

Week 35

August 27 - September 2

2 Kings 25:22-26; 1 Chronicles 4:24-5:26; 6:3b-15, 49; 7:1-8:28; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 40:7-44:30; 52:28-30; Lamentations 2:1-5:22; Ezekiel 32:1-39:29; Obadiah

The reality of the exile has set in, and life as the Israelites knew it is gone. They are now living with the consequences of their idolatry and disobedience to the Lord's covenant. Thus, our theme for this week is consequences. Whether we want to admit it or not, we all live with consequences. As we will discover, some consequences are good and some are bad, and all of them are real.

August 27th

Lamentations 2:1-4:22. "Spoiled Children"

"Why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins?" – Lamentations 3:39

A sign of maturity in the process of human cognitive and emotional development is the ability to accept consequences for our actions. As a parent of young children, I am fully aware that this is an ability that children must learn as opposed to being born with it.

In the reading today it seems as though the nation of Israel is still learning this lesson. Like a spoiled child who has never been disciplined, Israel responded to the Lord with shock and dismay that He would pour out His anger on them.

In the New Testament, Peter picks up on this theme in 1 Peter 2:20-21. Peter says that you will be rewarded for suffering if you suffer for doing good. However, if we suffer for doing wrong there is no reward.

We all must deal with the consequences for our actions. It doesn't matter if we were right or wrong, every action will bring about some consequence.

– David Curtis

August 28th

2 Kings 25:22-26; Jeremiah 40:7-41:18; Lamentations 5:1-22; Obadiah. "Compassionate Response"

When hurricane Katrina leveled the gulf coast and nearly destroyed the entire city of New Orleans, I heard someone comment on how they felt the city was being judged because of the excessive sin it promotes. Now, I do not pretend to know why God allowed that hurricane and the massive damage that resulted, but I do know that it is not our position to sit back and gloat or to pass judgment even if God is using the disaster to judge or discipline.

This was precisely what Edom did to Israel when God's judgment was carried out by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Because Edom refused to act with compassion towards Israel, God communicated His judgment on them through Obadiah.

So, even if someone is enduring consequences brought on by their own actions, our response is still to extend compassion and mercy.

August 29th

Jeremiah 42:1-44:30; Ezekiel 33:21-33. "Seeking Wisdom"

"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice" – Proverbs 12:15 (NIV)

Have you ever found yourself asking for advice and yet you have already concluded in your mind what you think should be done? This is precisely the situation that the leaders of Israel were in. When Jeremiah gave the answer from the Lord, they concluded that Jeremiah must be lying since it didn't match what they thought the Lord would say.

Seeking wisdom and counsel does absolutely no good if you don't listen to it. Routinely we are instructed in Proverbs to seek and listen to counsel.

While none of us can know exactly what the future will hold, it seems that a principle in life is that you will suffer consequences if you ignore wise counsel. It was true for Solomon's son Rehoboam who lost control of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel because he ignored wise counsel. It was true for the remnant of Israel who ignored Jeremiah and suffered their fate in Egypt.

August 30th

Ezekiel 34:1-36:38. "Forgiveness"

Forgiveness is a really curious thing. All this week we have been thinking about consequences in life. Now, forgiveness is like the exact opposite of consequences. When we are forgiven, the one who forgives decides not to bring about potential consequences against us. For example, some insurance companies offer what is called accident forgiveness. It used to be a guarantee that your rates would go up if you were in an accident, but if you have accident forgiveness, you don't have to face that consequence.

While Israel did endure consequences and discipline from the Lord for their actions, they did eventually experience restoration. The restoration was based on God's sovereign decision to forgive and to bless His people on account of His covenant faithfulness. It wasn't as if their consequences had changed because they had changed.

In the same way, we can experience forgiveness for our sins because of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Because of God's sovereign decision to forgive and extend grace, we are freed from the guilt and consequences associated with our sin.

August 31st

Ezekiel 32:1-16; 37:1-39:29. "Taking the Good with the Bad"

In the movie, It's a Wonderful Life, the lead character George Bailey, played by James Stewart, makes the statement that he wished he had never been born. Those of you who know the movie know that George was given a glimpse of what his family, friends and whole town would have been like if he had not been born. Even though George Bailey hadn't led a charmed life or accomplished all he had hoped for, he had made a difference in many lives. He realized that life was in fact worth living and was given the opportunity to make things right.

That movie strikes a chord with all of us because we all wonder at times if our life has amounted to anything, if it would change the world if we weren't there.

As we think about consequences, we must recognize that they come in both good and bad varieties, that even the smallest action can be used by God to bring about a positive consequence in someone else's life. If you ever doubt the significance of your life, just think of George Bailey and the lesson he learned.

September 1st

1 Chronicles 4:24-5:17; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 52:28-30; Ezekiel 32:17-33:20.
"Failed Watchmen"

Before the invention of modern fire suppression systems, it was required for a hotel of significant size to employ a watchman during the night hours to alert guests in the case of fire. One such hotel in Omaha, Nebraska had a fire on January 23, 1911, and the watchmen failed to notify the guests of the fire. Therefore, a guest who was forced to use a rope fire escape sued the hotel because of injuries resulting from his escape. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court where the court upheld the decision to hold the hotel responsible for its negligence in alerting the guests to the fire.

