

Ezekiel 3

- Last week in Ezekiel I taught on our mission to speak the truth of God's word in love
 - We're studying Ezekiel's commissioning in Chapters 1-3
 - In the second half of Chapter 2 and the first half of Chapter 3, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to go and speak to the rebellious people of Israel in exile in Babylon
 - The Lord told Ezekiel to be obedient to this calling regardless of whether Israel listened to him or not
 - He warned Ezekiel that Israel would respond harshly to his prophecies
 - Nevertheless, Ezekiel was to speak boldly, without holding back the truth
 - And he was to keep himself above reproach, obeying all the Lord told him
 - In these things, Ezekiel becomes an example for all God's people
 - Though we aren't prophets, we still have a call to reach a lost and dying world with the truth
 - And though we haven't received a vision of God on His throne, we have received something even more precious
 - We have the full counsel of the Word of God and we have the Spirit of God living in us
 - So by way of Ezekiel's example, we too are called to speak the truth in love even though we know the world won't approve
- Now we're ready to conclude this section of Ezekiel, considering the personal cost of speaking the truth for God
 - As we begin let's remember Jesus' words about the personal cost of following Him

[Luke 14:27](#) “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

[Luke 14:28](#) “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

[Luke 14:29](#) “Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,

[Luke 14:30](#) saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

- Following Jesus as His disciple brings a personal cost
 - We must pick up our own cross, as Jesus said, which means to be prepared to sacrifice everything, even our own lives, in service to Him
 - And to illustrate what He means, Jesus asks who would undertake the effort and cost to build a tower before determining if he had enough funds to complete the project?
 - Would you begin to build a pool in your backyard without asking for an estimate first?
 - How foolish would that be? You could end up with a pit in the ground and no pool when you ran out of money
 - So why would you embark on following Jesus without at least considering what it will cost to do so?
 - If we’re not willing to look foolish in front of our neighbors when we construct a pool...
 - Then why risk humiliation before the Living God when we agree to serve Him?
 - We must appreciate the costs so that we will be prepared to accept them
- That’s the challenge facing Ezekiel this morning
 - He’s received a call from God, one that will bring significant costs
 - So let’s see how Ezekiel responds to this burden

[Ezek. 3:12](#) Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place.”

[Ezek. 3:13](#) And I heard the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound.

[Ezek. 3:14](#) So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the Lord was strong on me.

[Ezek. 3:15](#) Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib, and I sat there seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them.

- Ezekiel says that as the Lord stopped speaking to Him, he was lifted up by the Spirit
 - He's taken away from the throne of God and transported back to the exiles in Babylon
 - He's transported by the Spirit
 - And he hears the cherubim making great noise as they move behind him
 - It appears Ezekiel can no longer see these creatures, but merely hears them moving behind him
 - Amidst the great sounds of rumbling, Ezekiel hears a voice declare "Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place"
 - The mention of God's glory reminds us that these sounds and visions are manifestations of the Shechinah glory of God
 - The word Shechinah means dwelling, and refers to the presence of God dwelling among men
 - The Shechinah glory makes frequent appearances in the Old Testament, most commonly in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle
 - This is Ezekiel's first exposure to the Shechinah glory of God, which is ironic because he was training to be a priest
 - A priest would have been among a privileged few in Israel to regularly come near the glory of God in the Holy Place
 - In exile, Ezekiel will never serve as a priest in the tabernacle
 - Yet now he receives an even greater appreciation of God's glory while in Babylon

