Eat the Scroll

Text: Ezekiel 2:8–3:3

Series: And They Will Know That I Am the LORD

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Thesis

God's messenger must hear and receive the word before he speaks it, even when that word is full of lamentation, mourning and woe.

Hook

It is possible to repeat the words of the Bible without ever letting them get inside of us. A preacher can prepare an explanation for other people while he avoids the part of the text that confronts his own life, and a teacher can learn to talk about the truth for years without living under its authority.

Ezekiel was sent to a rebellious house, but God did not begin by giving him a strategy for making the message more acceptable. He told him to open his mouth and eat the scroll, because before the prophet could carry the word to the people, he had to receive it himself.

What makes Ezekiel's calling particularly striking is that **God never promised him that the people would listen. In fact, God told him they would not.** In Ezekiel 3:7, the Lord declared, "Yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me." Imagine being sent to preach to people whom God has already described as unwilling to hear His word. Yet Ezekiel was still commanded to speak.

In Ezekiel 2:5, God said, "As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them." **Ezekiel was responsible for delivering God's warning, not determining the people's response.** As a watchman, he was accountable for warning the wicked, while those who heard were accountable for what they did with that warning (Ezekiel 3:17–19). Their refusal to listen did not excuse his silence, and his faithful preaching did not excuse their disobedience.

There is a lesson here for every preacher, teacher, and Christian. We must never confuse faithfulness with popularity or assume that an unfavorable response means the word of God has failed. We should long for people to repent, pray for their salvation, and patiently seek to persuade them. But we have no authority to change God's message to make it more acceptable. **God did not promise Ezekiel a receptive audience. He demanded a faithful messenger.**

And that brings us back to the scroll. Before Ezekiel could faithfully proclaim a message that others would reject, he first had to receive that message himself. The scroll was filled with lamentations, mourning and woe, yet when Ezekiel ate it, it was sweet as honey in his mouth. God did not permit His prophet to choose a more pleasant message or measure his faithfulness by the people's response. He was commanded to receive the word and proclaim it faithfully.

And that raises a question for every one of us: Are we willing to receive the whole word of God, even when it confronts us, and faithfully proclaim it, even when others refuse to listen?

Introduction

1 Ezekiel received his call among the exiles by the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1:1–3).

2 God sent him to Israel knowing the people were rebellious and might refuse to listen (Ezekiel 2:3–7).

3 Ezekiel 2:8–3:3 sets the messenger apart from his rebellious audience by requiring him to obey first.

4 Eating the scroll pictures receiving fully the word he would later proclaim.

The Text, Ezekiel 2:8–3:3

> **2:8** "Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." **2:9** Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. **2:10** When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. **3:1** Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." **3:2** So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. **3:3** He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

I. THE MESSENGER CAN BE REBELLIOUS TOO (2:8)

A. God commanded Ezekiel to listen.

1 The prophet was not given permission to concentrate only on other people's disobedience.

2 The first duty of the one who speaks for God is to hear what God has said.

3 Knowing that the people were rebellious did not automatically make Ezekiel a faithful servant.

1 God called Israel rebellious five times in Ezekiel 2:3–8, and in the very verse where He says it the fifth time, He turns to the prophet and says, "do not be rebellious like that rebellious house."

4 The messenger stays under the same authority as the word he announces.

1 Paul asked the Jew who taught the Law, "you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" (Romans 2:21).

B. God warned Ezekiel not to imitate the people.

1 The resistance of others could tempt the prophet to harden himself as well.

2 A difficult audience does not justify changing, softening or abandoning the message.

3 Neither does it justify pride, personal harshness or contempt for those who need to hear.

4 Faithfulness is measured first by obedience to God, and not by how the hearer reacts.

1 Paul told Timothy, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

C. Ezekiel had to open his mouth to receive.

1 God took the initiative and held out the scroll.

2 The prophet did not invent the content of his ministry.

3 Before he opened his mouth to speak, he had to open it to eat.

4 No servant of God has authority to announce a word he has refused to receive.

1 James writes, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22).

II. THE WORD OF GOD DOES NOT HIDE JUDGMENT (2:9–10)

A. The scroll was written on the front and back.

1 The picture is one of fullness, and not an empty message Ezekiel would fill in.

1 A scroll was normally written on one side, but this one was written on the front and back, so God left Ezekiel no blank space to add a word of his own.

2 God had already settled what the prophet was to carry.

3 The task was not to produce new ideas to capture attention.

4 Ezekiel was to serve the content he had received.

B. The content included lamentations, mourning and woe.

1 Judah had persisted in idolatry, violence and rebellion.

2 A faithful message had to name the sin and announce its consequences.

3 Biblical hope is not built by acting as if judgment does not exist.

4 Grace loses its meaning when the preacher hides what the sinner needs to be saved from.

1 Paul could tell the Ephesian elders, “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:26–27).

5 Paul warned that men would turn away from sound doctrine, and so he charged Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2).

