

Review

Our first two studies in the book of Ezekiel introduced us to this 30-year old man who'd been taken captive along with the rest of the Jews into Babylon. But unlike the others, this man is being called by God to speak as His prophet. This calling was in the form of a vision he had as he was by the River Keb-AWR.

The vision was of a storm cloud containing four cherubim, and above them was the throne of God. As Ezekiel saw the radiance of God's glory, he fell on his face, and then heard God's voice speak.

2:1-2 Son Of Man

The Lord called Ezekiel, "son of man." Throughout the Old Testament, "son of man" is an expression used to describe people in a lowly fashion. David wrote in Psalm 8,

Psa. 8:4 What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?

And in the book of Job, when Bildad the Shuhite was asking, "How can a man be just with God," he said,

Job 25:5-6 "If even the moon has no brightness and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, that maggot, and the son of man, that worm!"

God is going to call Ezekiel "son of man" almost a hundred times. Throughout the gospels, this was Jesus' favorite description of Himself, also using it almost a hundred times.

Stand up

At the appearance of God's glory, Ezekiel had fallen on his face (Eze. 1:28). But when God spoke to Ezekiel, He told him to stand up. Then the Spirit entered him and set him on his feet.

He had fallen down, and God lifted him up. This is the way that all of us must be lifted up. It is as Jesus said,

Matt. 23:12 "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

If we try to set ourselves on the throne, we will be knocked off. It is he who makes himself low that is put on the throne. Like the virgin Mary

said,

Luke 1:52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble."

2:3-8a Speak My Words

God will have Ezekiel speak for Him. However, the job will not be easy, for his listeners will not be listening.

The very reason they were in the Babylonian Captivity was because of their rebellion against God and refusal to listen to His warnings. God is giving Ezekiel the "heads up" that they're not going to suddenly start listening. As a matter of fact, not only will they not be listening to Ezekiel's words, but they will be threatening his body. But the Lord tells him not to be afraid.

He clarifies to Ezekiel that to not speak would be rebellion equal to that of the other Jews. This is a reminder to all of us that God has called to be His children: We need to speak God's Word whether people seem to be listening or not, whether people are threatening us or not. To shrink in fear of man is to be in rebellion against God.

God has heard all the excuses ever uttered in defense of why people won't speak His Word. Moses tried to weasel out of speaking for God. He tried various excuses like, "Who am I" (Exo. 3:11), "I'm not eloquent - my tongue is slow" (Exo. 4:10), and "Send someone else" (Exo. 4:13). Did God buy any of it? Not a chance.

Jeremiah had a similar fear, telling God that he couldn't do it because he was too young (Jer. 1:6). But God told him,

Jer. 1:17 "Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them."

"You have a choice, Jeremiah. What will you decide to be more afraid of? Man's ability to shatter you or Mine?"

In more recent times, we see Timothy struggling with fear of opposition. But his mentor, the Apostle Paul, told him,

2Tim. 1:7-8 "...God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (or of me His pris-

oner), but join with me in suffering for the gospel...

And so Ezekiel must speak God's Word in the same way that we must.

2:8b-3:3 Eat This Scroll

God had Ezekiel eat a scroll which was written on the front and the back and told him to eat it. The writing on it is described as lamentations, mourning, and woe. (Lamentations are words of sorrow, regret, and grief.) He was given this to eat, but we have to wonder, "How could such sorrowful words be sweet in his mouth?" It's because God's Word is sweet, no matter what the content. David wrote in Psalm 19 that even the judgments of God are...

Psa. 19:10 ...sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

And the author of Psalm 119 said,

Psa. 119:103 How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

And so why do so many people find the Word of God so distasteful? Jeremiah said,

Jer. 15:16 Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.

Those who have not been called don't enjoy the Word of God. It's like Paul told the Corinthians,

1Cor. 1:18 ...the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

You may remember that, similar to Ezekiel's experience, the apostle John was told to eat a little book...

Rev. 10:10 I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

Again, the Word was sweet in his mouth, but as he digested what it meant for a Christ-rejecting world, it was bitter in his stomach.

3:4-11 I Have Made Your Face Hard

God tells Ezekiel yet again to speak His Word to the Israelites, and that they will not listen. But he also reassures Ezekiel that as hard as they are in their stubbornness, He has supernaturally made Ezekiel as hard in his determination. This is interesting to me, since "Ezekiel" means "God strengthens."

Ezekiel is told that Israel should listen, but they won't, but he is to speak regardless of whether they listen or not.

3:12-14 The Spirit Lifted Me Up

The vision was ending, and Ezekiel was lifted up and away from it by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will lift Ezekiel up a few more times, bringing him to various places. This seems to be unique among the prophets.

Now, I would think that if I'd just had an encounter with God, and was carried away by the Holy Spirit, I would be jumping for joy. But Ezekiel says that he was embittered in the rage of his spirit. Why?

Some commentators say that he was upset at being called to the prophetic ministry. Others say that his anger was from hearing about how truly wicked and stubborn his people were. This seems to make much more sense to me.

3:15 Causing Consternation

Ezekiel went back to the Jewish exiles, and there sat among them for a week, saying absolutely nothing.

This caused "consternation" among them. This word (Heb: "shaw-MAME") means, "to be stunned, astounded, awestruck, appalled, or horrified." It's root is to be desolate. And so it appears that when Ezekiel gave them the "silent treatment," they were completely emptied of joy. But they would soon discover that with their stubborn mindset, they would be happier if he never spoke...

3:16-21 I Have Appointed You A Watchman

The reason Ezekiel did not speak to them was that God hadn't yet told him what exactly to say. Imagine what a perfect standard this is to live by. The old saying is, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say any-

thing at all." But instead, we could live by the rule, "If you can't say anything god-breathed, don't say anything at all."

After a week, when God did speak to Ezekiel, He told him of his new job description: He was being appointed as a watchman.

A watchman is one who stays awake (Psa. 127:1), at a high vantage point, keeping on the lookout to tell of what is coming (1Kings 18:24-27). If what is coming is danger, he blows the trumpet, warning everyone that it is on its way (Eze. 33:6). He also informs people of what time it is (Isa. 21:11).

And so Ezekiel was being appointed by God as a man of warning. If Ezekiel failed to warn them, God would require their blood at his hand. However, if he did his job, he would be vindicated, whether or not they received it.

3:22-24a Go Out To The Plain

God told Ezekiel to head out to the plain, where he would get further instructions. Remember, he had sat in silence for a week, and now, without saying anything, he stands up and goes out to the plain.

There, he saw the glory of the Lord, and once again, he fell to his face, only to be raised up by the Spirit.

3:24b-27 Made Mute, Made To Speak

Ezekiel is about to be given a number of things to do - acting out God's message to the Jews. The first thing he is told to do is to shut himself up in his house. This is going to make the Jews react by restraining him with ropes. But even then, he will not be speaking to them. God is going to make Ezekiel mute until the total destruction of Jerusalem, which is still over seven years in the future. The only speaking he will do will be when God enables him to speak His message.

Again, we are faced with the interesting prospect of being people who are slow to speak (James 1:19) anything but God's Word.

Eph. 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.