

## **Ezekiel Two: Consuming God's word**

Welcome, this morning to Christ Church Purley, and to the book of Ezekiel. My name is Carl Knightly and I am one of the members at Christ Church. Today we are in the book of Ezekiel, and we are going to be reflecting on what God said to the prophet Ezekiel in chapter two of this book. As I have prepared I have realised that delivering a talk is one thing, doing it trying to make sure I look at the webcam on my laptop, well that's another challenge altogether, so please bear with me, if you don't think I'm looking at you enough.

Before we start I am going to pray. *Lord God help us as we reflect on what You have to say, and please equip me by your Holy Spirit as I seek to unpack the passage. Amen*

Before we start, wherever you are watching this, if you don't have your Bible to hand, why not pause the screen and go and grab it- then you can keep up as we go through God's word.

As we helicopter into the book of Ezekiel, what do we need to know before we start? Well, Ezekiel was born in Judah and was preparing to become a priest when the Babylonians attacked, in 597 BC, and carried him and 10,000 others away into exile. 5 years later God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet, to be a messenger for Him. And that's where we pick up the story at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel.

Context is important so when you get a minute, do take some time to read through chapter one, it's quite something, the visual magnificence of Gods angels and then the glory of God Himself. And two things that stand out for me, are that the hand of the Lord was on Ezekiel (we see that in verse 3 of chapter 1); and secondly that when Ezekiel sees this vision of God, he falls on his face.

I think I have said this before, but when I was younger, at school, I remember often picking up a book and flicking to the end to see what happened, before starting. Now that's generally not sensible if you want to enjoy a good story, but I want to make an exception here, and briefly take us to the beginning of Ezekiel chapter 3. In Ezekiel chapter 2, which we will be looking at today, God is appearing to Ezekiel in a vision and gives Ezekiel instructions, encouragement and lastly spiritual food. And Ezekiel does eat it, as we see in verse 1- 3 of chapter 3 says this: *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."*<sup>2</sup> *So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.*<sup>3</sup> *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 Ezekiel ate, tasted good, as sweet as honey. So with that in mind, let's head back to chapter 2 and see what we think. And as we do, I have 2 questions for us as we journey through this chapter:

1. What does God say to Ezekiel?
2. What does it mean for us?

As we head back to the beginning of chapter 2 we find Ezekiel on his face on the floor, trembling and awestruck as he is hearing from God- but that isn't where God leaves him, God tells him to get up. And the Holy Spirit helps him get up and stand to attention. And God addresses him as 'Son of man'. This is important as it reminds us that there is a clear difference, God is God, and Ezekiel is a man- not the other way round- and that's important, I'll come back to that later.

And the use of the name 'son of man' is interesting; Ezekiel is a "son of man," and is the man of the hour, chosen, Spirit filled, and delegated by God. But he's also just a human, on his own weak, sinful and fallible. We know the Lord Jesus calls himself The Son of Man – all capital letters- which whilst pointing to his humanity, is different from the countless times in the Bible the phrase "son of man" is used in the Bible, where it simply means man. The difference is that Jesus is *the* Son of Man; that is He is the epitome of humanity. Jesus is the Sinless One, humanity perfected, the one to finally reconcile God and man.

But back to the passage. So what does God say to Ezekiel? Well I want to focus on three areas. Firstly God says to Ezekiel, "**Speak my words...**" Do you see that in verse 7? And God explains what He means, earlier in the chapter. He wants Ezekiel to go to the Israelites and speak on His behalf to them, because they and indeed their ancestors have been rebelling against God, and they are obstinate and stubborn- as we see in verse 4. God gave Ezekiel the difficult responsibility of presenting His message to a terrifying and rebellious people. I don't know about you but that doesn't sound like much fun! What's interesting though is that God isn't measuring

success based on how well the Israelites listen and respond, (although I'm sure God would want the Israelites to change their ways) but the important thing is that Ezekiel is obedient to God, and fulfills God's purpose for him. See verse 5; irrespective of the outcome, God says "they will know a prophet has been among them". **God won't judge us on how successful we are, but on how faithful we have been.** Now I don't know about you but if I was Ezekiel, I would have been more like Jonah probably, and legged it- I wouldn't have been jumping for joy at the task in hand. And yet that is God's calling on Ezekiel's life at that point, and Ezekiel needs to listen- because the God of the universe is talking.

So God tells Ezekiel what to say, but he also tells Ezekiel to **not be afraid**. If you look down at verse 6, God says "do not be afraid" three times- which is significant. It will be tough out there for Ezekiel, it's tough out there for us as well, in a society where being a Christian means at the worst, persecution, and at best, means sometimes feeling uncomfortable. There is no sugar coating what God is asking of Ezekiel, but he is asking Ezekiel to be God's messenger come what may- which means it's time for courage. God wants us to share His good news whether it's convenient or not. But we don't need to be afraid, because God is with us, and as He speaks directly to Ezekiel, God tells him to **"open your mouth and eat what I give you"**. What this means is that God wants to give His message, His words to Ezekiel, that Ezekiel would consume them fully, and would be nourished by God's word, and be nourished by knowing that he was serving God, and fulfilling God's plans for him.

