

SPEAK UP

As we continue our series, we move to the Book of Ezekiel: Ezekiel was a prophet of God and his name means “**God strengthens.**” If you’re going to speak the word of God to people that don’t always want to hear what God has to say, you’re going to need strength from God.

Well, by the time **Ezekiel was 30 years old**, the kingdom of Judah was in decline and would soon fall to the Babylonian army. So about 5 years into exile, God came to Ezekiel through a series of 3 visions. In the words of Ezekiel in the very first verse of the book he wrote: *“The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.”*

Because the book of Ezekiel is the telling of these **visions**, the imagery can be a bit confusing at times. In fact, much of the imagery Ezekiel describes is also found in the book of Revelation.

In his vision, God commissioned Ezekiel to speak a prophetic word to the Israelites, which brings us to the passage I want to focus on this morning and as we look at God’s calling on Ezekiel to “Speak-up”, I believe God may be calling each of us to speak-up us as well.

We begin in Ezekiel 2:1-2: He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. Ezekiel 2:1-2

**\*WHEN GOD SPEAKS, WE NEED TO LISTEN**

When God said, *“Stand up and I will speak to you”* it was a way of saying, *“Pay attention, I have something I want to say to you.”* **God is a God who speaks and we need to be a people who listen.**

Verse 2 says that *the Spirit came into Ezekiel and spoke to him.* That’s one of the main roles of God’s Spirit... to speak to us. Now often when God speaks to us, it’s for our benefit. But sometimes God speaks to us for the benefit of others.

**Have you ever had one of those moments when you felt God nudging you to say something to someone or do something for someone on God’s behalf?** We need to listen for those moments.

We need to listen carefully to what God is saying 1) so we don’t miss what He’s saying; 2) so we only say or do what he’s actually calling us to say or do. (*Too many people have said what they thought was God was calling them to say, but what they shared or the way they shared it wasn’t so much God’s opinion as theirs).*

**But the point is, God still speaks and we need to listen. ....**

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. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says.’ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them. **Ezekiel 2:3-5**

**\*SOMETIMES GOD CALLS US TO SPEAK TO REBELLIOUS PEOPLE**

Over and over in His words to Ezekiel, God calls His people rebellious and rebellious people don’t want to listen and they don’t want to change. And sometimes, even God’s people can be stubborn and rebellious as we struggle with sin that has become strongholds in our lives.

**Rebellious people can be a tough audience. As someone who has been called to speak the words of God on a weekly basis,** I can tell you that it’s fun to speak the words of God to people who are hungry for the word of God, but trying to speak the words of God to people that are disinterested or rebellious can be frustrating.

It’s easy to think, “*Why bother?*” **But God loves people, even rebellious people and just as God never gives up on us, He doesn’t give up on rebellious people either.**

Ezekiel was told that he **must speak God’s words to them. So what were God’s words for a rebellious people?** They were **words of anger & sadness over sin; words calling people to repent and return to God, and words of hope and restoration.** **The same words God is calling us to speak to those living in rebellion.**

**Note: Sin vs Sins (always address sin first)**

**So who in your life seems hardened toward the voice of God?** What might God be calling you to say or do in order to bring that person into fellowship with God?

.....

And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. **Ezekiel 2:6-7**

**\*WE CAN’T ALLOW FEAR TO KEEP US FROM SPEAKING-UP**

Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them

**The greatest obstacle when it comes to saying what God wants us to say is fear:** fear of how they’ll respond or if they’ll respond; fear of being judged or the people we talk to feeling judged by us; fear of not knowing how to answer their questions; fear of an awkward moment or how that conversation might change our relationship with them. The list of fears goes on and on.

And **fear might not cause us to be completely silent, but it may lead to watering down the words of God to make them more palatable.** How many people and churches have changed their perspective on everything from salvation in Christ alone to Biblical ethics because they don't want to be seen as narrow or judgmental? **But when it comes to speaking-up, we need to be more concerned with what God thinks than what the world thinks.**

To speak the words of God in a **culture** that believes all paths lead to God or a culture that doesn't want to hear that what they're doing might not be God's will **isn't very popular.** To speak-up **opens the door to all kinds of criticism.** But **there's too much at stake to remain silent.**

**But if you see someone walking in the middle of the street and a car was quickly approaching behind them, would you say anything?** Let's hope so. And ignoring God is an accident that has eternal consequences so we need to speak-up.

