



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### Forging a Servant of God, Part 3

#### [A Calling Amidst Disappointment](#)

David endeavored to describe the beauty and glory of unity in the body of Christ by likening it to the ordination of a priest:

Psalms 133:1-2, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, *even Aaron’s* beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes.”

It is NOT an overstatement to say that in the Old Testament, one of the most celebrated rites given to the people of God was the ordaining and commissioning of a priest unto ministry! This

NOT ONLY would have been the highpoint in the life of a priest, BUT ALSO a big deal in the life of a community! In contrast, listen to Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 11:14-15, "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles, and the whole house of Israel, all of them, *are those* to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the Lord; this land has been given us as a possession.'"

This essentially was the invoking of a curse upon the exiles! It represented twisted thinking that believed personal blessing was an endorsement on the part of the gods- in this case, Yahweh! And so, because they had NOT been taken into exile, the remnant viewed themselves morally superior and in the right to ridicule, mock, and curse those taken by the Babylonians! Such was the treatment Ezekiel received!

This is significant because "...the thirtieth year [of Ezekiel's life], on the fifth *day* of the fourth month..." (Ezekiel 1:1) corresponded to that momentous time when Ezekiel would have been ordained to the priesthood! This means that when God approached Ezekiel here, the prophet no doubt would have been in a very dark place of regret and resentment! What had he done to merit such suffering? Why would God keep one of the rare *faithful* Israelites from the priesthood? Daniel Block wrote, speaking of Ezekiel 1:1:

The phrase *among the exiles...* does not mean he was in the immediate company of the deportees at the time of the revelation. Rather, it highlights the fact that he was away from his native land, removed from Jerusalem and the temple, the place from which Yahweh's glory had emanated in the past. Ironically, Ezekiel found himself among those whom the present residents of Jerusalem had written off as rejected by Yahweh (11:15). The exiles' fate was looked upon as incontrovertible proof of divine rejection.... [Accordingly,] For Ezekiel, far removed from Jerusalem and the temple, the privilege of priestly service would have seemed a hopeless dream... His own deportation probably meant the end of all his professional dreams. (Block, 1997, pp. 83-84, 87)

Yet little did Ezekiel know the calling that God had in mind! It stands as a beautiful example of the promise given to God's people just prior to the exile.

Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

Ezekiel's exile was NOT an accident NOR was it a punishment! God placed a higher calling upon Ezekiel, specifically the calling of a Prophet and so a spokesman of the Lord!

Christian, note this well, it is the same with you! Though your way may be rough and weary (today or in the future), you must understand that the Lord is bringing about His perfect plan in your life! Of this you must be sure! In a nobler sense than Napoleon ever dreamt (Boettner, 1991, p. 259), you truly are a man or woman of destiny!

Prior to Ezekiel's commissioning, the Lord lifted the veil that separates this world from the next and gave Ezekiel a *shallow* glimpse at the God who was both calling and sending him into ministry. And talk about a lasting impression, Ezekiel wrote this book toward the end of his life and ministry, and yet he referred to this vision no less than four times (cf. Ezekiel 1; 3:22ff; 8:4ff; 43:1ff)! Clearly Ezekiel lived out his life mindful that it was before this Lord and King that he executed his ministry!

A second facet in the raising up of Ezekiel as God's servant is God's strength! When the disciples joined Christ, and expressed concern over the fact that He had not eaten for a while:

John 4:34, "My meat/food is to do the will of Him who sent Me..."

So, what was “the meat” that strengthened Ezekiel? Besides the beatific vision of chapter 1, what is it that enabled Ezekiel to minister over the long haul? We note from the text that there are three things. First, his strength was housed in his fellowshiping with God.

Ezekiel 2:1: “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man<sup>1</sup> [an expression which emphasizes one’s lowliness; in the context of chapter 1 this makes perfect sense], stand on your feet that I may speak with you!’”

The translation does NOT say here that it was God’s intention simply to speak TO Ezekiel (although He would indeed do that). RATHER, it was God’s intention to speak “WITH” him! This is massively significant!<sup>2</sup> How is it that Ezekiel was able and willing to:

- Be a laughing stock his community?
- Be a fool for Christ?
- Suffer much without complaint or objection?
- Rebuke the religious elite of his day?

How is it that he could sacrifice greatly for the Lord, and yet he did not shrink back in resentment to inactivity? Ezekiel’s “meat” included fellowshiping/communing with the Lord!

