

Ezekiel 2:3-2:8—The Call to Ministry: The purpose of Our Calling

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Revision: The Call to Ministry: Counting the Cost

1. We must remember that God's plans are always what is best for us, even if they are not easy or comfortable, and they cause us temporary pain. Therefore, when we are in the storm, don't try to jump ship but instead ride out the storm and we will reach our destination stronger and closer to the Lord.
2. God's calling us to serve Him will involve great sacrifice—we will never experience the new life until we are willing to let go of the old life (sinful desires/pleasures).
3. If we are to obey God consistently, we must first seek Him through His word with our whole heart (see Psalm 119). If we have one foot in the world (seeking to satisfy the desires of our sinful nature with worldly things), and one foot with God (seeking to please Him, but not with our whole heart), we will be unstable—we will find ourselves held by addictions and constantly vacillating between loving God and loving the world. We will be the typical Romans 7 Christian: "And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway" (Romans 7:18-19 NLT).
4. God's commands are also His promises. Where God guides, God provides. God will never command us to do anything without also giving us the power to obey, e.g. overcoming sin, evangelising, and going through trials.
5. True humility results only when we see ourselves as God sees us—sinful and weak.

The Call to Ministry: The purpose of Our Calling

As we study the following verses that describe Ezekiel's calling, keep in mind the great commission. There are many similarities between Ezekiel's calling as a prophet of God and our New Testament calling to be ambassadors for Christ (see Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). We'll learn about Ezekiel's calling first, then compare it to ours.

Ezekiel 1:28b-3:15 NKJV

1:28 So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

2:1 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you."

2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. 3 And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 5 As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.

⁶ “And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. ⁷ You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

⁹ Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. ¹⁰ Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe.

^{3:1} Moreover He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” ² So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.

³ And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.” So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness.

⁴ Then He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ⁵ For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, ⁶ not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. ⁸ Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. ⁹ Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house.”

¹⁰ Moreover He said to me: “Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ whether they hear, or whether they refuse.”

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: “Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!” ¹³ I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. ¹⁴ So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. ¹⁵ Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

The Purpose of Ezekiel’s Calling—Speak God’s Words to the Stubborn and Rebellious House of Israel (v 3-5)

Ezekiel 2:3-4 NKJV

And He said to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. ⁴ For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”

v 3, 4 **I am sending you to the children of Israel... I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them:** God's message through Ezekiel was to all Israelites: those still living in Jerusalem and Judea, the exiles from the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom, and the exiles living in Babylon after being taken there by king Nebuchadnezzar.

v 3 **I am sending you:** "Prophets functioned primarily as messengers of God, and the critical issue in the conflict between true and false prophets was which persons had actually been commissioned (**am sending** = Hebrew: *salah*) by Yahweh. Accordingly, the most serious charge that could be levelled against a true prophet was 'Yahweh has not sent you' (see Jeremiah 43:2)." (Block)

Some things will never change—this is still the issue today. There is much said about false prophets in the New and Old Testaments. Jeremiah 23 is a detailed and insightful discourse by God condemning the false prophets that He never sent, but who claimed to be sent by Him. In it God describes several ways the false prophets harmed the people:

- * they keep people from being saved,
- * they stunt the growth of true believers,
- * they cause sin to abound in the church/nation by discouraging repentance,
- * and they will bring judgment upon themselves and their followers.

During Ezekiel's lifetime, tens of thousands would perish because of the message of false hope that we talked about last week, where the false prophets were saying that all the captives would be going home, back to Jerusalem and Judea, within two years (See Jeremiah 28:1-17 for the public dispute between Jeremiah the true prophet, and the false prophets).

v 3-4 **To a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 For they are impudent and stubborn children:** God sent Ezekiel to speak to a very difficult audience. Notice how God described His own people:

- **To a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me** (v3): The nation of Israel was rebellious by nature. Their rebellion was even worse because it was **against** Yahweh, the God who had loved them and done so much for them.
- **They and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day** (v 3): The nation of Israel had rebelled from the time that God created it, **to this very day**. They had constantly rebelled against God for their entire existence. They were traitors and rebels against God.
- **Impudent children:** Literally "stiff faced" or "hard of face"; cruel, grievous, obstinate—they were completely selfish, only doing what they wanted to do, unwilling to bend, obey, or comply with what God desired for them. Their attitude is shameless; they simply don't care if they are doing the wrong thing, just like the adulterous woman in Proverbs 30:20 who commits adultery with a man and then says, "what's wrong with that."
- **Stubborn children:** Literally "hard-hearted" or "firm of heart". They were uncaring, ungrateful, and unkind—like the insubordinate teenager who refuses to obey their parents—the stubborn, unyielding will that refuses point-blank to give way even when found guilty—they refuse to repent. They were continually unappreciative of all the love, goodness, and blessings that God continued to pour out on them even though they didn't deserve them. Remember that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4)

