

## **You Have a Good Pastor** **Ezekiel 2:1-5**

*<sup>1</sup> He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.” <sup>2</sup> The Spirit entered into me as he spoke to me and brought me up to my feet. Then I heard him speaking to me. <sup>3</sup> He 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. <sup>4</sup> These 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. <sup>5</sup> Then, whether they listen or do not listen—for they are a rebellious house—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.*

What makes a good pastor? Most of you have been served by several pastors. Each had gifts for ministry. But some may have been more gifted in certain areas of ministry. Some were good counselors. They showed you God’s will for our life when you met with them. Some were good teachers. They could answer tough question based on their knowledge of God’s Word. Some were good worship leaders edifying us with Word & sacrament. I hope all were good preachers who could faithfully expound on the word of God and effectively apply it to your life.

As you look back over the past you remember the pastors who baptized your children, instructed and confirmed you, married you and ministered to your loved ones in a hospital bed or their death bed. I hope that while looking back, you are able to say, “Boy, have we had some good pastors.” What makes a good pastor? Of course, he has to be able to preach a sermon. He has to visit shut-in members that are unable to be in church and delinquent members who struggle with prioritizing church attendance. He has to be able to teach so our children can be examined before the congregation and children of God of any age can grow in God’s Word. So what makes a good pastor. Then let’s listen to our Lord who gives you your pastors. In his Scripture before us we hear about a good pastor by the name of Ezekiel. In the second chapter of his book, God gives Ezekiel his assignment to preach. In these verses God shows us what makes a good pastor. When he listens to his Lord and when he speaks his Word, then you know you have a good pastor.

When God chooses a man to speak for him, this can only come out of pure grace. In the chapter before our text, the Lord appears to Ezekiel in a vision. The vision came five years after Ezekiel and 10,000 other Jews were taken captive to Babylon. The event took place some six hundred years before God became flesh in Bethlehem. Ezekiel tells how he reacted when he saw the vision: *“When I saw (the glory of the Lord), I fell on my face”* (Ezekiel 1:28). Ezekiel hit the deck for a very good reason. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord at his calling as prophet, as a man with unclean lips among a people of unclean lips, he said *“Woe is me. I am ruined!”* (Isaiah 6:5). When Moses asked to see God on top of Mount Sinai, God told him, *“You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live”* (Exodus 33:20). A sinful creature cannot stand in the presence of a holy God.

And yet in this Scripture, we hear, *“He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.’”* Only by God’s grace could Ezekiel stand before God. It is interesting in how God addresses Ezekiel. Over 90 times in the book of Ezekiel God addresses him using the term “son of man.” Because he would receive visions from God himself and carry God’s Word to God’s people. Ezekiel needed a constant reminder of his mortality. He was still a sinful descendant of the first sinner Adam. The Apostle Paul needed a similar reminder. In our second Scripture

reading we heard Paul talk about his *thorn in the flesh*. And Paul knew exactly why God gave it to him. He wrote, *“To keep me from becoming arrogant due to the extraordinary nature of these revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, so that I would not become arrogant”* (2 Corinthians 12:7). To keep Ezekiel humble with all the great revelations he received from God, God kept calling him *son of man*, reminding him that he was a lowly mortal who needed God to rescue him from sin.

Our text tells us how God had Ezekiel stand before him. *The Spirit entered into me as he spoke to me and brought me up to my feet*. God gave Ezekiel the Holy Spirit so he could stand in God’s presence and listen to him. Ezekiel needed the Holy Spirit so he could listen to his Lord. The Apostle Paul would later write, *“An unspiritual person does not accept the truths taught by God’s Spirit, because they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them”* (1 Co 2:14). With the Holy Spirit in his life, Ezekiel could believe God’s saving promises and understand God’s holy Word. No person can understand Scripture unless the Holy Spirit opens it to them. During my seminary days, I attended a debate that was held at UW Milwaukee between a Muslim man and one of our seminary professors. They debated over the question: Who is Jesus? The Muslim man defended the Islamic claim that Jesus was only a prophet and not true God. What amazed me about that gentleman is how many Scripture passages he could recite from memory. But he still did not believe what they said about Jesus. Apparently, this man did not have the Holy Spirit to lead him through Scripture by faith so he could see our Savior there. With the Holy Spirit lifting Ezekiel to his feet and opening his mind and heart, Ezekiel was a good pastor who listened to his Lord.