- Remember, you may have your eye on a certain ministry or mission, but God may redirect you
- Redirection in ministry isn't a sign of failure or reason to pout...it means God has something better waiting for you
- Then in v.14, we have Ezekiel's first reaction to everything he's heard and seen
 - It says he was embittered in the rage of his spirit
 - As a result of his remarkable encounter with God, Ezekiel is wrestling with two conflicting emotions inside himself
 - He has bitterness and he has a rage in his Spirit
 - In Hebrew, the word rage could be translated literally as heat
 - You could say he felt heat in his spirit
 - And who could blame him...he's had an audience with the Living God
 - He's seen the glory of God and the awesome majesty of His cherubim and of the throne
 - Have you ever had the opportunity to meet a childhood hero or favorite musician or celebrity?
 - When people finally meet someone they idolize, they usually walk away from that encounter feeling flushed, exhilarated, jubilant
 - In part, I think that's what Ezekiel must have been feeling
 - Only we need to magnify the effect by about a million fold
 - Ezekiel's spirit is hot having come so close to the glory of God
- Yet on the other hand, he's also embittered
 - He's probably feeling bitterness because he knows how little regard his countrymen have for the glory of God
 - He's just experienced the sweetness of the word of the Lord and the awesomeness of His majesty
 - And now back among his people in Tel Aviv, Ezekiel sees on full display the depravity and idolatry and indifference of Israel for this great God Who has made them His people

- Therefore, he knows the terrible things that must come against them for their sin
- And he grows bitter
- It reminds us that prophecy is a double-edged sword
 - On the one hand it's sweet to know God's purposes in advance
 - That's why the scroll was sweet in Ezekiel's mouth
 - John has a similar experience later in Revelation 10

Rev. 10:9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."

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.

- Like Ezekiel, John found the word of prophecy sweet in his mouth
 - But when the content of God's word hit home, it left him bitter
 - It's not God's word that causes us to feel bitter; God's word is always sweet as we said
 - But we become bitter as we understand that the word of God brings wrath against sinful hearts, in the day of judgment
- So it's Israel's hard heart that leaves the prophet feeling bitter
 - In an instant, Ezekiel realizes that the hearts of his Israel are too hard to be turned even by the severe warnings of God
 - And so the outcome will be a disaster, which is a bitter thought indeed
- So you may identify with Ezekiel in his bitterness and rage in his spirit
 - Having come to know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, you want everyone to understand and appreciate what you understand about God
 - You'll feel excitement to share the Lord and His word
 - You burn with desire in your spirit for everyone to give Christ the glory He deserves

- We feel like one of those disciples on the road to Emmaus after encountering Jesus

[Luke 24:31](#) Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

[Luke 24:32](#) They said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

[Luke 24:33](#) And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them,

[Luke 24:34](#) saying, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.”

- That’s the right response to a revelation of the holy God
- That’s the “heat” Ezekiel felt in his spirit
- But at the same time we may also feel a growing bitterness
 - The closer you get to the glory of God, the more intolerant and even bitter you will become toward sin and those who approve it
 - The better we know God, the more we respond to sin as He does
 - After you experience the awesome majesty of God, you’ll recoil at the vanity of human beings
 - If you understand the righteous judgment of God, then you’ll shudder contemplating the destiny of the unrepentant sinner
 - Once you know the wisdom of God in His word, you’ll lose patience for the foolishness of human wisdom
 - Once you have the perfection and holiness of God living in you, you begin to hate sin – especially your own
 - Even more, we can feel sadness when we see how the world just doesn’t get it
 - We see unbelievers who sin with impunity, without regard for their eternal future
 - Yet we know judgment is only a heartbeat away
 - And our hearts hurt to see our fellow believers wasting their time on earth caught up in sinful or selfish pursuits

- We want them to live out their faith so they may receive a full reward
- When we see these things, we may feel angry, bitter and even vengeful
 - That's the bitterness Ezekiel feels
 - He knows his people are turning their backs on the glory of the Lord
 - And he knows what's coming for them
- We could label this bitter feeling as righteous anger, but if it's going to remain righteous, we have to put it to work in the right way
 - We can't let our resentment over another's sin lead us to judge them harshly or to refrain from serving them with the truth
 - Have you ever felt that instinct...to refrain from sharing the Gospel because you don't feel someone deserves to be saved?
 - You're so bitter against them that you secretly look forward to them receiving God's wrath, so you withhold the good news
 - As if we have control over their salvation in any case...we don't...read Jonah again
- Now I doubt most of us would admit to thinking this way about someone else, but I suspect we all know the feeling
 - Obviously, it's an unloving, sinful response and it's exactly the opposite of what Jesus did
 - He experienced the ugliness of humanity in a way none of us will ever know, thankfully
 - The world spit in the face of God Himself...it's hard to do worse than that
 - And yet He showed no bitterness toward that sin
 - Rather He said, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do"
 - We need to adopt that same thought...forgive them Father because they don't know what they're doing
 - Moreover, that was you and I before the Gospel came into our hearts