Ezekiel 3:22-23, “And the hand of the Lord was on me there, and He said to me, ‘Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.’ So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face [I love this... Ezekiel’s relationship with God never became casual. This is the third-time God revealed His glory to Ezekiel and as it was the first time, he fell to the ground!]. The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, ‘Go, shut yourself up in your house.’”

The implication is that prior to Ezekiel’s first official day of ministry, God separated the prophet for the purpose of fellowship and communion. *The Lord brought him to the desert!* By this Ezekiel learned that God NOT ONLY was the Lord of his life of service, BUT ALSO a Lover in whom he could confide, depend, and trust! We see this same pattern in the life of Paul whom God sent into the wilderness of Arabia where he spent a significant amount of time fellowshiping with and serving the Lord prior to any formal ministry.

Galatians 1:15-16, “But when He who had set me apart, *even* from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia [for three years (v. 17)], and returned once more to Damascus.”

Think of the exiled people of God of 722 BC! For what purpose did God send them into exile — into the wilderness? What is the purpose of the wilderness in God’s economy? God ordained the wilderness for His people so that they might see the world and its pleasures for what they are. Hosea uses Gomer, as a metaphor of Israel to show us this truth.

Hosea 2:6-7, “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!’”

The book of Hosea continues:

Hosea 3:3-5, “Then I said to her, ‘You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.’ For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek

the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness...”

The strength of any people is the depth of their walk with Christ!

Christ Himself was not exempt! If God is sovereign and Christ is God, why did He pray? Because prayer was a vehicle of deep and abiding communion with the Lord! And so, He prayed:

- All night, Luke 5:16.
- From Afternoon till evening, Matthew 14:23.
- During the evening, Luke 22:17.
- When He was physically tired, Mark 1:35.
- When He was rejected, Matthew 11:25.
- When He was misunderstood, John 6:15.
- During spiritual conflict, John 12:27.
- When He was dying, Luke 23:46.

From all of this and more it is obvious that Christ’s ministry was saturated with prayer, fellowship, and communion with God!

We see the same emphasis in the book of Ezekiel and God’s stated purpose behind the exile of 586 BC.

Ezekiel 11:16, “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Though I had removed them far away among the nations, and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.””

Again, this is a major theme when it comes to exile! Since it was about disciplining His people, it was more so about fellowship and communion! Communion with Christ, deep and abiding fellowship- has always been and will always be the foundation upon which effective ministry rests!

Accordingly, as Ezekiel is called by God to the life and service of a prophet, we are not surprised to discover that his life was rooted and grounded in Fellowshiping with God! That was the secret behind his strength! And yet there is more. Notice secondly, Ezekiel performed his ministry by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit.

### The Enabling Grace of the Holy Spirit, Ezekiel 2:2; 3:24a.

Ezekiel 2:2, “And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard *Him* speaking to me.”

The language here is that of the royal court in Ezekiel’s day. At the time when a person was ushered into the presence of a king, the individual would signify subjection by lying on his face (in Ezekiel’s case, it was NOT by choice, BUT by necessity; so great is God). The individual then would not rise until he received word from the king. And so, though Ezekiel is merely a “son of man” (v. 1), nevertheless strengthened by the Spirit of God, he is enabled to stand in God’s presence. We see it further in chapter 3 where Ezekiel once again was ushered into the presence of God where, as before, he fell down as a dead man. Notice that which enabled him to stand:

Ezekiel 3:23-24a, “So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face. The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet...”

Here it is quite evident how Ezekiel was able both to stand in the presence of God as well as execute his ministry. The Spirit of God enabled him! Daniel Block describes it this way:

In the meantime Ezekiel is infused with an energizing *rûaḥ* that picks him up and sets him on his feet... This can be none other than the Spirit of God, and the *rûaḥ* that energizes Ezekiel must be the same *rûaḥ* that had animated the wheels in 1:12, 20–21, and that will control his movements throughout his ministry. (Block, 1997, p. 115)

We see this same pattern throughout Scripture! It was/is by the enabling grace of God that:

- The Prophets of the Old Testament prophesied, 1Peter 1:11; 2Peter 1:21.
- The Word of God was written, John 14:26; 16:13-14; Ephesians 6:17.
- Christ was conceived, Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35.
- The dead were raised, Ezekiel 37:12-14; Romans 8:11.
- The church was built, Ephesians 2:22.
- A person enters into the kingdom of God, John 1:12-13; Tit. 3:5; Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 3:5-6; Revelation 22:17
- The Christian grows in holiness, 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 15:16; Galatians 5:16-18.
- He is empowered for ministry, Isaiah 11:1-2; 42:1-3; 61:1-2; Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:1-18; John 1:32-33; 3:34; Acts 10:38; Hebrews 9:14.
- Spiritual gifts are given and exercised, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 8, 11; Romans 12:3-8; 1Peter 4:10-11.
- The child of God is empowered to boldness, love, and self-discipline, Acts 4:29, 2 Timothy 1:7.
- A Christian can know conviction and repentance, John 16:8-11.
- Love, joy, peace, patience, and the like are enjoyed, Galatians 5:22-23.
- Comfort is received as well as counsel, help, and encouragement, John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 9:31.

