

Ezekiel's Call, Ezekiel's Reluctance
Ezekiel 2-3

Turn to Ezekiel 2. Our text will be chapters 2-3 of Ezekiel. In Ezk 1, God showed himself to Ezekiel, showed his glory to Ezekiel, and in Ezk 2-3 God called Ezekiel. What God wanted with Ezekiel was in some ways unique to Ezekiel, just for him.

But in other ways God treats us all like this. We are all his servants. We turned from idols to serve the living God, Paul tells the gentile church in Thessalonica. We'll pay close attention to what happened between God and Ezekiel, and the usefulness for us will not be hard to see.

God called Ezekiel in Babylon, in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin. So that means the fifth year after the second Babylonian invasion, when 8-10 thousand Jews were taken captive to Babylon and settled there. Ezekiel was a priest in that crowd, and there God showed himself to Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel saw God on his divine chariot-throne, like nothing he'd seen.

We'll pick up the story with the last lines of Ezk 1.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. 2:1 He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." ² As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

Ezekiel saw the likeness of the glory of the Lord, and fell face down. Doesn't sound deliberate, he just collapsed. The Lord said, "stand up on your feet," and as he spoke, the Spirit came into Ezekiel and raised him to his feet. It does not say he couldn't stand up, we don't know. But he did not have a choice in the matter. The Spirit raised Ezekiel to his feet, and then God spoke.

Difficult Job (2:3-5) *He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. ⁴The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' ⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them.*

"I am sending you to the Israelites." That's the call. And such Israelites: rebellious nation, they have rebelled, they are in revolt against God, obstinate, stubborn, a rebellious people. My brothers and sisters, God gives us his people hard jobs. Not always, but sometimes, yes.

We have his assignment, and it's difficult. But God does not deceive, he's clear on this from the start. We should not be too surprised if this happens to us.

Don't be Afraid (2:6-8) *And you, son of man, (1) do not be afraid of them or their words. (2) Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. (3) Do not be afraid of what they say or (4) be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people.*

Four times, God told Ezekiel not to be afraid of them. Brier and thorns will be all around you, you will live among scorpions – God is describing difficult people, not plants and insects. Do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words.

Opposite of Fear: Speak my Words and Do not Rebel (2:7-8) *You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you.*"

When God talks to Ezekiel, the opposite of fear is obedience: *you must speak my words to them, do not rebel.* The Bible does sometimes speak about feeling peaceful and calm, because we trust God. Pss 23 and 46 are confident like that. But very often it is like this: the problem with fear is that it stops us from obeying God.

You must speak my words to them, Ezekiel, do not rebel. If fear stops you from doing what I tell you, Ezekiel, you are rebelling against me. My brothers and sisters, we need to hear this, too.

What is success? (2:5) I skipped over a line here at the beginning of v5 – *and whether they listen or fail to listen.* Also in 3:10, 27. Suppose you battle your fears, and you take hold of the difficult assignment that God has given you, and you obey, you do what he says, what do you expect the result of your effort to be? Do you expect your actions to be productive? A good result?

Suppose, after all that, it does not happen, there is no good result. What will you tell yourself then? When what you thought was obeying God does not accomplish anything, what do you tell yourself then? God prepared Ezekiel for his. God more or less told him this from the start.

God said, "Ezekiel, whether they listen or fail to listen, they will know that a prophet has been among them." For Ezekiel, success was to do what God wanted done, period, end of story. Success was to do what God wanted done. Lack of human response proved nothing, it was actually to be expected.

Did Ezekiel fail? Depends what he was trying to do. If he was leading Israel to repentance, he failed miserably. If he was doing what God wanted done, he was a complete success. What are YOU trying to do?

Eating the Scroll (2:8:b – 3:4) *"Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you."* ⁹ *Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.*

3:1 And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.”² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

³ Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

What does it mean to eat the scroll? It has words on it of lament and mourning. Eating the scroll means that Ezekiel is not just a mouth, a tape recorder, to hear and then speak. No, he is to fill himself with God’s message. God’s message is supposed to go into his ears and his mind and his heart. God wants him to absorb the message, not just remember it, but soak it up.

In 3:11 God says, “listen carefully and take to heart all the words that I speak to you.” That’s what eating the scroll means. Don’t know if he actually ate a scroll or not, but we get the point.

The scroll had writing on it. God has a specific message. It is not just a feeling that Ezekiel gets, it is particular words. God gave Ezekiel a scroll to eat, and then Ezekiel spoke it, and someone wrote down what he said, and then it was on a scroll again, just for us.

Called Again 3:4-11. In 2:3, God began, “*Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites.*” That call lasts until 2:8. Then we have the part about eating the scroll. Then in 3:4, God begins again in much the same way: *Son of man, go now to the people of Israel.* And in 3:4-11 God repeats pretty much the same call as he just gave Ezekiel, in 2:3-8.

⁴ He then said to me: “*Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them.*

⁵*You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel—*⁶*not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you.*⁷*But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate.*⁸*But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are.*⁹*I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people.”*¹⁰ And he said to me, “*Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you.*¹¹ *Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”*

Same thing again: the Israelites are hard and obstinate, do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, go speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen.

God does add one part: v8 *I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.* God said much the same to Jeremiah. The thing is, Jeremiah and Ezekiel did not feel like this at all. They did not feel like hard stone. They were often frightened and discouraged. To others, though, an iron pillar and a bronze wall.

To others, they were as unyielding as the hardest stone. That just means they wouldn't quit. You can't stop them. There is much of this in our church, and in every body of believers in the world. People with troubles, who are scared and discouraged, but they don't quit. Nothing stops them.

That is because God makes us unyielding and hard, foreheads of the hardest stone. It does not feel like this on the inside, but it looks like this from the outside. That's how we are to our opponents.

