

Ezekiel 2:1-7

1 He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. 2 And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. 3 He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. 4 The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD." 5 Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. 6 And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. 7 You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house (NRSV).

When I first became a pastor, I shared a concern with the regional minister that I lacked knowledge of the Old Testament. He assured me that I would be OK. The congregation had a Wednesday evening Bible study and I began teaching Old Testament prophecy. I began to truly appreciate the Hebrew prophets. They saw the world through the eyes of God and particularly called out injustice, inequality, and lack of peace. They addressed what was going on in the world and how it goes against the will of God. The prophets shared visions with people that did not want to be shaken out of their misconceptions. The prophets knew that most of the people would not listen. However, it is very important that someone speak the word of God. People had to know the reason behind their suffering was due to their rebellion against God and defiling the temple. Prophecy takes up a huge chunk of scripture but it goes underemphasized as it relates to contemporary society, particularly in regards to injustice, inequality, war, politics, oppression, and racism.

Ezekiel was one of the four great prophets of the Old Testament along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. Ezekiel was a priest that God chose for a prophet to the people in exile during the darkest days of the nation. A prophet is much more significant than priest. Providing prophetic witness is bigger than preaching. Prophets have a passion for justice, righteousness, and correct theological doctrine. God commissions the prophet to deliver the word of God. The prophet has to address the good and the bad in the world. The prophet also has to warn people that ignore the warnings. Therefore, suffering is necessary for an awakening. The goal is to change lives and address evil on both personal and institutional levels, especially the willful disregard of injustice. The pillars of prophetic witness are to teach the will of God and the word of God, identify the transgressions, offer a chance for repentance, caution the people on the consequence failure to repent, and a promise of hope and restoration. All of the prophets had a difficult job and encountered strong resistance. This is because the word of God is in direct conflict with selfishness and a challenge for wayward rulers.

Ezekiel responded to circumstances occurring during the exile. The whole nation of Israel was in a state of rebellion and had been for generations. Most of the kings were evil. They worshiped the idols of foreign nations instead of the one true God. They defiled the temple with foreign idols and dedicated alters to foreign gods. This blatant idolatry required punishment so that the people would know the Lord is the one true God. The people had to leave Jerusalem so

that the defiled temple could be destroyed along with the people that defiled it. Ezekiel had a harsh word of judgment. This is very unpopular. No one wanted to hear about Jerusalem falling on account of their transgressions and how their only hope is to repent and turn to God.

Ezekiel emphasizes that each person is responsible. This is a central theme that is repeated several times. Return to God and you get the blessing of restoration and a glorious future. When God acts, foreign nations and Israel will know that the Lord is the one true God. It is up to each individual to change but our problem is one of self favoritism. We favor ourselves over others. We judge others and see their faults while we ignore our own. We need to understand ourselves first and foremost.

Prophecy is the word of God that comes to the prophet directly from God. Preaching is a matter of interpreting the word of God from biblical resources. However, the biblical grounding is subject to incorrect doctrine. False doctrine leads others astray as they preach and teach what they want as opposed to what is real. The false reality is skewed in their favor and it becomes real to them. They believe in things that are in direct conflict with the will of God. This brings us to our next case study on reasons people leave organized religion.

I left organized religion when my mom got kicked out Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing to not celebrate mine and my siblings birthdays. You can't convince me God will disown you for celebrating life.

The reason the person left organized religion is due to people in the organization that stick to misconceptions that have nothing to do with the preaching and teaching of Jesus. Theological doctrine needs to be centered on Jesus. The bull's eye center of theology is Jesus. The gray area, the area outside of the bull's eye, is in the realm of interpretation and this is where conflict and division occurs. This is also in the realm of misinterpretation and off center theology. The situation of the person is that he is a victim of incorrect doctrine and off center theology. The New Testament letters strongly condemn false teaching especially when doctrine pulls people away from the love of God. Their focus was on refraining from something because of a belief that it might displease God when they should be focused on actually pleasing God. They have taken the same path as the scribes and Pharisees. Their rules and regulations reject others. It is my hope that people of the world will realize that there are forms of organized religion that are more about God than our own misconceptions. The challenge that Jesus faced and the challenge that the Old Testament prophets faced is that people were more concerned with rules than with actually pleasing God. It is a rebellious nation.