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The Sovereign LORD Speaks What We Must Hear

It's not easy to bring someone bad news. A doctor gives a terminal diagnosis. A boss lets their employee go. An emergency worker tells the family that their loved one died in an accident. But it's even harder to give that news to someone who is at fault. Perhaps a man is sick because he didn't take proper care of his body. Or that employee was let go due to poor performance. Nobody likes to be told they've done something wrong. They might react like the rebellious Israelites, becoming obstinate, stubborn, hard-hearted, or thorny and poisonous. As challenging as it might be to get through to them, it's crucial that rebellious hearts hear what God has to say. We might be hesitant because we know how the world reacts to the truth, but the same command God gave to the prophet Ezekiel he gives to each of us: "You must speak my words to them." And God's message is not just for them, but for our own rebellious hearts too. As we listen to the Word today, **the Sovereign LORD speaks what we must hear.**

The book of Ezekiel begins around the prophet's 30th birthday, when he should have begun serving as a priest, being from a priestly family. But Ezekiel wasn't in Jerusalem anymore. He and the Jews were far away from God's Holy City, far from the Temple where Ezekiel would have served. He was taken to Babylon as part of the second wave of exiles, and God called him to be a prophet instead. Like many of the prophets during his time, Ezekiel didn't have an easy message. As these Jews sat in Babylon, they held out hope that they could return to Jerusalem any day. But for the first chunk of his ministry, Ezekiel prophesied to them that Jerusalem and the Temple would be completely destroyed. They weren't going home anytime soon.

To make his message even harder, Ezekiel needed to show the Israelites that the exile and destruction were consequences of *their* actions. In the ten verses of Ezekiel 2, God calls his people rebellious 5 times. Verses 3 and 4 elaborate on that rebellion. God said that the Israelites were "a **rebellious nation that rebelled against me**; they

and their ancestors have been **in revolt** against me **to this very day....**" They are "**obstinate and stubborn.**" Ezekiel later proclaimed how Israel rejected God's laws and did not follow his decrees. They desecrated his Sabbaths and devoted their hearts to idols. Israel's sins weren't done in ignorance. God's own people knowingly cast aside the Almighty God who gave them their land and prosperity. For this rebellion, God sent them into exile. And Israel wasn't left to wonder why this was happening. The Sovereign LORD spoke to them through his prophet Ezekiel, telling them what they had to hear.

When we hear descriptions of rebellion like the LORD laid out for Ezekiel, we might be fearful to speak ourselves. How would people in our lives react if we pointed out their sin? What if your neighbor lashes out because you "judged" the way they live? What if your boss treats you differently around the office because you spoke up against something they said? Even harder, what if your family members want nothing to do with you because you stand up for what God says? Satan wants us to believe it's easier for us if we just shut our mouths. Then, we can all just get along and love one another.

This temptation shows that we struggle with rebellious hearts too. Our own arrogance doesn't want to listen when we're told that we deserve to be exiled from God both now and in eternity. We want to downplay what we've done wrong by comparing ourselves to those we view as worse than us. We try to excuse our sin saying that it's not hurting anyone. Or maybe our refusal to listen shows up in this way. We turn away our Christian brothers and sisters who are trying to warn us. We start latching onto false teachings that are more pleasing to our ears. We stop coming to worship. Or perhaps we keep coming, but we don't put what we hear into practice. Our pride tells us that we're good enough Christians just for showing up to church. We think that those truths in God's Word that we don't like to hear – well, they're meant for someone else, not for us. But this kind of rebellion is just as toxic as if we were outright persecuting God's messengers. We are taking the Sovereign LORD's Word and tossing it down in the dirt.

Is it even worth it for the message to be spoken? If there's rebellion all around, outside and inside the church, why do Christians keep on

proclaiming the message? The success of God's Word is not measured in numbers. Yes, it's frustrating when we don't see immediate results in our favor. But successful ministry happens when we speak the Word that the LORD says must be heard.

Right before God spoke to Ezekiel, the prophet had just gotten up close and personal with God's glory, and he fell on his face. God called out to him, the Spirit of the LORD came into him, and God put Ezekiel on his feet. Then, the all-powerful Creator of the world gave this humble son of man his daunting task to preach to these rebellious people. And the Sovereign LORD promised that when Ezekiel spoke, they would know that a prophet had been among them.

This wasn't because of Ezekiel's own greatness. The title, "son of man," emphasized the great divide between lowly Ezekiel and the exalted God whom he represented. While Ezekiel was afraid and trembling, that didn't mean he could change the message to appease a rebellious nation. He must speak the Word given to him. This message came from the God above all gods, higher than any idol the Israelites worshipped. The words were hand-fed from God to Ezekiel's mouth – a message filled with lament, mourning, and woe; but sweet to Ezekiel's tongue and filling for his stomach. The Spirit set Ezekiel on his feet so he could boldly speak the words God gave him.

Our rebellious hearts must hear *all* the words of the LORD. We need to hear words of law, to tear down any self-confidence, any hope of man-made restoration or earthly glory. We need the law to reveal our stubborn, stony souls. But we also need to hear words of gospel good news. We need to listen to prophecies that point to our only source of confidence. We need to hear that God brings restoration. Ezekiel told Israel that in time they *would* return from exile to rebuild Jerusalem. But he also prophesied of a greater restoration, of a new heavenly Temple and Holy City. Through the words of the gospel, God creates new hearts filled with the Spirit that listen to all he has to say. We hear the Sovereign LORD say, "This is my glory. I have restored you, renewed you, and made you holy. You are forgiven. You are saved."

The Sovereign LORD wants all people to hear this powerful message. In the end, everyone will recognize that God sent his messengers to proclaim his truth to them. Everyone will see the grace of our God who wants all people to be saved. Who gathers a multitude from every tribe and people. Who sends out his people to make disciples of all nations. Our lesson from 2 Timothy 2 illustrates how we carry out our role as God's messengers. Like soldiers, athletes, and farmers, we act with determination, focused on the goal and pouring out our full effort. We know that the process isn't easy. The work can be cumbersome and painful. But we follow our captain's commands, we run the race, we faithfully plant the seed.

We know that we can only boldly speak what must be heard because the Spirit is in us. When the world knocks us down, the Spirit puts us on our feet and says, "**Do not be afraid.**" God spoke those comforting words to Ezekiel 3 times here. We don't need to fear the rebels, their words or their faces, whatever thorns or scorpion venom they threaten us with. We may be rejected and hated by the world. But so was our master. And still, he tells his humble servants, "**Do not be afraid.**" We don't know when and how God's message will work in people's hearts – we just know that it will achieve its purpose, because God's Word is not chained. So, we speak what must be heard so that everyone will know what we know.

What exactly do we want them to know? That the Greatest Prophet has come, the one who speaks with all authority, the one who is The Word, the Sovereign LORD made flesh. Son of Man and Son of God, humble and exalted. Jesus came into this world knowing that some would receive him and some would reject him – even his own hometown and parts of his family. And yet, he continues to come to rebellious sinners because he knows they need him. He knows they need to hear the call to repent from their sins. He knows they need to hear about the restoration he came to bring – establishing a new Holy City, bringing sinners back from exile, and creating new hearts that listen and trust in him. We go out as restored rebels to a rebellious world, proclaiming what the Sovereign LORD knows we must hear. Then, all will know a prophet has been among them: The Prophet, Jesus himself who saves us from our sins. Amen.