Ezekiel Doesn't want the Scroll – 2:8b – 3:3

There is something else going on here which we need to see. Ezekiel does not want this, does not want to speak for God. This comes up a few ways. Let's read this again:

“Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you.” 9 Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, 10 which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. God said, “don't rebel, open your mouth and eat.” Ezekiel looked, but did not open his mouth or eat.

3:1 And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. God told him two more times, eat this, eat this scroll. Ezekiel opened his mouth, but did not eat. He's now been told three times to eat, but has not eaten it. God has put it in Ezekiel's hand.

3 Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. Now, finally, been told four times to eat, And Ezekiel eats. In 2:8, God said, “don't rebel like this rebellious people,” and God was on to something. Ezekiel does not seem to want this call.

Ezekiel's Second Call – 3:4-11

We will not go over these verses again, but at least notice that God says the same thing again, the same thing he said in 2:3-8. The first one did not take very well. So God said it all again.

Ezekiel's Anger – 3:12-15 Let's first review 3:11 *Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”*

This is not complicated. God said, “Ezekiel, you know my message, you ate the scroll I gave you, now go to your people and speak to them.” Let's pick it up from there.

12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound as the glory of the Lord rose from the place where it was standing. 13 It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound. 14 The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger

of my spirit, with the strong hand of the Lord on me. 15 I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Aviv near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—deeply distressed.

Did Ezekiel go? No, not really. God was still in his divine chariot-throne, and he picked Ezekiel up and delivered him. *The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the Lord on me. I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Aviv near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—deeply distressed.*

Ezekiel: The Spirit took me to the exiles, I had no choice. The strong hand of the Lord was on me. I was bitter, my spirit was angry, I was deeply distressed. God had said, “go to your people and speak to them.” Did I speak to them? Not a chance. I was too angry and bitter and distressed. I sat there for seven days and never said a word. I did not give them any of God’s message.

Ezekiel is like Jonah, does not want to do what God sent him to do. Even Moses, in Exodus 3, at the burning bush, had several reasons why God’s call was not a good idea, and explained this to God. Long conversation, and God answered every one. At the end, in Ex 4:14, Moses said, “O Lord, send someone else.”

And at that point, God got angry. God said, “Your brother Aaron is already coming to you to help you, you are certainly going to Egypt, and this conversion is over!”

Like Moses and Jonah, Ezekiel does not want to be God’s messenger, and like them, God did not take “no” for an answer. So Ezekiel got to the exiles, been there seven days, and has not spoken any of God’s message. God was not finished:

God Warns Ezekiel – 3:16-21 *At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ¹⁸When I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ¹⁹ But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself.*

²⁰ *“Again, when a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before them, they will die. Since you did not warn them, they will die for their sin. The righteous things that person did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ²¹ But if you do warn the righteous person not to sin and they do not sin, they will surely live because they took warning, and you will have saved yourself.”*

Both of these paragraphs end the same way: *But you will have saved yourself. But you will have saved yourself.* After seven days of silence, God warned Ezekiel that if he did not do what God said, he would face the same judgement as the rebellious people.

“Ezekiel, if you won't obey me because I commanded you, then obey me to save yourself.” And it worked: after that God said, 3:22-23 *“Get up and go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.”* So I got up and went out to the plain. That is the first time Ezekiel has done what God told him to do. But Ezekiel got it right that time, and from then on.

That, my brothers and sisters, is the story of Ezekiel's call and Ezekiel's reluctance. What can we learn here about God and his people?

First, these paragraphs about Ezekiel as a watchman have been used to urge all believers to be evangelists. Years ago that was preached to me more than once. Biblically that does not work. This was a warning to a rebellious prophet. We do need to obey God, and not rebel against him. But he never asked us to do what he asked Ezekiel to do. We've covered this before.

1, God is determined that his people will hear his message. His messengers will deliver his message, and God will see it done. These were obstinate rebellious Israelites, and Ezekiel was no model. But God resolved to get his words into their ears, and God could not be stopped on this.

2, God calls his people to do hard things. The world is a difficult place, and God sometimes asks a lot of his servants. He's done quite a bit of that. Let's not be too surprised.

3, Fear blocks obedience. In the first call in Ezk 2, God mentioned this four times, and two more in the second call in Ezk 3. God was not offended that Ezekiel felt scared. The problem was that fear would stop Ezekiel from obeying God. In this story, faith is not what makes fear go away, faith is what leads frightened believers to obey God.

4, Whether they listen or fail to listen. Don't measure your obedience by people's response. Success means doing what the Lord tells us to do. People will not always respond well.

5, God makes us tough. *I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.* God told Jeremiah, *“you will be an iron pillar, a bronze wall.”* We don't feel like this, of course, but the God who calls us is faithful, and will see it through. God will take care of us. Don't be afraid! If God has something for us to do, NOTHING can stop us. Nothing. If God has something for us to do, nothing can stop us.

6, The most remarkable vision of God recorded in Scripture as the basis of a call did not take away Ezekiel's rebellious spirit. But fear of God's judgement turned Ezekiel around. That was not God's first choice, but it worked. Perfect love casts out fear, that's true (1Jn4). But our love for God is not perfect. Fear of God was quite helpful in Ezekiel's life

No one else was called with a vision like Ezekiel's. Moses got a burning bush, Paul saw the Lord on the road. No one got the royal treatment Ezekiel got. But he did still did not submit to that God. But he obeyed to save himself.

7, It is hard to miss God's will for your life. Don't worry about that. Follow Jesus one day at time. That's his will. When he wants more, it will happen. When God has something for us to do, it's going to happen. The one who calls us is faithful, and he will do it. Amen.