Now in case you are wondering, the reason verse 10 talks of lament and mourning and woe is because the words God is giving Ezekiel for the Israelites involve wrath and judgement, against a wicked and rebellious people, if they do not turn from their ways. And if you read on through Ezekiel another time, you will find it very sobering reading, (although it does end well) and some of what we read might make us feel very uncomfortable or unsettled- but as I mentioned earlier, it is important to remember that we are created beings, and God is God, our loving yet supreme creator and Lord of all. You might even think, that doesn't feel like what we read tastes *sweet like honey*- but we do know Gods love is always good news, and when we are obedient to Him, we are living our lives as He created us to.

So God has given Ezekiel instructions, to tell, to not be afraid, and to eat. **But what does it all mean for us today?**

Well in the same way that in verse 9 God stretched out His hand and gave Ezekiel a scroll to eat, God wants us today to consume his Word- and we have the wonderful benefit of having it all, in His holy Bible. And knowing God speaks to us directly through the Bible, which the Holy Spirit brings to life for us, well that is amazing! What a privilege! I never cease to be amazed when I read His word- which when we eat it, and pay heed to it, tastes as sweet as honey.

Now at this point you might be thinking, okay Carl, this all sounds rather weird, I don't eat my Bible, I eat my dinner-- but stay with me. Think of everything in the world, actions, behaviours, characteristics, in terms of food, and then think about whether it's good food. If its things- let's go for extreme examples, violent tv, pornography, too much alcohol, music that doesn't glorify God, racism, whatever it might be. Or lets think of behaviours that we might absorb, by just being in the world- narcissism, lying, selfishness, idolatry, the list is endless. **But what do we get when we consume God's word?** The fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Many of us will be aware of that phrase "you are what you eat". This is as true for spiritual food and what goes in our minds and hearts, as it is for physical food.

**So how do we eat well?** Well as we saw earlier, we need to open our mouths. That may seem obvious but it's fairly crucial. And then we need to chew, and to digest. How can we chew and digest scripture? That's for us to reflect on in our hearts. I could certainly spend more time with my Bible, chewing over what God has to say, and reflecting and digesting.

And when we do eat good food, we aren't hungry again for a while, and most importantly we are **strengthened and nourished**. And of course taking Communion at church is an outward reminder of consuming Gods word, as we eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus dying for us- and that is why in amongst the words used at Communion we are invited to "*feed on Him in our hearts with thanksgiving*".

I know we aren't doing much going out these days, but how do you find going out on an empty stomach? It's not much fun for me, I get hungry very quickly, and need to then snack on something on the go, and what I end up eating is invariably not as good for me as a hearty breakfast. Something I need to work on is spending time with the Lord before I start my day- having that "breakfast" as it were, filling up spiritually before starting the day. Starting the day being quiet with God, reading the Bible and praying- well that changes my outlook on the day, being reminded of God's goodness as I start my day.

Let me read us the first two verses of 1 Corinthians 3, which say this; *[1](#)Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. [2](#)I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.*

Now I just want to pause and say that this isn't guilt trip time. You didn't tune in today to feel bad. This isn't about legalism, or box ticking. This is about a life changing appetite though- God has so much for us!

The best way I can describe it is that when our children were babies, they would be sat in their high chairs, and we'd be trying to feed them some sort of mush on a spoon, which didn't always look great, but which was nutritious, filling and good for them. They would often be resistant, or not keen on more than a couple of spoonfuls, and yet as a loving parent, I really wanted them to eat, as I knew how good it was for them! How much more does God want His people to eat well, to grow, and to go and tell others of the good news of Jesus. Because those who don't know, who haven't heard, well they maybe don't realise they are hungry, they may not

even be hungry, but they need this food, the good news of Jesus Christ. Whether we are believers or not, we all need to know how much God loves His people, and wants to be in relationship with them, with us.

God calls us, his people, all throughout the Bible, to go and spread the life changing good news of Jesus Christ. And sometimes telling of God's love is easy, and sometimes, and perhaps more and more, it is difficult- like it was for Ezekiel, when God called him to speak. But we **are** still called, God hasn't changed, and if anything, as every day goes by, the task becomes more urgent. The good news though, is that God always gives us the strength to accomplish what he asks us to do.

We might feel that we are either overwhelmed by God's holiness- **which we should be**- or maybe we are overwhelmed by what He calls us to do; but I love what American 20<sup>th</sup> century preacher John Vernon McGee says, when he said this; **"If God has called you to do a certain thing, He'll give you the power to do it. The best position you can come to is to recognize that you are not able in your own strength to do the job the Lord has given to you."**

I often use the analogy of a car. God has put us in the car, and we can drive it- but He ensures the car has petrol in it. The car drives because of Him, but it is our job to steer, as He navigates. God's petrol is the Holy Spirit.

Bringing us back to the beginning of Ezekiel 2, as we finish, we see that when God wants to speak to Ezekiel, the Holy Spirit raises Ezekiel to his feet. And God promises us free food, the best food, His Word, to nourish and grow us, food that tastes sweet as honey. This food is found in our Bibles, which the Holy Spirit brings to life, as we seek out what God has for us. **We just have to decide whether we are hungry.**

Let me pray as we finish. *Loving Father God, Lord of all, we thank you that you love us, we thank you that you created us, and we thank you that in a world that feels increasingly broken, that you know what's best for us. Help us to eat well, to consume your Word, and to grow according to your plans for us. Amen.*