**\*REGARDLESS OF RESULTS, WE NEED TO BE OBEIENT TO THE SPIRIT'S LEADING**

You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen...  
Ezekiel 2:7

**Ezekiel had a tough audience and God made no promises that they would listen to him.** I'd rather be like the prophet **Samuel** who we read that *"The Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground."* But God was with Ezekiel just as He was with Samuel, even if he didn't get the same results.

When we speak the words of God, some will listen and others will not; but regardless of their response, when God says, "Speak-up," we need to be speak-up. I'm not saying there aren't times when we need to shake the dust off our feet and move on, but we need to move on when God says, "Move on" and not just because we don't see progress.

Look at how accountable Ezekiel was for speaking-up in Ezekiel 33:7-9:  
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. When I say to the wicked, 'You wicked person, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.

Just as Ezekiel was accountable for whether or not he spoke when God called him to speak, so are we. **Trying to speak the word of God into the lives of people who are hard-hearted and rebellious can be discouraging, but we can't let results dictate our obedience.**

Let's pick-up in Ezekiel 2:8:

Listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you.” Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. 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.” 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. Ezekiel 2:8-10; 3:1-3

**\*BEFORE WE SPEAK THE WORDS OF GOD, WE MUST FEEL THE HEART OF GOD**

Before Ezekiel could go and speak the words of God, he needed to eat the scroll of God which contained words of *lament, mourning and woe.*

While the book of **Lamentations** was predominately God’s people expressing deep sadness over their circumstances, they were not alone in their lamenting. Scripture is filled with many examples of God lamenting when His people disregard and disobey Him.

\*Worth noting: *“words on both sides of the scroll”* In those days, scrolls typically were only written on one side, but to give us an idea as to the magnitude of lamenting & mourning that was taking place, it could not be expressed with only one side of the scroll.

**So before Ezekiel went to rebellious people on God’s behalf, God wanted to make sure that Ezekiel was in touch with the heart of God.** He needed to feel the sadness and anger that God feels when His people are disobedient and he needed to feel the love & compassion God feels even toward those same people.

**If we’re going to speak on God’s behalf, we better make sure we’re aligned with the heart of God.** Too much damage has been done by people who spoke God’s truth, but they lacked the heart of God. And as a result, they did more damage than good.

**If we’re going to do more than make statements and actually influence on others, we need to be deeply in touch with the heart of God and this must shape not only what we say but how we say it.**

Let’s continue in Ezekiel 3:4: He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them. Ezekiel 3:4

**\*WHEN GOD CALLS US TO GO AND TELL, WE MUST NOT DELAY**

**The great commission has always been about going and telling and that’s what God tells Ezekiel to do. And notice when God tells Ezekiel to go, God says, *“Go now.”***

**If fear is the greatest obstacle to speaking the words of God, delay is often how we deal with our fears.**

I understand the importance of timing and when it comes to speaking the words of God into other people's lives. We really do need to pray for wisdom and discernment when it comes to the timing of what we say. **But we also need to realize that delay can be a form of disobedience.** And if God has called us to "Go and tell" then we need to be careful about dragging our feet.

Let's continue with Ezekiel 3:5-7: You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel— 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. 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.

**\*SOMETIMES THE ISSUE ISN'T OUR HEARING, IT'S OUR HEARTS**

The problem with Ezekiel's audience wasn't that they couldn't understand what he said, it's that they didn't want to hear what he was saying. Remember, God didn't call His people "ignorant," He called them rebellious. It's one thing to not know the truth, it's another thing to ignore the truth

Someone said, *"the part of the Bible I have the most trouble with isn't what I don't understand, it's what I do understand and don't want to do."*

**If you've much time in God's word, you know certain things are contrary to God's will. But how many times do we ignore the voice of God anyway?**

In the book of Ezekiel, we find the word "heart" 29 times. If we truly have a tender heart toward God, we will listen to and obey the voice of God.

Let's wrap this up with Ezekiel 3:8-9:

*"But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. 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."*

**\*IF WE'RE GOING TO SPEAK THE WORDS OF GOD, WE MUST BE RESILIENT**

The word **"Resilient"** comes from the latin word meaning to "leap back." It's the ability to leap back when things don't go according to plan.

**Because they were "hard-hearted", Ezekiel needed to be "hard-headed."** The mission God was giving him would be difficult, but there was too much at stake to give-up when his listeners wouldn't listen.

**Example: Selling the LA Times in SD vs. Call to ministry**

What keeps me going: God's calling & Too much at stake to quit

**Closing: \*Turn to God and away from rebellious ways  
\*Listen more & speak when God says speak**

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\*WE CAN'T ALLOW \_\_\_\_\_ TO KEEP US FROM \_\_\_\_\_.

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