

The Wager • Ezekiel 12:21-28

INTRODUCTION – Read vs. 21-25

Pascal's Wager

1. **Blaise Pascal** was an ancient French **skateboarder & motocross rider**.
  - a. Of course not – but with a name like **Blaise**, he ought to have been.
  - b. He spelled it Blaise – not Blaze!
2. He was a 17<sup>th</sup> C. philosopher, mathematician & physicist.
3. A committed Christian, Pascal's greatest work was the **Pensees**, which means “thoughts.”
  - a. They were his meditations on **apologetics**.
  - b. As a **scientist**, he knew the importance of reason, but as a **philosopher**, he knew its limits.
4. He proposed a simple little logic challenge on why people **OUGHT** to believe in and live for God.
  - a. It's called **Pascal's Wager**.
  - b. I'll share it in a moment, but first let me say there are some Christians who don't like it; here's why . . .
    - 1) They say Pascal's Wager encourages people to have a mere intellectual assent to God's existence.
    - 2) It gives people the idea that as long as they believe God exists, that's good enough.
    - 3) They worry people won't come to an abiding faith in Christ, which of course is the only means of salvation & promise of eternal life.
  - c. While this is a real concern, it misses the point Pascal made.
    - 1) He didn't salvation came merely by being logical or concluding God is real.
    - 2) He knew and proclaimed salvation is by faith in Christ alone.
    - 3) What he called for in The Wager, was that people would use the brain God gave them to make an obvious choice;
    - 4) And that was to conclude that God is indeed real & that going on to believe in Christ is an eminently rational thing to do.
5. Pascal's Wager goes like this . . .
  - God either exists or He doesn't.
  - If He **does**, believing in & living for Him will produce **an infinite & eternal good**.
  - If He **doesn't**, believing in & living for Him will have **only a tiny loss**.
  - Therefore, the rational person will believe in & live for God.

6. I want to propose a version of Pascal's wager today, and adaptation of it in light of our text in Eze. 12 this morning.

Vs. 21-25

<sup>21</sup> And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>22</sup> “Son of man, what *is* this proverb *that you people* have about the land of Israel, which says, ‘The days are prolonged, and every vision fails’?”

1. God was well aware of pop culture & had heard many bantering a silly saying around.
2. Several prophets had warned of the destruction of Jerusalem for many years.
  - a. **Way back**, Isaiah & Micah had told of coming destruction in vivid detail.
  - b. In **recent** times, Jeremiah & Ezekiel had renewed the warnings.
3. Though **current events** had clearly **setting the stage** for what was foretold, it **hadn't** happened yet.
  - a. So whenever the subject came up, people said, “Yeah, yeah, yeah! You prophets gotta' stop crying ‘Wolf!’”
  - b. “It's been years and Jerusalem still stands. Your dire words of warning have come to nothing.”
4. God finds this **dangerous** so He says . . .

<sup>23</sup> Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.”’

- a. Because the judgment that was so long foretold **WILL** come.

But say to them, “The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. <sup>24</sup> For no more shall there be any false

vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. <sup>25</sup> For I *am* the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord God.' ”

b. The time foretold had come.

c. Not long after Ezekiel spoke these words, the Babylonians marched on Jerusalem, & after a 2½ year siege, leveled it.

Mercy, Grace & Justice

1. We can ask – Why did God give such a **long pause** between the prophecies of Jerusalem’s judgment & it’s fulfillment?

a. Didn’t that delay **encourage** people to assume what was foretold wouldn’t come?

b. Well, it may have, but that was not God’s intent. He made His intent clear.

c. The prophecies **at first** were **conditional**; they were **warnings!**

1) Repent of your sin. Turn from your idols, back to the Lord & He will return to you.

2) But, know this; if you refuse to return to the Lord, He will send great judgment upon you.

2. The pause/delay, was because of God’s mercy! He gave them **time** to hear & heed the warning & escape judgment.

3. The problem was, & this is the grave error millions make **today**, because God was merciful for so long, they assumed He always would be.

4. If they’d spent a little time thinking about it, they’d have realized their error.

5. Let’s make sure we’re not repeating it. // Follow me now because this is important.

a. If you’re a Christian, this may help you explain things to your non-christian friends.

b. If you’re not a follower of Jesus, pay close attention because this will clear up some things.

6. **Mercy** is **NOT** getting what we deserve. **Grace IS** getting what we don’t.