C. The tone of the messenger must match the truth he announces.

1 Lamentation is not religious entertainment.

2 Judgment must not be proclaimed with cruel pleasure or a sense of superiority.

3 The woes of God call for a seriousness that loves the hearer enough to warn him.

1 Paul wrote about the enemies of the cross, “of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping” (Philippians 3:18), and he reminded the Ephesians that “night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31).

4 A faithful voice can be firm without turning the truth into a show.

III. THE WORD RECEIVED BECOMES SWEET EVEN WHEN IT IS HARD (3:1–3)

A. Ezekiel ate what God set before him.

1 He did not pick out only the comforting parts of the scroll.

2 He received the whole word before he went to the house of Israel.

3 Eating speaks of a deep receiving, and not a quick glance.

4 The truth has to fill the messenger before it governs his message.

1 Jeremiah said the same, “Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16).

B. The scroll was sweet as honey.

1 Its sweetness did not mean that lamentations and woes were pleasant in themselves.

2 It was sweet to receive the true word of the holy God.

1 The words on the scroll were lamentations, mourning and woe, and still it was sweet as honey in Ezekiel's mouth, because the sweetness came from the hand that gave it and not from the news it carried.

3 Obedience finds goodness in God even when His word corrects us and hurts.

4 The one who loves the Lord does not limit his appetite to the texts that confirm what he already wants.

1 Peter tells Christians, “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).

C. Jesus Christ received and fulfilled the will of the Father completely.

1 Jesus lived by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

1 When His disciples urged Him to eat, Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).

2. He did not change the message to avoid rejection, and He never spoke with sin.
3. On the cross He bore our sins in His body and suffered what was necessary to rescue us (1 Peter 2:24).
4. He rose again and sent His church to proclaim all that He commanded (Matthew 28:19–20).

> **Matthew 4:4.** But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’ ”

Anticipated Questions

Did Ezekiel physically eat an ordinary book?

The account belongs to the vision of his prophetic commission, and it presents the scroll as a word received from God. Eating it pictures taking that word in completely before speaking it. The force of the image does not depend on turning it into a physical practice for messengers today.

Does the sweetness of the scroll mean its message was pleasant?

The scroll was full of lamentations, mourning and woe. The sweetness expresses the good of receiving God's word and obeying it, even when its content confronts and hurts. A message can be bitter to the audience and still be precious to the servant who knows it came from God.

Does this passage authorize preachers today to receive new revelations?

Ezekiel received a prophetic commission within the history of God's revelation. The passage binds the preacher to receive and faithfully proclaim the word God has already given, and not to produce another scroll or claim authority equal to the prophet's. The church tests every teaching by the revelation of the Bible, and not by the personal confidence of the messenger.

Application

Read the Scriptures first as someone who stands under their authority. Before you ask what someone else needs to hear, ask what you must believe, confess, abandon or obey. Do not use the preparation of a lesson as a place to hide from the voice of God.

Receive the hard parts too. A sermon is not faithful if it announces comfort without sin, salvation without judgment or discipleship without obedience. The congregation needs the whole word of God, presented with clarity, seriousness and love.

If you teach, do not measure faithfulness only by the visible response. Ezekiel was sent to a rebellious house, and God told him ahead of time that they would not be willing to listen (Ezekiel 3:7). Your responsibility is to listen, live under the text and speak the truth, and the hearer's response remains before God.

Conclusion

1. God warned the prophet that he too could act like a rebel.
2. The scroll held a complete message that included lamentation and judgment.
3. Ezekiel received the word before he announced it.
4. The hard word was sweet because it came from the true God.

Final Connection: The Sweet and Bitter Scroll (Revelation 10:9–10)

A. John also received a book he had to eat.

1. In Revelation 10:9–10, John received a little book that was sweet as honey in his mouth but bitter in his stomach.
1. The angel told him, “Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey” (Revelation 10:9).
2. In Ezekiel, the scroll contained lamentations, mourning and woe.

3 Both passages show that receiving God's word can bring joy, even when the message we must announce is hard.

4 God's word does not exist to satisfy our tastes, and we must receive it just as He has given it.

B. Before we speak to others, we must listen ourselves.

1 Brethren, before we ask whether the world is listening to the word of God, we must ask whether we are listening to it.

2 Before we take the Bible to our neighbors, we must let it examine our own lives.

3 Before we correct a brother, we must be willing to be corrected.

4 God told Ezekiel, “Open your mouth and eat.”

C. The final question is personal.

1 Are we willing to receive the whole word of God, even when it confronts us, makes us uncomfortable and demands that we change?

2 Do we only want to hear God's promises, or are we also willing to obey His commandments?

3 The one who refuses to listen to what God has said is not ready to tell others what God wants.

Before we preach the word, we have to submit to it. Ezekiel had to open his mouth to receive the word before he opened it to announce it, and we too must listen to, receive and obey what God has said.

Invitation

The word that confronts your sin also announces Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried and rose again. Do not close your mouth or your heart to what God has said.

Hear the word, believe in Jesus, repent of your sins, confess His name, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. If you are already a Christian, receive the whole of Scripture again with a heart ready to obey it before you teach it to others.

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