This should make us God-dependent and NOT self-dependent. In light of the enabling grace of God, we must be men and women of faith and trust! In the words of Proverbs:

Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

This was Ezekiel! That which enabled him both to stand as well as execute his prophetic ministry was the Enabling Grace of the Spirit of God! Notice lastly, that which by which Ezekiel was able to execute his ministry... he was strengthened by the word of God.

## The Appropriation of the Word of God, Ezekiel 2:8-10

Ezekiel 2:8-10, “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you [this is in clear contrast to Judah who disdained the word of God...]; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.<sup>3</sup> Then I looked, behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll *was* in it. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back [this was odd in the ancient world as scrolls were only written on one side; accordingly, the idea behind this is that of fullness or enormity...]; and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.”

This fleshes out the last point. Truly the Spirit of God is that which enabled Ezekiel to fulfill his calling. Yet what does that mean practically in the life of a child of God? Are we talking here about a mystical experience where the Spirit of God literally speaks to us and so guides us? Is that what occurred in the life of Ezekiel?

The answer is found with this final point. Ezekiel was NOT simply chosen and commissioned to serve the Lord as a prophet. RATHER, he was equipped by the Spirit of God, working by and with the Word of God! Notice the language.

Ezekiel 2:8a, “...listen to what I am speaking to you...”

Ezekiel 2:8b, "...open your mouth and eat what I am giving you."

From this it should be obvious that Ezekiel was called to do far more than simply utilize the word of God as a guide or a duty which he checked off each morning. Neither is the word of God just a pocket book of promises or a lucky charm which in reading he felt he now could face the day. The language of "listening to what I am speaking" and the imagery of "opening your mouth and eating" speaks of a life devoted to being mastered by the word of God and then ministering as a result!!<sup>4</sup> The Preacher's Complete Homiletic put it this way:

Ezekiel has to eat the book. It is not that he is merely to learn its meaning, but it is that he is to make all its words his own. He is to 'inwardly digest' them, that they may obtain a form suitable to his character and environment. (D. G. Watt, 1890, p. 28)

That has always been the Biblical standard when it comes to God's servants! Recall the preface of Paul's teaching on the family in order to fulfill our familial calling as husbands, wives, children and workers:

Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit."

The word for "filled" was a maritime term used to describe a sail when the wind filled it and so drove the boat in its journey. In this regard, for Paul to call us to be "Spirit filled" tells us two things:

1. Our lives must be directed and governed by the Spirit of God.
2. Being "Spirit filled" is something we participate in and so have responsibility for- v. 18 is a command!

So how is it that we can be "Spirit filled"? If you do a comparison between Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16-17 (both epistles written by Paul at roughly the same time), you discover that the practical effects of being "Spirit filled" and being "word filled" are one and the same:

- Ephesians 5:18- "be Spirit filled" which results in speaking to one another with the Psalter, singing, and expressing thanks!
- Colossians 3:16-17- "be word filled" which results in speaking to one another with the Psalter, singing, and expressing thanks!

From this we conclude the way an individual is "Spirit filled/driven" is by being "word filled/driven." One being in the word of God, submitting to it, and allowing it to drive your thoughts, desires, actions, and will, is Spirit filled. This is and nothing less is what it meant in Ezekiel to "open your mouth and eat"!

Ezra 7:10, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel."

This is the first and foremost rule when it comes to ministry in the kingdom of God. What we offer, teach, and proclaim must come first from a heart which has been moved by it!

Jeremiah 15:16, "Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts."

This is what Ezekiel was about as a servant of God. He first ate the word, and then he preached it! Listen to the testimony of the Psalmist:

Psalms 119:103-104, "How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."

The Psalmist testifies to a life lived in subjection to the word of God! As difficult as that is, nevertheless the results are glorious: understanding, guidance, direction, and hope! Jesus

temptation to reject the way of the Lord and so manage in one's own strength was answered this way:

Matthew 4:4, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" - this, family of God, is life, health, and peace... a ministry executed by one filled and so driven by the word of God!