- Or at least that's who we would have become apart from the grace of God
- So how can we look down our noses at someone else who is dead in their sins and needs to know the love of God?
- That's why we've been given the indwelling of His Spirit...so that we can know God and offer that to others
- That's the challenge Ezekiel faces at this point...to share the glory of God that touched him with an undeserving people who will likely reject it
 - So let's see how he gets started with that mission
 - In v.15 it says Ezekiel came back to sit among the exiles in Tel Aviv
 - And he sits there for a week "causing consternation among them"
 - The Septuagint translates this verse this way:

Ezek. 3:15 Then I passed through the air and came into the captivity, and went round them that dwelt by the river of Chobar who were there; and I sat there seven days, conversant in the midst of them.

- The Septuagint (LXX) translation says Ezekiel was conversing as he sat among the people and the NASB says he was causing consternation
 - I suspect he was explaining what he saw and heard during his encounter with the Lord
 - So he's trying to communicate to these people, but he's getting ahead of the Lord
 - Because at this point, Ezekiel has not been given a specific message to deliver to the people
 - God has not yet said "Thus saith the Lord" to Ezekiel
- So what is Ezekiel sharing? He can only be sharing his personal experience seeing the glory of God
 - And by what he shared, he confuses the people or at least he's freaking them out (as we would say today)
 - He's causing consternation and astonishment, because he's speaking about mysterious and frightening things

- Obviously, this isn't going to fix a rebellious heart
- So after seven days of this going on, the Lord is ready to begin giving Ezekiel a word for the people

[Ezek. 3:16](#) At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

[Ezek. 3:17](#) "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me.

[Ezek. 3:18](#) "When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

[Ezek. 3:19](#) "Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.

[Ezek. 3:20](#) "Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.

[Ezek. 3:21](#) "However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself."

- Now after the seven days Ezekiel receives his first word from the Lord
 - Notice this time there is no vision, no creatures darting about, doing wheelies and the like
 - It's just the word of the Lord
 - And though we don't know how this communication took place, Ezekiel is confident he heard from the Lord
 - First in v.17 the Lord tells Ezekiel he will serve as a watchman for Israel
 - A watchman was a guard who walked along the top of the walls of a city
 - He kept a lookout for threats headed toward the city
 - The job of a watchman was NOT to fight the threat
 - His job was to issue a warning to the people so they could respond properly in defense of the city

- So Ezekiel's job is to warn the people of Israel so they may act accordingly
 - Ezekiel isn't supposed to act on his own or try to take matters into his own hands
 - He will simply relay the warnings God gives him
- Now of course being a good watchman requires that we relay our information completely, accurately and in a timely fashion
 - What would we think of a watchman who only gave us half the story...a partial warning?
 - Or a watchman that slept on duty?
 - We wouldn't think that watchman was doing his job at all
- Furthermore, it's in the watchman's own best interest to speak accurately, because if he fails to warn the people, he dies too
 - So a poor watchman puts his own life at risk as well as those of the city when he fails at his task
 - And so it would be for Ezekiel too, the Lord says
- In v.18 the Lord warns Ezekiel that whenever God issues a warning to the wicked, Ezekiel will be held responsible for what he does next
 - If he fails to deliver the message to the wicked as the Lord commands, then both the wicked and the watchman will die
 - Conversely, the Lord says in v.19 that if Ezekiel is obedient, he will be preserved regardless of what the wicked do with his warning
 - Here again, the point is that a watchman is only accountable for giving the warning, not whether his warning is heeded
 - And just to show that the Lord is evenhanded and is not a respecter of persons, He tells Ezekiel in vs.20-21 that this process will work the same way for the righteous who fall into sin
 - If a righteous man falls into sin, then God will warn that man to change his ways
 - If he heeds the warnings, he will live longer on earth

