin against God, we are living in darkness and how bad that darkness can get. However, hope can be found in true darkness. Let's turn to Ezekiel 18: 20 – 32 where we read this, "The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them. But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked declares the Lord? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? But if a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked person does, will they live? None of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness they are guilty of and because of the sins they have committed, they will die. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. Yet the Israelites say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a

new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live! (NIV).

In many places in the Old Testament, Israel is asked to repent and turn back to God. We can almost say the same thing here when we pray for a spiritual awakening within this nation. Here, God has narrowed down repentance to a personal level. God is letting these captives know that it is their own responsibility to repent from their sins. Plus, they are guilty of their own sins, not guilty of their parents' own sins. This doesn't mean children can't suffer from the sins of their parents. It happens all the time. If a mother does drugs while pregnant, it may affect the child in a bad way. If a parent is abusive to a child, this will cause lasting trauma to that child. The child suffers from the sin of the parents, but is not guilty of the sin committed by the parent. What God has done is laid bare what sin is to the captives – it has become personal. Since they are no longer in their own nation, they are responsible for their own sin. Plus, God let's them know in very strong terms there is punishment for unforgiven sin which is death (verse 20). However, if they turn away from all their sin they have committed, that person will live. If a righteous person turns to wickedness, then their past righteousness will not be remembered and they will die. God goes straight to the point here. Sin is sin and it will not be tolerated. Some think today that because they were baptized as a baby, they have a free pass into heaven. It doesn't work that way. If you were baptized as a baby, but sin everyday against God with no remorse, you will die spiritually. In the Old Testament, we can see this more clearly. God had given Israel His law or we can say the written law. God wrote down the Ten Commandments to Israel. When they disobeyed that law, it was sin against God. Plus, they had the law within as well. Paul tells us this in Romans 1: 18, "But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves. For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. (NLT, 1768)" Paul then continues with how the people worshiped false gods and did sinful sexual acts to each other even though knowing the truth. John Calvin, a

theologian during the Reformation period, did talk some about a gift God has given us – the “conscience”. The Oxford Dictionary has this definition: an inner feeling or voice as acting as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one’s behavior. To John Calvin, what Paul is talking about is the gift of “conscience” from God. The law is needed so to remind us of what is right because our sinful nature fights against our conscience and the written law helps to give the conscience reinforcements. When we choose to disobey both the law and conscience, then we feel guilt, which is another gift from God. The problem is if one chooses to continue to reject this feeling of guilt, a hard heart starts to form and we become more and more separated from God. This is what Israel had done. Proof of their hard heart against God can be seen in verses 25 and 29 where God tells us that the captives thought God was unjust for what He had allowed to happen to them because of their sin against Him. They had no excuse because they rejected both the written law of God and their conscience and they made their own choice to turn away from God and His Supreme Authority over them. However, they still felt right to tell God He was unjust. God didn’t waver against His judgment against them because God is all righteous. God tells them that he doesn’t punish the people who are righteous – who obey the first law which is loving God with everything they had (Deuteronomy 6:4 – 9). They did it for only a little while and then they went their own way by choice. If they had followed the law, God would have seen them as being righteous. We have to remember that God is all righteous and He can’t allow sin to go unchecked because that would go against His nature. Moses tells us this about God in Deuteronomy 32:4, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He” (NKJV). So, because of God’s Righteousness, He can’t allow unrighteousness to go unpunished. Let’s remember, we, today are to be righteous as well and we have with no excuse as well. We can’t blame our parents for our sinfulness. They may have set a bad example, but we make the final choice to disobey God because of knowing the law of God. We can see how our culture is trying to destroy the rule of law. If there is no law to obey, then there is less chance of guilt and this is the driving force of why our culture is trying to destroy the rule of law – we don’t want to feel guilty about the sin we do against God and the society. I had a police officer last week tell me about another judge that has started to water down the law and are finding ways to let criminals go free. We are no different today from

how Israel acted in the Old Testament. We still fight against our conscience and the law.

So, God gives Israel and us a message in Ezekiel 18: 31 – 32, “Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live NIV)! Today’s Church can’t take sin too lightly. We can say that this is the Old Testament days. Paul tells the New Testament Church, which includes us today, this in 2 Corinthians 5: 21, “For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (ESV) We are still called today to be righteous because our God is still righteous. Since the people of the Old Testament had such a hard time being righteous, God has brought us help. He sent His Son, Jesus who knew no sin, to take that sin we carry and makes us feel guilty away if we allow Him into our hearts. When we allow Him into our hearts, then He allows His Spirit to live within us to help us to be a righteous people for God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone.

However, there is a requirement from us that hasn’t changed from the Old Testament. If we go back to Ezekiel 18: 30 and 32, God tells us we must repent and live! We must WANT to repent of our sin. The Hebrew term used for repent is “sub” a verb which means: to restore; to turn away; to return (Strong’s Concordance). In other words, to repent from our sins means we want to turn away from our sin which makes us feel guilty and we want to return to God so that our relationship with Him can be restored because our sin had separated us from God. So, we must go through Jesus Christ to do this. We must repent of our sin to Him if we want to be made right with God and then we can have His Righteousness flow through us. John tells us in 1 John 1: 9, “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. (NLT)” The Lord has given us the gift of being able to repent of our sins. We cheapen that gift by watering down sin or saying some sin is no longer evil or say some sin is ok because the culture says so. We can’t be like the basketball player who thought he just had a bad day because he only tried to choke his coach. He didn’t repent of his sin. The Lord wants us to repent of our sin. The Lord wanted Israel to repent of their sin. God wanted to

restore them and have them return to Him. To repent is not a show of weakness or something to be ashamed of. God loves when people want to repent of their sin. God wants to restore that relationship He wants with us. If there is sin in your life, it will cause darkness in your life. To repent of sin in your life will only bring light and fellowship with God. Don't water down sin, repent of that sin and allow the Lord to forgive you and give you a new heart and spirit. It's only a prayer away.

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001

Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph. *A Code of Jewish Ethics: You Shall Be Holy.* Bell Tower: New York, 2006.