Ezekiel was given a similar charge by God, a responsibility to warn people of God's judgment. It is important to note that Ezekiel wasn't responsible for the peoples' response to his warning; he was merely responsible, as the watchmen, for sounding the warning itself.

The same is true for our sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not responsible for the consequences one faces for rejecting the gospel, but we are responsible for delivering the message.

September 2nd

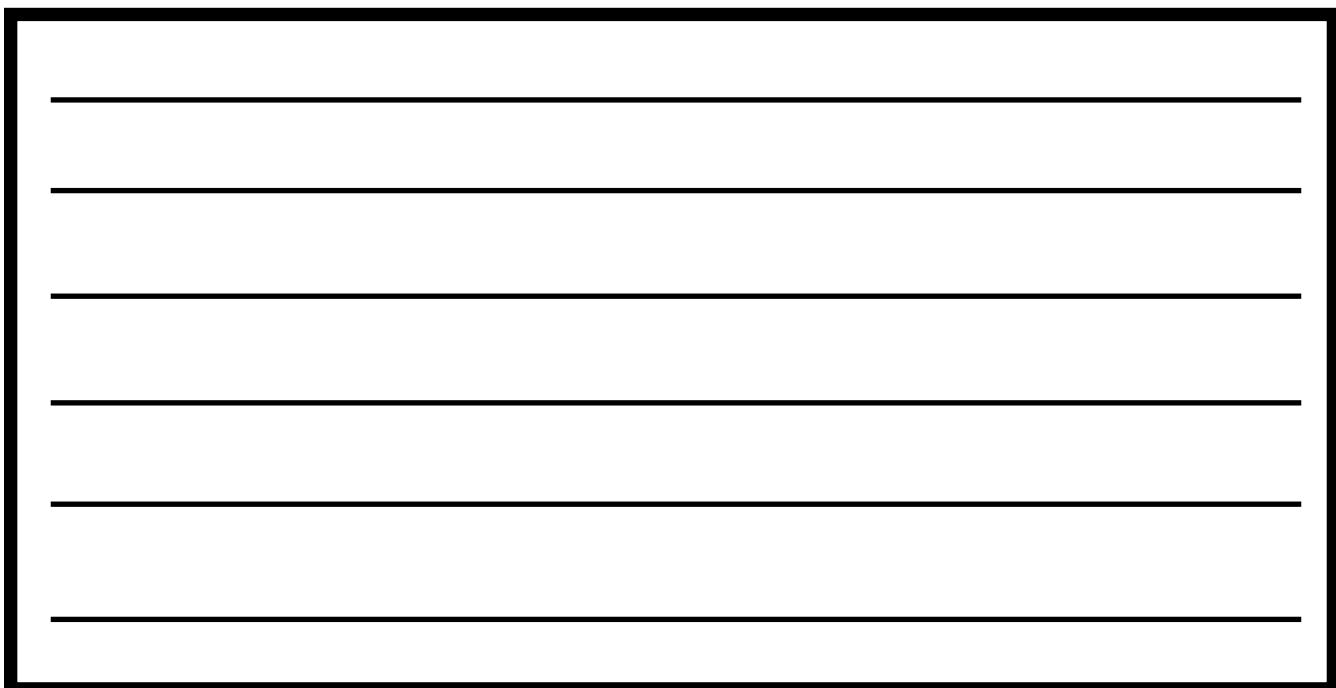
1 Chronicles 5:18; 6:3b-15, 49; 7:1 – 8:28. "News of Record"

In our town, the paper has a section called News of Record, which reports every 911 incident and arrests or violations of the law. When appropriate, the names of those involved are listed in the paper. You would think that, because people in this town know they will face public humiliation for breaking the law, even traffic laws, there wouldn't be much to print; however, the section never seems to shrink.

So, the thought occurred to me that merely knowing about the consequences of our actions is not sufficient to prevent us from engaging in destructive or sinful behavior. While it is true that knowledge of the consequences can be a strong deterrent, many of us will choose to sin in spite of those consequences.

God's people diligently studied the Scriptures and knew about the warnings in Deuteronomy regarding the consequences they would face for covenant unfaithfulness, but that didn't stop them from abandoning the Lord.

May you recognize the consequences of your actions before you are forced to endure them.

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General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

How do you generally deal with consequences? Do you get frustrated or do you accept them and work through them?

Sometimes we receive negative consequences, even if we do what is right. How does this possibility affect how you live your life?

What is your first reaction to witnessing someone else dealing with the consequences of life? Are you quick to judge or quick to help?

If God decides what consequences He will bring about for His purposes of judgment and discipline, what is our role to be?

Have you ever ignored good advice and regretted it? Could you share your story with the group?

What is the root reason for our unwillingness to accept someone else's counsel? How can we change that underlying cause?

Can you share an example of a time when forgiveness doesn't eliminate all consequences for our actions?

If consequences can still result even with forgiveness, what purpose does forgiveness serve?

If we forgive someone, what rights over that person do we voluntarily give up?

Make a list of people who have had a positive impact in your life. How would your life be different if one or more of those people never existed?

What is it that gives significance to a life?

Is the responsibility of a watchman a fair one?

Consider the story of the negligent hotel employee. How might the verdict be different if he had alerted the guest, who then chose to not leave until the rope fire escape was the only viable option.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Successful evangelism is taking the initiative to share the gospel and leaving the results up to God."

Why do you think people continue to sin in spite of a full awareness of the consequences?