- If he fails to heed the warning, he will be consigned to an early death
 - God will place a stumbling block before him to cause his death
 - But regardless of the man's response, if Ezekiel is obedient, he will not be caught up in the punishment
 - On the other hand, if Ezekiel fails to warn the righteous man, Ezekiel will die with him
- To be clear, in both cases the judgment God is talking about is an earthly judgment of a physical nature
 - The Lord isn't speaking about eternal judgment of the soul
 - A person's eternal judgment is determined by faith alone, not by their works whether good or bad
 - Notice that even though the Lord made a distinction between the wicked (unbelievers) and the righteous (believers) in His instructions...
 - Still both groups suffered the same fate if they failed to heed the warning: an early death
 - That tells us the Lord is talking about consequences for disobeying the Old Covenant, not eternal consequences for failing to believe
 - Whether you were a believer or unbeliever in Israel, you were still bound to the terms of the Old Covenant
 - So God's people must heed His warnings or else the Lord would end their lives prematurely as punishment
 - What happened to them after they died depended on the heart of each person
 - The unbelieving (wicked) experience the second death
 - While believing (righteous) go into eternal life
 - But notice also in v.20 that in the case of the righteous, their righteous deeds will not be remembered either
 - So a believer who fell into sin and ignored God's warnings not only died sooner, but also risked losing eternal reward

- So now we understand the personal cost for Ezekiel serving the Living God as a watchman
 - He could not look away from the approaching danger or fail to speak it to Israel
 - Nor was Ezekiel supposed to worry about the outcome once he spoke the word
 - He must obey the Lord and leave the result to the Lord
 - Which means he had to conform his behavior and lifestyle to ensure obedience to this calling
 - Sitting among the exiles conversing about his visions wasn't a part of Ezekiel's job description
 - He had been talking too much and it wasn't helping the situation
 - Ezekiel was to speak only when the Lord commanded,
 - And he also was to remain silent when the Lord wasn't speaking through him
 - That may not seem like much of a cost for this man, but let the implications of this requirement sink in for a moment
 - Ezekiel is no longer free to interact with his countrymen in the way he preferred
 - He was constrained by God to a very specific and very restrictive lifestyle, one that made him a more effective prophet
 - But it also came at great personal cost
- We see the full extent of this burden in the last passage from this chapter

[Ezek. 3:22](#) The hand of the Lord was on me there, and He said to me, "Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you."

[Ezek. 3:23](#) So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face.

[Ezek. 3:24](#) The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself up in your house.

[Ezek. 3:25](#) "As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them so that you cannot go out among them.

[Ezek. 3:26](#) “Moreover, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house.

[Ezek. 3:27](#) “But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

- These are the final instructions the Lord gives Ezekiel in preparation to receive his first prophecy which begins in Chapter 4
 - Ezekiel says the hand of the Lord was on him there by the river
 - Earlier in v.14 he also said that the hand of the Lord was strong on him
 - He is being comforted, strengthened, and prepared for his mission, because he will need the Lord’s strength
 - Next, he’s told to go away from the camp to receive the word of the Lord
 - Why does the Lord send Ezekiel away to receive the word?
 - After all, the Lord is already speaking to Ezekiel here now?
 - I think the answer relates to what’s happened already and to what will follow in this chapter
 - Earlier, Ezekiel sat for a week in Tel Aviv in conversation with the exiles
 - He probably told them bad things were coming, that the Lord was preparing judgment, and that they needed to repent
 - He shared his own thoughts, his own wisdom, not God’s wisdom
- So now that the Lord is ready for Ezekiel to begin speaking to the people, He doesn’t want His words to be confused as just more conversation
 - To correct this problem, the Lord does two things
 - First, he directs Ezekiel to get out of town for a while
 - He will receive his instructions from a nearby plain or uninhabited area

