

Ezekiel 2B

- There's an old joke – one I'm sure you've heard before – of a son who wakes up one Sunday morning and declares to his mother that he's not going to church

The mother asks, "Why aren't you going to church?" The son replies, "Because no one likes me. Everyone says unkind things about me behind my back. Whenever I try to join a group of people, they all stop talking and walk away. Plus, the sermons are boring."

The mother replies kindly, "Oh son, you must go to church." The son asks, "Why do I have to go?" And the mother answers, "Because you're the pastor."

- Like any good joke, there's a grain of truth in there somewhere
 - God expects His undershepherds to speak the truth, to live according to the Word and to serve Him faithfully
 - And as a result, sometimes the shepherds who lead God's people will endure poor treatment for their faithful service
- Because we tend to prefer different things in our leaders than God prefers
 - God wants leaders to tell us the truth, and we say we want the truth except when the truth hurts our feelings
 - God wants leaders to be good role models, and so do we except when we're convicted by their example
 - God expects faithfulness and we respect faithfulness in our leaders, until their faithfulness to the truth gets in the way of what we want, at which point we call it stubbornness
- In a sense we want it all: God-fearing leaders...who do what WE want
 - Hopefully, we don't all think that way, at least not all the time
 - But in the worst cases, when God's people wander far from His word and from His Spirit, they will reject God's servants
 - They will even go so far as to kill God's representatives
 - As Jesus Himself said:

Matt. 23:37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

- Ezekiel will experience this pattern personally and the Lord is preparing him for that outcome
 - Let’s rejoin his story as the Lord continues explaining Ezekiel’s commissions as a prophet to the exiles of Israel

Ezek. 2:6 “And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 2:7 “But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.

- Earlier in v.5 the Lord told Ezekiel that Israel was rebellious and likely to ignore what he says to them
 - So now the Lord adds that Ezekiel must not fear their response
 - The Lord uses the word “fear” three times in v.6
 - When people don’t like the message, they’re bound to threaten the messenger
 - So the Lord knows Ezekiel’s is going to encounter fear in the course of fulfilling his duties
 - But He warns Ezekiel not to give into this emotion
 - Specifically, Ezekiel is not to fear them personally nor what they say to him
 - He uses figurative language to allude to what is coming for Ezekiel
 - Specifically, the Lord warns Ezekiel to be prepared for thistles, thorns and scorpions
 - These terms are descriptions of the people of Israel
 - They are a rebellious people, and people who have rebellious hearts reject the conviction that truth brings
 - They will rip at him and prick him like thorns and thistles

- They will even sting him like a scorpion
- These terms suggest hurt, discomfort of
- But in the end, their response is not worthy of fear
 - Just as thorns and thistles and scorpions won't kill a man, neither will Israel's harsh words harm Ezekiel or even silence him
 - Therefore he has nothing to fear
 - Therefore, speak God's words whether they listen or not
- This is the second time the Lord has said this to Ezekiel...to speak whether they listen or not
 - We all love to be heard when we know people are listening
 - It makes us feel appreciated and important
 - On the other hand, we all know what it feels like to be ignored
 - The modern way to communication disinterest in what someone is saying is to pull out a smartphone while they're talking
 - How do you feel when you see that happen?
 - And when someone reacts negatively to what we're saying, then we feel even worse
 - We're automatically assume we said something wrong
 - We wonder what we should have said instead
 - And we're likely to stop talking once we realize that no one wants to hear us
 - Sometimes that's the proper response,
 - Perhaps we spoke in a thoughtless or rude manner or just got boring
 - But other times, the reason people stop listen to us isn't because we said the wrong thing
 - The problem is we said the right thing but the person didn't want to hear it

- We spoke truth that needed to be said, and even though we did it in love, they wanted no part of it
- Now if you're the kind of person who can't bear to hurt someone's feelings or who constantly needs approval from others, then you're not likely to handle that response very well
 - You may be tempted to hide the truth
 - You'll offer flattery instead of fact
 - You'll favor tact over truth
 - The Bible says we are to speak truth in love, and concealing the truth isn't loving
- So God demands Ezekiel prepare himself for this mission
 - He must speak the truth regardless of how it makes Israel feel or how it makes HIM feel to see their response
 - In fact, Ezekiel is already on notice that Israel isn't going to like it
 - Israel will make him feel very uncomfortable for having said it
 - In fact, the more he speaks, the less they're going to like him
 - For some of us, this revelation would be enough to cause us to disobey the call of the Lord, to say no to this mission
 - Some folks can't bear the thought of being rejected by people, especially friends and family
 - We call that fearing men rather than fearing God, and the Bible says that's sin
 - We all know this feeling, and it comes in different ways at different stages of life
 - Children and teens worry about being cool, being liked, and being accepted among their peers
 - Young adults worry about finding the right spouse, getting the right job, getting into the right neighborhood
 - Then as we get older, we worry about whether our kids like us, whether our boss likes us, whether our pastor approves of us... (scratch that last one...no one worries about that one)