The Apostle Paul recognized it was only by God’s grace that he was able to share the gospel with people. Especially when you consider his past as a persecutor of Christianity. He told the Ephesians, *“To me—even though I am the very least of all the saints—was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”* (Eph. 3:8). It is also important for pastors today to recognize it is only by the grace of God that we are allowed to be God’s spokesman. Every pastor must realize how unworthy he is to stand in the pulpit as say, *“This is what the Lord says...”* In our Gospel reading Jesus spoke an important truth that holds very true today. *“A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own house”* (Mark 6:4). There are rare exceptions, but how effective could a pastor be if he stood before people who only remembered the sins of his youth. During this election year we are used to seeing politicians under the microscope. I think we are all glad that we don’t have our past sins broadcast on national television. But we don’t need a microscope to see how unworthy we are. We simply need a mirror—the mirror of God’s holy law. That law reflects how many times we have failed our God. How can we possibly stand before our holy God who knows every thought that crosses our minds and see clearly into our darkest closet. Before you pastor can preach from this pulpit he must join you at the altar and plead, *“God have mercy on me, a sinner.”*

A good pastor is one who listens to his Lord. And when God speaks to him in his Word, he sends his Holy Spirit to lift him up with forgiveness and words of life. God’s Spirit takes us to the stable where our Savior was born. He shows us his flawless life which has earned us God’s favor. The Spirit brings us to a cursed cross where Christ died in our place. He shows us an empty tomb that reminds of our Savior’s victory over death for all people. When your pastor listens to his Lord he

finds forgiveness for his sin that is only found in Jesus. By listening to God's Word, you have a good pastor.

With his slate wiped clean in the blood of Christ, your pastor is willing and able to get to work. He's ready to speak God's Word to you. And when he does that, you know you have a good pastor.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Ezekiel was ready to get to work. Our text tells us what work God had waiting for him: *"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. These children of mine are brazen-faced and hard-hearted."* What an understatement to say that Ezekiel had a difficult ministry. He wasn't dealing with people that were going to welcome him with open arms. They were rebellious. God had chosen them as his special people. He gave them his saving Word. God chose them to bring his Son into the world to save every soul. But sadly, God's people wanted nothing to do with that. They chose false gods that brought them sinful pleasures. And God would use Babylon to carry them away from the Promised Land. Amazingly God still wanted them. Out of pure grace he continued to send prophets to them. But would they listen? Even in captivity God sent the prophet Ezekiel to these stubborn, and rebellious people.

It seems that Ezekiel would have been smart to return this call and find an easier way to make a living. But God gave Ezekiel complete confidence to go to those rebellious people. God told his prophet exactly what to say. *I am sending you to them, and you are to tell them that this is what the LORD God says. Then, whether they listen or do not listen—for they are a rebellious house—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.*

I think it's safe to say that pastors today don't have it as rough as Ezekiel did. We sit in air-conditioned offices. We deal with people who are generally on their best behavior when we're around them. But like the people in Ezekiel's day, they still have natures that are rebellious and stubborn. Those natures want to make pastors eat their words. How dare he claim that I have been unfaithful as God's child! How dare he tell me what's right and how wrong I have been! But this isn't just my pastor's assessment. This is what the Lord says. God is our master. He makes the rules. And he punishes any who break his rules. You may choose to listen. But if you don't, then remember what Jesus tells his apostles in Luke chapter 10: *"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me"* (10:16). When we listen to our pastor bring us God's Word, we are listening to our Lord. We want to listen to our Good Shepherd as well as his under-shepherds. Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand"* (John 10:27-28). When we listen to our pastor we hear what we need to turn from our sin and turn to God for forgiveness. When we listen to our pastor we hear why God forgives us. It's all because of Jesus' life, death, and return to life. When we listen to God's Word that our pastor brings us, we grow in our faith and are enabled to live lives that bring God glory. As you listen to your pastor, you find eternal life in Jesus Christ.

So listen closely. Among the many blessings God has given you in this land of freedom, remember to thank God for good pastors. They first listen to God's Word. They then share that word. And through that word, they bring you eternal life.