7. For mercy to be real, there **has to be** a **limit**, an **end** to it.

a. Mercy **requires** the existence of Justice; because mercy means, **NOT getting** what justice requires.

b. **If there’s no justice**, there’s no **need** for mercy, because wrong-doing will never be judged.

c. The **existence of mercy** means justice is real. And **justice demands** that evil be punished.

d. Mercy just delays judgment, providing time for the wrong-doer to repent & avoid judgment.

e. But eventually, Justice **must have** its **Say & Day** in order to remain Just & Right.

8. Let me use an illustration: I’m at the park with my kids.

a. Look over and see another little kid misbehaving badly

b. I think that’s sad, but since the child isn’t mine, not my responsibility to correct him.

c. If it IS my child that’s erring, I’ll pull aside and have a talk.

1) Point out what’s wrong & show what’s right.

2) **Warn** about what’ll happen if the bad behavior continues.

3) But I show mercy at first and don’t thump him right off.

4) My hope is that he’ll take advantage of the mercy I show him to self-correct.

5) But what happens if he doesn’t, but goes right off & does the same foolish thing all over again?

6) I **have to** discipline him, otherwise I **make myself a liar** because I warned him & said if he disobeyed there’d be consequences.

9. As Creator, God is responsible for all of us.

a. He warns us of the consequences of rebellion: Judgment!

b. But then in mercy He gives us time to see if we’re going to take advantage of the delay in judgment and repent.

c. If we don’t, then eventually mercy runs out and judgment comes.

10. The people of Israel turned from God to worship idols.

a. As though that wasn’t bad enough, the **way** they worshipped was utterly corrupt & involved really gross sin – including the sacrifice of their children.

b. **In mercy**, God warned them to repent & return to Him or Justice would come & judge them

c. Mercy meant NOT getting what they deserved; & what they deserved was to be punished.

d. In the space of time mercy opened for them, God poured His grace by providing for them.

e. It was all meant to soften them to Him and encourage their return.

- f. But like fools they hardened and grew worse in their sin, treasuring up even more judgment.
11. What Jerusalem did 2500 years ago, our world has done today.
- God sent prophets to warn of coming judgment of the City.
  - To prove the prophets were from God, they foretold lesser events so that when they came to pass, people would realize their ultimate message of the destruction of Jerusalem was certain.
  - And though every sign was fulfilled exactly as foretold, the people chalked it up to coincidence & ignored the warnings.
  - They foretold famines, foreign invasion, economic distress, social problems.
  - When they happened, people pretended it was all just an interesting fluke.
  - Then, when Jerusalem finally went up in flames as the prophets had long forewarned, they had the audacity to complain & blame God!
12. Just as the prophets foretold Jerusalem's judgment, they've foretold the world's.
- And they've given dozens of signs that **mark the march of history** toward the end.
  - Most have already come to pass.
    - 1) Israel is back in her land and a nation among the nations of the world once again.
    - 2) Buying and selling with numbers rather than cash is a global reality.
    - 3) It's a global economy.
    - 4) National political alignments are all set **exactly** as the Bible foretells will be in the Last Days.
  - The world stage is set just as God's blueprint in the Bible describes.
13. And what do most people do? They say it's a coincidence / a fluke!
14. Instead of taking advantage of the mercy of God and repenting, they go on and grow worse in their sin & rebellion.
- 15 .They treasure up wrath for the Day of Wrath.
- Vs. 26-28
- Vs. 21-25 were for the skeptics and those who'd written off the prophets & prophecy.
  - The next vs. are for those who acknowledged Ezekiel as a real-deal prophet, but still weren't responding as they ought.

<sup>26</sup> Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>27</sup> "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees *is* for many days *from now*, and he prophesies of times far off.' <sup>28</sup> Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord God.'"

- Even though they accepted what Ezekiel was saying as a genuine vision and warning, they pushed it way out into the future.
- This was a convenient way to maintain the **image** they were believers, while effectively living no differently than unbelievers.
- And again, sadly, it seems this is largely that state of the Church in our time.
  - Almost every poll taken over the last couple decades shows while people **say** they believe in God & that the Bible is His Word,
  - There's very little correlation between their faith and how they live.
- Let me just cut to the chase:
  - Do you believe Jesus is coming soon?
  - Do you believe the Rapture could occur at any moment?
  - Does your lifestyle back that up?