- Here's the point... we all know the feeling of seeking the approval of the world in various ways
 - But inevitably, when standing up for Christ and for biblical truth gets in the way of pursuing these things, then we're tempted to turn away from the Lord
 - If standing for Christ means the cool kids mock us, then maybe we can just keep our views to ourself
 - Or when holding to biblical standards for relationships means losing the girl or boy we want to date, then maybe we compromise
 - Or when obeying the Lord's call on our life means turning down promotions or giving up our lifestyle, then maybe we tell Jesus to stick to Sunday mornings
 - If we do these things, we're disobeying the Lord
 - We're joining in the rebellion of those who oppose the Lord, we're aligning ourselves with the world against the Lord
 - In fact, look at what the Lord said next to Ezekiel

Ezek. 2:8 “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”

Ezek. 2:9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it.

Ezek. 2:10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.

- The Lord reminds Ezekiel that if he should give in to his fear, then he will be joining the rebellion of Israel
 - That's what it means to fear men instead of fearing God
 - The one sent to convict the nation of Israel would become guilty of the same crime
- And to illustrate what Ezekiel must expect, the Lord prepares a little object lesson for the prophet
 - He hands Ezekiel a scroll written on front and back
 - Normally, scrolls were only written on one side, like Torah scrolls

- But a few legal documents might be written on both sides, and one would be a judgment issued by a magistrate
- This scroll seems to be that kind of document
 - Perhaps on the inside were the terms of the covenant that both parties agreed to keep in the past
 - And perhaps on the outside of the scroll were written the violations of that agreement and the penalties that must follow
 - Perhaps that's what is happening here since Ezekiel said the scroll contained lamentations, mourning and woe
- The Lord then commands the prophet to eat this scroll
 - This is an object lesson for Ezekiel
 - An object lesson is a striking practical example of some principle or ideal
 - It's designed to leave a powerful impression, so that we won't forget the message
 - And certainly eating a scroll will leave a lasting impression
 - So what's the message the Lord wants Ezekiel to remember?
 - Turning to chapter 3, here's what we find

Ezek. 3:1 Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."

Ezek. 3:2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll.

Ezek. 3:3 He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

- The Lord repeats the instructions for Ezekiel to eat the scroll then go to Israel
 - Ezekiel opens his mouth and the Lord feeds Ezekiel the scroll
 - We don't know exactly what this looked like
 - We're only told that Ezekiel opened his mouth in response to the Lord's command, then the Lord fed Ezekiel the scroll
 - He tells Ezekiel feed your stomach, fill your body with the scroll

- Ezekiel says it was as sweet as honey in his mouth
 - Honey was the sweetest thing found in Israel
 - So Ezekiel was saying the scroll couldn't have tasted better
- So what is the point of this object lesson?
 - First, the Lord is teaching Ezekiel to be bold
 - The word of the Lord left a sweet taste in his mouth, which would have been an encouragement for Ezekiel to speak
 - Even though the message was filled with mourning and lamentations...
 - And it foretold terrible things set to happen to Israel as judgment against them for their sins...
 - Even though the words communicated these devastating things, Ezekiel could take comfort knowing that speaking God's truth is always a good thing
 - The word of the Lord is sweet regardless of what it contains, because it advances the program of God, and that program is good
 - For Israel, these lamentations were advancing the plan of God to the next phase for the nation
 - They were moving from an earlier stage of judgment into later stages
 - And each step brought Israel closer to their Messiah and ultimately the Kingdom
- Likewise, when the Lord brings us difficulties, it may not be pleasant in the moment
 - But anything that comes to us by the hand of the Lord is a good thing in the end
 - Because it's moving us along a path that ultimately brings us closer to Him
 - We need to maintain that perspective when we have to share difficult truths with someone from God's word

- Communicating God’s truth is a blessing even when we’re saying things people don’t want to hear
- Or even when it’s something WE don’t want to hear
- After all, it’s better for a person to know the truth so he or she can get right with God
- And remember, a person’s initial response to truth is usually not a good measure of how that truth will ultimately impact their hearts
 - We need to give time for God’s word to work in a person’s heart
 - Speak in love when led by the Spirit and trust the Lord will do good things with it in time
 - And even if that person should never heed the lesson, at least you know you’ve been faithful to the Lord and His word
 - That’s the sweetness of the word of God...it’s good no matter how it’s received
- Secondly, this object lesson reveals the prophet has a small but important part to play in sharing the word
 - God assigned Ezekiel a small part in this object lesson
 - If he was to eat the scroll, Ezekiel had to open his mouth, as the Lord commanded
 - Likewise, a prophet has to obey the Lord’s call to go and open his mouth, to speak so that the word of the Lord may reach an audience
 - If a prophet refused to go, then the word wouldn’t arrive, as Paul reminds us:

Rom. 10:14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

Rom. 10:15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”

- Consider the example of Jonah
 - He ran the opposite direction to avoid speaking God’s word to Israel’s enemies

- His disobedience stood in the way of delivering the message to Nineveh
- So the Lord “persuaded” Jonah to obey his calling so Nineveh would hear the message
- But also notice that after Ezekiel opens his mouth, the Lord fed Ezekiel the scroll; Ezekiel didn’t feed himself
 - Illustrating that as the prophet obeys his call, the Lord put His words in the prophet’s mouth
 - Ezekiel didn’t have to be eloquent, and he didn’t have to come up with a compelling message
 - He just had to speak what God gave him
 - The word that a prophet shares is from the Lord, not his own word
- The same principle holds today
 - When we share God’s word with someone, we don’t need to embellish it or sugar coat it
 - Whether we’re a teacher or an evangelist or simply a neighbor giving godly advice
 - No matter our role, the only thing of value we have is God’s word, not ours
 - And it’s already sweet enough, and it’s far better than anything we might invent instead
 - So just open your mouth and share the word of God accurately and faithfully
- Thirdly, the object lesson illustrates that a messenger of God must internalize the message before sharing it with others
 - Notice the Lord says that Ezekiel must fill his stomach and his whole body with the scroll
 - That is before we can become an effective messenger of God’s word, we need to take it in ourselves
 - We need to understand it, memorize it, meditate upon it

- If you don't have a good grasp of the word of God, then when the time comes to share it, you'll be empty
 - The words you share will just be your own thoughts
 - You'll be like one of Job's three friends
 - They had a lot to say to Job concerning his predicament
 - But they didn't know the word of God so they offered him nothing of value
- But more than knowledge, internalizing the word of God means living it out
 - Nothing robs our message of power faster than hypocrisy
 - We all of us disobey the word from time to time, and thankfully no one expects us to be perfect human being
 - But our audience can tell the difference between someone speaking a truth out of conviction...
 - Verses someone trying to sell a story they don't believe themselves
 - If you want others to live according to the word of God, be sure you're doing it to
- Finally, the Lord taught Ezekiel that unless he found his supply in the word, he wouldn't last long before a rebellious Israel
 - Ask yourself what strengthens you when your audience turns against you?
 - Where will you find your supply?
 - When you lose their approval, on whose approval will you rest?
 - Either we live for the world's approval or we live by the word of God
 - As Jesus said

Matt. 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

- Living for bread means living for what the world can offer, but living by the word of God means living for what God provides
 - Those two things are always in opposition
 - Whatever the world approves and desires, the word of God opposes
 - Whatever the world approves, the word of God condemns
 - And vice versa
- The only way a messenger can withstand the world's disapproval is by taking satisfaction in obeying the word of God and speaking it faithfully
 - If Ezekiel was going to stand against an entire nation, he needed complete confidence in the message he was delivering
 - You can only withstand the world's rejection and hatred of Christ if we find your satisfaction in the very thing they hate
 - You can accept the world telling you you're wrong when you know God is saying you're right
- So we are to be bold knowing God's word is sweet, we go to deliver God's word, not our own, we live it out while taking satisfaction in God's approval
- Then Lord gives Ezekiel a final word of exhortation and encouragement

Ezek. 3:4 Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.

Ezek. 3:5 "For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel,

Ezek. 3:6 nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you;

Ezek. 3:7 yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.

Ezek. 3:8 "Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.

Ezek. 3:9 "Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house."

Ezek. 3:10 Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely.

Ezek. 3:11 "Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, 'Thus says the Lord God.'"

