

Thought for the Day 14th August - John Reed

Read Ezekiel 18:1-9

Those not interested in sport may have missed the news yesterday that Paul “Mary” McGregor, the former player and for the last several years coach of the St George Illawarra Dragons has resigned. Or mutually agreed with the club that he should go. Or something like that.

I’m not asking you to suddenly take an interest in sport, if that’s not your thing. And I don’t want to go into the ins and outs of the Dragons’ recent form, player signings, and so on.

What struck me is one comment that Paul McGregor made to the media as he announced his departure. Which was this: “It’s really hard to do when you are owning the result but not picking the team you want. I wasn’t dealing with that very well ...”¹

Apparently, apart from the dissatisfaction from fans and club officials about the team’s performance, the coach himself had some dissatisfaction with the fact that he was copping the flak for the performances of a team that he didn’t actually pick, since the team selections had been taken out of his sole hands and placed into the hands of a selection panel on which he was only one voice.

It does seem a little bit harsh, to say: “You can’t pick the team, but you’re responsible for the outcome.” And let’s not forget it’s not the coach out there on the field standing by as the opposition run in try after try – that’s the players. They should bear some of the blame, along with the selection panel. It should not all rest on the shoulders of one man.

And that brings me to this passage in Ezekiel, where God’s message to his people is that there will be no more excuses, no more blaming their failures on others, no more complaining that they’ve suffered unfairly for the sins of others. Each man, woman, and child will stand (or fall) before God on the basis of their own lives and actions. No more “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” You sin, you die. You’re righteous, you live. It’s on you, and you alone.

It sounds fair. But it’s also a death knell for all of us. Because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

But look at the next verse in Romans 3, where Paul tells us that we can be “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). That is, a righteousness that we don’t deserve and haven’t earned is credited to us anyway. We don’t stand or fall on our own merits, but on the merits of Jesus.

This is the marvelous good news of the gospel of grace. That, despite the fact that we’ve contributed nothing to the outcome, we are credited with righteousness and given the reward anyway.

¹ <https://www.foxsports.com.au/nrl/nrl-premiership/nrl-2020-paul-mcgregor-sacked-st-george-illawarra-dragons-rugby-league-round-14-vs-eels/news-story/244141e1f21ff5211b951d111d51b756>