- Then when Ezekiel returns to the people, they will see him as one coming with a message from God
- Rather than merely someone spouting off his own opinions
- The Lord commonly takes His prophets away before bringing them back with a word
 - Moses went to Midian and later he climbed Mt Sinai multiple times so that he could come to the people with a word from the Lord
 - The Lord sent Amos from the southern kingdom to the northern kingdom to bring the word of the Lord to a evil king
 - He drove John the Baptist into the wilderness and then brought him back to declare the time for the Messiah was at hand
 - The Lord led Saul into Arabia before bringing him back to the church as the apostle Paul
 - He even sent Jesus into Egypt as a child and later sent Him into the wilderness, so that He could return to begin His ministry
- So the Lord separates His prophets from among the people to mark the delivery of something new and special
 - The Lord sends Ezekiel to a plain
 - And there he encounters the Shechinah glory of God and hears a word from the Lord
 - Now his words and the word of the Lord can be distinguished
- Secondly, the Lord makes sure Ezekiel won't create this same confusion in the future
 - In v.24 the Lord tells Ezekiel to live under house arrest
 - He was to stay in his home and not spend time among the people
 - This probably accomplished two things
 - First, Ezekiel was no longer in a position to lead a normal life, to interact with the people of Israel and to speak of his own accord

- From this point forward, the only time the people hear Ezekiel speak will be when the Lord speaks through him
- Notice in v.27 the Lord says that only when the Lord speaks to Ezekiel may he then open his mouth and speak to the people
- This will ensure that the people recognize that everything Ezekiel says from this point forward is from the Lord
- They will soon come to understand that when Ezekiel speaks, they should listen
- But there is a second reason for this isolation
 - The Lord is protecting Ezekiel from the people and even from himself
 - The people of Israel were immersed in sinful practices of one kind or another
 - So that if Ezekiel lived among them in a normal fashion, it would be very difficult for him to fully separate himself from their practices
 - Associating too closely with them would likely compromise his walk and his witness
 - Remember the Lord told Ezekiel he must live according to the word he would share with Israel
 - Since Israel is so corrupt, there was no safe harbor from sin among them...except to remain in one's own house
 - In v.25 the Lord says that Israel will put ropes on him and bind him so that he cannot go out among them
 - There is no evidence in the record of Ezekiel that this event happens to Ezekiel literally
 - So it's best understood as figurative speech
 - The Lord is saying that the sins of the people have forced God to bind up Ezekiel in his home
 - The evil of Israel has tied Ezekiel's hands, so to speak, leaving Ezekiel with no option except to isolate himself to prevent defilement

- So the Lord's instruction protects Ezekiel from the sin of the people
- Finally, this isolation will protect Ezekiel from himself
 - The Lord says in v.26 He is going to make Ezekiel mute should Ezekiel decide to speak on his own again
 - Ezekiel has already shown a propensity to talk without permission, so we can assume he will be tempted to speak again in the future
 - Then at the end of v.26 the Lord says he will not allow Ezekiel's tongue to rebuke a man, *because* they are rebellious
 - God knew that Israel was rebellious, so rebellious in fact that it was unreasonable to expect Ezekiel to remain silent on his own
 - Even the most heartless person would have wanted to warn Israel of the things God was prepared to bring upon them
 - So God said He places Ezekiel in his home and prevents him from speaking to ensure that Ezekiel's words are God's words only
- In the end, Ezekiel was called to be a watchman, a faithful deliverer of God's warnings to Israel
 - And he was to let the chips fall where they will
 - The Lord ends saying let him who hears, hear, and let him who refuses, refuse
 - The outcome is not our responsibility...we are merely the messenger
 - This was the personal cost Ezekiel paid to be a prophet of God... he had to isolate himself from God's people
 - What does serving God cost you? It will always cost something...
 - Less time for what we want, more time for what He wants
 - Let us make the sacrifices that demonstrate faith