- Once more the Lord refers to Ezekiel as the son of man reminding him that is just a clay vessel that God has filled
 - But like a jelly donut, it's the filling that counts
 - And Ezekiel will be filled with God's word
 - Notice the Lord says you will speak *with* my words
 - In other words, both Ezekiel's will to speak as well as the content of what he says will come from the Lord
 - But then notice the Lord says that this power wasn't intended to compensate for some human limitation or barrier
 - The Lord says He sent Ezekiel to the house of Israel, not to a people of unintelligible speech
 - In Hebrew that phrase literally translates "deep lip" and only appears here and in Isaiah 33:19
 - It is a euphemism meaning a strange or foreign people
 - In other words, God isn't sending Ezekiel to strangers but to God's own people
 - Moreover, God didn't send Ezekiel to a people of a difficult language, which is literally translated "a heavy tongue"
 - This is the same phrase Moses used to describe himself to God in Exodus 4
 - It means someone who lacks eloquence or can't communicate
 - In v.6 God adds that Ezekiel won't find himself speaking to Gentiles, peoples of strange languages
 - No, Ezekiel was going to God's own people, the people of Israel
 - Men and women who weren't strangers to the message or incapable of appreciating the language
 - They had heard it all before from the Lord and they knew what He said
 - For all these reasons, the Lord says Israel "should" listen to Ezekiel
- But they won't...because their disobedience isn't a result of confusion or lack of information or lack of opportunity

- It was the result of an unwillingness to listen
 - They have been unwilling to hear the Lord in the past
 - And since Ezekiel will carry the Lord's words again, then he can be sure the people won't hear him either
 - They are stubborn and obstinate, unwilling to bend their knee in obedience to the word of God
- Remember this truth the next time you find yourself the messenger of God's word to someone or some group unwilling to hear it
 - You can't produce a better message than the word of God
 - And you get a better result than the one obtained with the word of God
 - If they will not believe Moses and the Prophets, then they won't be impressed by you and your message
- Don't try to "fix" a problem you don't have the power to solve
 - When someone lives in disobedience to the word of God, it's rarely because they lack the understanding or capacity to obey
 - Most of the time that person simply doesn't want to obey
 - It's purely a matter of will
- So don't be tempted to change the message or retreat from the proclamation of the truth just to get around a stubborn heart
- Remember last week I explained that the word stubborn in Hebrew literally means "hard face"
 - Now we see in v.8 the Lord making a play on those words when he tells Ezekiel he will make his face and forehead as hard as Israel's
 - They are stubborn and set in their ways against God's word
 - And so God will strengthen Ezekiel's resolves to be just as persistent in delivering the truth to them
 - The more they resist the Lord, the more His prophet will persevere in speaking the truth
 - But the point in Ezekiel's persistence won't be to win Israel over

- The reason for hardening Ezekiel's resolve is to equip him to go the distance with this adversary
- Do you remember in the case of Pharaoh how the Lord hardened his heart during the plagues?
 - After six plagues, the Pharaoh was willing to give in, but the Lord hardened his heart to make sure the battle lasted ten rounds
 - Because the Lord has a plan to bring ten plagues even before the fight started
- The same is true here in a way
 - The Lord has a message He wants Ezekiel to deliver to Israel
 - That message needs to be delivered because it speaks to people and events in the distant future
 - God can't afford to have his prophet give up early just because the audience of his day didn't like it
 - So in v.9 the Lord says Ezekiel's going to be as hardheaded as emery, which could be translated diamond
 - God made Ezekiel hardheaded
 - Just to be clear, hardheadedness isn't normally a gift from the Lord, so you can't use this as your excuse with your spouse
 - In short, God tells Ezekiel to ignore Israel's response, just keep on talking to them
 - The Lord sums up the prophets' commission in vs.10-11
 - He says take everything I tell you to heart, which means believe it yourself
 - And listen closely which means to obey it all personally
 - And then go to the people of Israel and tell them these things whether they listen or not
 - Dismiss none of it, change none of it, hold back none of it
 - Simply add, "This says the Lord"
- So as Ezekiel does these things, what will be achieved in Israel?

- First, they will know that a prophet has been among them
 - Which is to say, they will know that the Lord spoke to them so they will be without defense for their sin
 - And the world will understand that what came against them was according to the word of the Lord as a result of their sin
- We're learning about an unique man who received a remarkable mission at a critical time in the history of God's people
 - So you may assume you have little in common with him
 - But don't be sure
 - Every believer shares in this mission to some degree
- You too are living in an unique and critical time in the history of God's people, and you too share in a remarkable mission
 - Like Ezekiel, you too have the indwelling of the Spirit of God
 - And you have been entrusted with the word of God
 - In fact, you have the whole counsel of God's word, even more than he had
- But we also face the same challenges he faced
 - We must take it to heart and listen closely
 - We too have an audience that, in many cases, won't listen
 - And we too may experience the pain of thorns and scorpions when the world responds to God's truth
- Therefore, we need to think like Ezekiel
 - Don't fear the world's response...our family's response, our friends' response
 - Don't even be surprised when they don't listen
 - Just say "Thus says the word of the Lord"
 - And be persistent, so that they know the Lord has spoken to them
 - And leave the results to God