

Ezekiel 2:8-3:11

*“But you, son of man, hear what I say to you; be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth, and eat what I give you.”
And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and, lo, a written scroll was in it; and he spread it before me; and it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And he said to me, “Son of man, go, get you to the house of Israel, and speak with my words to them. For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and of a stubborn heart. Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. Like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead; fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.” Moreover He said to me, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go, get you to the exiles, to your people, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God’; whether they hear or refuse to hear.”*

During my ordination service, which is kind of like a graduation, I was down front kneeling with two close minister friends, our district superintendent and the resident bishop all laying hands on me. The bishop and these ministers were praying over me for what was ahead for me as a minister. The bishop closed her prayer by saying these words which I have never forgotten, “seize the authority, as you minister to those around you.” Think upon those words “seize the authority,” as we look at Ezekiel’s call into ministry with and for God.

With those words in mind “seize the authority,” look to this morning’s Scripture. In chapter one and all of chapter two we hear Ezekiel sharing his personal story of God coming to him in a vision, and calling him as a prophet/priest. Ezekiel’s account of this vision is a vivid one, full of wonderful imagery. Ezekiel actually sees the “*glory of God*” coming down from heaven. God’s glory is so overwhelming that Ezekiel falls on his face, but the Lord will not let him remain there as God speaks to Ezekiel: “*Son of man, stand upon on your feet, and I will speak with you.*” And the Lord does speak to him.

The message, which Ezekiel is to preach, is given to him in a kind of scroll. So, Ezekiel receives his appointment. It's not a promising appointment, as far as appointments go. He was not called to plant a new church that was sure to grow. He was not called to be the senior pastor of First Church downtown which had tremendous influence in the entire community. He was not called to an appointment to a rapidly growing church in the suburbs. It's a hard calling for Ezekiel and God makes it clear for him what is ahead. Ezekiel will have to preach to deaf ears and dwell among scorpions. Basically, Ezekiel will be preaching to people who will not listen and will do him harm. There is no prospect of success given to this prophet in his call to ministry, and a burden of no prospect continues to increase as God continues to speak.

Even so, Ezekiel's call carried with it the power and support of God Himself. God makes the prophet's face harder than flint. This brings us to the passage for this morning. God gives Ezekiel a scroll and tells him to eat it. He was not told to read it. He was not told to study it. No, he was told to eat it.

This may seem strange, but what God was telling Ezekiel was to know and understand My word so well that it becomes part of you. It's what you need to grow. God's word was to sustain Ezekiel as he went forth as God's prophet.

Now, am I saying God has called you to be a prophet to a sin sick world? Am I saying God wants you to literally eat the Bible? Am I saying you will, as Scripture says live, "*though briers and thorns are with you and you will sit upon scorpions?*" Yes to all this and more. God is calling you graduates and everyone here to devour His word. We are called to be sustained by His word and only His word. But here in is the problem, we don't! We may read God's word ... we may study God's word some what... we may even talk about God's word, but for the most part, most are not sustained by God's word. Our lives, our words, and our actions are proof of how we rely upon ourselves instead of God.

You and I can choose to continue with business as usual in our Christian life and in the church as a whole, enjoying our successes based on standards defined by the culture around us.

We can continue doing what we have always done no more and in some cases far less. Or we can take an honest look at the Bible and dare to ask what the consequences might be if we really believed God, really obeyed Him, and put aside our personal wants and desires.

We are settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves. Contrary to what many may believe, God does not use gimmicks to get followers. He simply and boldly makes it clear from the start that if you follow Him; you are to abandon everything, your needs, your desires, and maybe even your family, all for the sake of the gospel.

Many are thinking, and some even saying “that’s not me, I’m not a preacher.” Everyone is a preacher; some just do it for themselves and not for God. Everyone who is living, and who has ever lived has preached to the world and everyone has and/or will leave their mark just like Ezekiel left his mark.

When I was in high school I played sports. I was known as a wrestler. I left my mark as a wrestler, but I also left my mark in another area. This mark was not a good mark but a mark none the less. I played baseball, and I

played third base in school. If a ball was hit to third I was going to knock it down. I would, at all costs keep the ball from leaving the infield. Years after I had graduated high school I learned that the coach would tell the new and returning players of a guy who would sacrifice his body to stop the ball. The coach would then point over to the backstop, which had been built behind 1st base to block most of my throws. See I would stop the ball, but throwing it accurately over to 1st was another story. Years after that coach had retired and the stories of how blocked baseballs had ended up in the gully and the backstop built behind first base was a mark of my time at Burrillville High School.

Everyone leaves a mark on this world some good and some not so good. Your words, your actions, your attitude all leave a mark on this world. What type of mark you leave all depends upon your knowledge of God's Holy Word. But it's much more than knowledge. Anybody can know God's Word frontwards and backwards, Satan can do that. Knowing God's Word and having a close intimate relationship with Him is what ultimately determines your words, your actions, and your attitude.

People will know how close a relationship you have with God or if you have one at all as soon as they hear you speak, see your actions, and witness your attitude.

Preacher that's not me, I don't know what to say about God. If you have an intimate relationship with God and His Holy Word you will. God tells us in Exodus 4, "*Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.*" What you say may not be preaching talk, but how you say what you say will. Remember this; what you say may not be what they hear.

I heard Bishop Will Willimon speak one time and he said he preached a sermon and after, 3 or 4 different people came up to him to say thank you for saying this and that. Bishop Willimon said what those people heard him say was never said.

If you have a close relationship with God as you go forth into the next chapter of your lives God will be with you and your words. A close relationship with God will also direct your attitude. You can listen to people and how they are about others and/or situations and you know about their relationship with God.

Someone who is constantly complaining or tearing someone down probably only knows about God, but doesn't really have a relationship with Him.

Again, knowing about God is not the same as knowing God.

In chapters 2-3 from Ezekiel there are some big important lessons, directions, and promises for us to take with us this morning. First, God says, "*Stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.*" The lesson He is speaking about is, we are to listen. Our position in life must always be a receptive one. We should be able to stand and say, "*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.*"

Notice the second thing. After hearing God tell him to "*stand on his feet*" so that He might speak to him Ezekiel says, "*As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.*"

What he is telling us is, it is not our ability to do what God calls us to do, but our willingness to respond to Him, to yield to Him, to attempt what He calls us to do, to go where He will lead us, which in turn releases God's power.

God called Ezekiel, "*stand on your feet,*" but then as he says "*A spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.*"

Remember this; God does not call us to a ministry which we can accomplish with our own strength and with our own resources, but only with His divine aid. In that way, we are kept on our knees, dependent on Him.

Then there is a third lesson and promise. *“And He said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll: then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 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.”*

The lesson to remember; we must become one with God's Word. What we say must be matched by how we live. As you begin this new journey in your lives I pray you allow God to guide, direct, and sustain you. It is only then that people will know that a God fearing, God lead prophet is among them. It's time for you to get up; be strengthened by God's Spirit; devour His Holy Word and go into the next chapter of your lives, and I pray you go with and for God. Graduates, “It's Time to Go!”