

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 432, 07-11-2021 †† Pentecost 7

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”



EZEKIEL 2-3

¹He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.” ²The Spirit entered into me as he spoke to me and brought me up to my feet. Then I heard him speaking to me.

³He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to disloyal nations, who have been disloyal to me. They and their fathers have rebelled against me to this very day. ⁴These children of mine are brazen-faced and hard-hearted. I am sending you to them, and you are to tell them that this is what the LORD God says. ⁵Then, whether they listen or do not listen—for they are a rebellious house—then they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶But you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words. Even though briars and thorns surround you and you are living with scorpions, do not be afraid of their words, and do not be intimidated by the look on their faces, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷You are to speak my words to them whether they listen or they do not, for they are rebellious. ⁸But you, son of man, listen to what I am telling you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”

⁹Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out toward me, and in it there was a rolled-up scroll. ¹⁰He unrolled it in front of me, and there was writing on both sides. Written on it was: Laments, Groaning, and Woe.

^{3:1}Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat what you have received. Eat this scroll, and then go, speak to the house of Israel.” ²I opened my mouth, and he fed me the scroll.

³Then he said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I am giving you.” I ate, and in my mouth it was sweet like honey.

⁴He then said to me, “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them.



What is the sweetest thing you've ever tasted? Ice cream? Candy canes at Christmas? Cotton candy? Slurpees at 7/11? We all enjoyed Mackinac Island fudge on our Bode family vacation. Someone here shared maple syrup-flavored moonshine. My brother will forever enjoy peanut butter and honey sandwiches. What is the sweetest thing you've ever tasted?

How about the words of Jesus? At times we sing, "*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are they who take refuge in Him*" (Psa. 34:8). If you didn't know those words were from the psalms, then you may have expected them here in Ezekiel 2 and 3. It was sweet for Ezekiel to chew on and share God's Word. It can be just as sweet for you and me.

HOW SWEET IT IS WHEN OUR WORDS ARE HIS

1. Ezekiel was told to take his message to the Hebrews in exile. Because of God's choice of their nation to produce the Savior, these people had started with a special national relationship with God. Most of them, nevertheless ...

- rebelled against the Lord.
- insisted on following other gods.
- insisted on disobeying God's will.
- were punished and sent into exile.

Even in their years of exile, most of the Hebrews refused to repent of their sins. In spite of what appeared to be a lost cause, God still sent his prophet to these people. Here we have a taste of our patient, long-suffering Lord. He allowed the rejection of His people for a long time, but it did not keep Him from appealing to their hearts. Their rejection did not keep Him from trying to bring them to repentance.

That is true about your favorite sweets. Cotton candy is sweet. Honey is sweet. Mackinac Island fudge is always sweet. You can always rely on your sweets to be sweet. Otherwise, you know it's not that food. The Lord is always sweet to those who are crushed by their sins and trusting in His forgiveness. When He has forgiven our sins, His words become ours. We own them, chew on them and live in them. *How sweet it is when His words are ours!*

Ezekiel was supposed to inform the Hebrews that his message was not his own. It was the message of the same God who had made the covenant with Moses

and the nation. The Lord did not change. Nor did the covenant change. The Lord was trying to get the people to see the problem—that they'd changed. Ezekiel was supposed to disregard the people's willingness or unwillingness to receive God's Word. He was not supposed to

- stop telling God's Word even if they refused to listen to it.
- be intimidated by their rejection, their challenge of his authority, or their ridicule of God's Word, even if they would become like thorns in his side and scorpions in his house.

Thus, even the rejecters would have to admit that a prophet, a transmitter of God's Word, had been at work among them, especially after Jerusalem fell as the prophet had said it would.

Transmitters of God's Word always must make it clear that what they are saying is what He says. We need to be ready to point to the Bible, God's written Word, so people are aware we are not just giving them our opinions. Witnesses for the Lord never plot a course of action on the basis of the reaction of their hearers. We are to witness because God has commanded it, not because we are getting a good reception. To apply God's Law to other people is never a pleasant task. We know the message may very well not please those to whom it is directed. Even if it is accepted, it will produce lament and mourning. Consequently, we are inclined to **avoid** announcing this part of God's Word. We can counterbalance our reluctance with the knowledge that it is a God-given privilege to transmit His Word, including the unpleasant parts. As Paul said, *If I were still trying to gain the approval of men, I would not be the servant of Christ* (Gal. 1:10b).

As you know from today's gospel, Jesus Christ Himself is the perfect example of this. While Ezekiel was a *faithful* preacher, only Jesus was *perfect* at telling His Father's will. He went to His hometown to teach and instruct the people, but they rejected Him. They wouldn't even receive His miracles. They didn't like the taste of grace. We might repeat with the writer to the Hebrews, "*The message they heard did not benefit them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith*" (Heb. 4:2). So began a personal rejection of Jesus that **ultimately cost His life**. But that cost paid for our sins of **ignoring** or **avoiding** God's Word. That is part of the taste of God's Word to those who have sinned against it.

2. The prophet was asked to do something unusual; that is, to eat a snack. That snack turned out to be the prophetic scroll, rolled up in laments and groaning. The Lord designed food to be assimilated by the body. In much the same way, God's words were to be assimilated into the prophet's very existence, into his

very bone and fiber. Thus the command to eat the scroll. Once the prophet made the message his own—and only then—could he go and speak. The content of the scroll was a message of lament and mourning and woe. The message was not pleasing; yet when Ezekiel ate it, it tasted sweet. In spite of the painful content of the message—in spite of the difficult circumstances described on the scroll—nothing could prevent Ezekiel from experiencing joy at being a messenger for the Lord.

This is not too different from everyone who reads, marks, learns, and inwardly digests the words of the Lord. As it turns out, to those on the road to hell, God's words taste like death. To those who are being saved, God's words come with the taste of life—so tasty that we want to share them—a taste of grace, a sweet taste.

So fill yourself up on God's sweet Word, even if it makes His enemies scowl. In fact, Jesus even says, "*Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets*" (Luke 6:26). There will be times when our words must be sweet to the world OR sweet to the Lord. How sweet it is when our words are sweet to the Lord! Even if they are disagreeable to others, it is like a burden lifted if we speak the truth of God Himself. It sets you free. *How sweet it is when our words are His! Amen.*