In the words of Arthur Pink:

The objects [doctrines/truths] which are revealed in Scripture are not bare abstractions which are to be accepted as true, nor even sublime and lofty concepts to be admired; they are to have a powerful effect upon our daily walk. There is no doctrine revealed in Scripture for a merely speculative knowledge, but all is to exert a powerful influence upon conduct. God's design in all that He has revealed to us is to the purifying of our affections and the transforming of our characters. (Pink, 2001, p. 68)

This is NOT going to be easy! Not only will service in Christ's kingdom bring us places where we do not want to go, it ALSO will force us to believe that which we don't want to believe! That is the significance of Ezekiel 2.

Ezekiel 2:9-10, "Then I looked, behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll *was* in it [this contained the judgments that were about to be unleashed upon Judah]. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back; and written on it were lamentations [the song sung at funerals], mourning [referencing the literal cries of the bereaved] and woe [which speaks of a self-malediction]."

Family of God, do you know what it means to be Reformed? It means that you are radically Biblical! It speaks of a life that is dead unto self and alive unto the Lord. Such flowery language; yet what does it mean? In my estimation, there are four types of Christians in the body of Christ today. Those who allow their understanding of God's word to be governed by feeble reasoning. These are the ones who come across a doctrine in Scripture and say, "*My God wouldn't do that!*" They can't live in a world where they take God's word at face value. And so like the ostrich that buries its head in the sand, they ignore or dismiss whole passages of Scripture because they can't accept what it says. In the words of William Cowper, they don't understand that:

Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain. (Commissions, 1990, p. 128)

Those who submit the teaching of the word of God to their lives and so look for support from the word for what they are doing, but ignore where God's word might be inconvenient. We see this a lot today: Christians engaging in questionable behavior, endorsing bizarre policies and practices- all in the name of Christ. Did you know that 31% of *evangelicals* support homosexual marriage? This is crazy! Now listen, I have nothing against a homosexual, but I am bound and governed by the word of God which speaks quite clearly on the issue! Yet such is the state of so many in Christ today. Their lives are NOT subject to God's word, BUT God's word is subject to their living, agenda, and opinion!

Those whose theology and worldview are shaped by their experience rather than the word. These are Christians whose identity is derived by their job, a horrible event, their health (or lack thereof), their socio-economic situation, their race, and so much more. They really are sad. Talk to them, gaze upon their Facebook page, read their blogs. And you will behold that which has become their idol. No longer is it, "For me to live is Christ..." (Philippians 1:21). It has become, "For me to live is...

- Politics."
- My job."
- A social issue or cause."
- My health."

- A tragedy.”
- Their own personal failure.”

The previous three Christians sadly have allowed the world to shape their thinking. What a contrast to the exhortation Paul gave in Colossians:

Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

This is where the fourth type of Christian lives. Those who endeavor to subject their thinking, doing, living, and dying to the Lord, His glory, and so His will! This is what it means to be Reformed; again, it is to be radically biblical! It is to delight in the entire word of God, smiling at its promises, being inspired by its callings, being sobered by its warnings, and being moved to weeping on account of its curses! This is where Ezekiel found himself as the Lord called him into ministry! For him it truly was, “God said it; that settles it!”

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## Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Lamar Cooper wrote, “Emphasizing ‘human frailty and moral ineptitude,’ it is associated with terms that “symbolize a wretched, lowly existence” and that “have the smell of death about them.” (*Ezekiel*, NAC, p. 74) In fact, the expression occurs over 90 times in Ezekiel, compared to a mere 14 times in the rest of the Old Testament.

<sup>2</sup> While the Hebrew literally reads, “...that I may speak”- the choice of “to” or “with you” is based on interpretation- it is clear from Ezekiel’s call that the Lord spoke WITH him as well as TO him. That is why the NASB and ESV translate it as, “with you.”

<sup>3</sup> Lamar Cooper wrote, “The ideas of eating and drinking sometimes were used in a figurative sense to denote the operation of the mind in receiving, understanding, and applying doctrine or instruction of any kind. Ezekiel was to assimilate the message and proclaim its contents.” (Cooper, 1994, p. 78)

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin wrote, “...there are many ready speakers who utter what they have never digested, and thus their teaching is but vapid. And this is the meaning of what Paul says: the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. (1 Corinthians 4:20.) But those who truly consecrate themselves to God, not only learn what they speak of, but as food is eaten, so also they receive within them the word of God, and hide it in the inmost recesses of their heart, so that they may bring it forth from thence as food properly dressed.” (*Commentary on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Vol. 1, p. 127)