- **“Rebellious nation** is literally *rebellious nations*, in the plural. The word is the familiar term *goyim*, most often referring to heathen nations.” (David Guzik)

Basically, God is calling the nations of Israel (northern and southern kingdoms) a heathen or gentile nation. He is insinuating or implying that there is no difference between them and the other nations who didn't have Yahweh as their God. This is a big slap in the face for the nation that prided themselves on being the people of God. They thought that they were better than all the other nations because they had the temple and were keeping the outward requirements of the law. But God saw them as heathen because their hearts weren't right. *You can't just add religion to your life and think that God will accept you.*

This very negative description of the children of Israel is continued throughout the book of Ezekiel. “It is a characteristic of Ezekiel's message that he saw nothing good in Israel's past history (cf. chapters 16 and 23), and so to describe the people as both ‘heathen’ and ‘rebellious’ (i.e. idolatrous) at the very outset of God's word of commissioning is quite in keeping with the outworking of the prophet's message in the rest of the book.” (Taylor)

v 4 **You shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God”**: Ezekiel was sent to Israel to speak *God's* words, not his own. This was not about what Ezekiel liked or did not like; it was about being God's messenger. So it should be true for every pastor, preacher, Bible teacher, and Christian who shares their faith today.

Ezekiel 2:5 NKJV

5 As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

v 5 **They are a rebellious house**: The phrase **“rebellious house”** (literally, “house of rebellion”) is used over a dozen times in the book of Ezekiel. Instead of calling the nation the the “house of Israel”, God instead calls them the “house of rebellion”.

There is a principle here; the greater the revelation and responsibility given to us, the greater the extent of our disobedience or rebellion against God (the further we can fall) —we are more accountable to God.

v 5 **As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse... Yet they will know that a prophet has been among them**: *The important thing to understand here is that we are only responsible for sharing the message, and not how the message is received.* Ezekiel was responsible for accurately and faithfully sharing exactly and only what God said to say. ***The results are God's responsibility.*** Whether or not people listened, they would know that Ezekiel was a true prophet because what he said was true—both in the sense that it agreed with the word of God, and in the sense that the predictions he made came true.

“By this they shall be assured of *two* things: 1. That God in his mercy had given them due warning. 2. That themselves were inexcusable, for not taking it.” (Clarke)

This means that when we share the gospel with others, all we need to be concerned about is that we are faithful to share and teach the whole counsel of God—then we will never need to be ashamed when we stand before God (See Acts 2:27).

Application: Revelation Means Responsibility

v 3-4 **Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel... I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'** "After giving Ezekiel a vision, the Lord gives him a commission. If God has given you insights into His character or understanding of His Word, there comes with it a certain responsibility to share it, for to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48)." (Jon Courson)

Jesus said to the disciples in:

Matthew 10:7-8 NKJV

And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' ⁸ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give [give as freely as you have received—NLT].

We come to church to become equipped (see Ephesians 4:11-13) by growing in our knowledge of God through the word of God. Once equipped, we then have a responsibility, indeed an obligation, to use what we have learned to help others both come to God and grow in their relationship with God.

Think of a fireman. They go through rigorous training to fight fires and save lives. Once qualified, they are expected to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired to fight fires and save lives. To not do so is negligence—it's pure selfishness to have in your possession the ability and resources to save someones life, but choose not to do so.

Like the apostles, we to have freely received. Now it's our responsibility to give. That's always the way. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 12:48b, "*When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.*" We have been given the words of eternal life—and no one else has them—the gospel message is exclusive—there is only one way to the Father (see John 6:68 and John 14:6). Our responsibility is greater than that of the fireman. We are not just talking about physical death, but rather people's eternal future—spending eternity in torment in the Like of Fire. Paul describes our roles as ambassadors well in:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NLT

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin [to be sin for us], so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Then of course there is the great commission. It doesn't get any clearer than this:

Matthew 28:18-20 NLT

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Don't be afraid—speak boldly no matter what happens! (v6-7)

Ezekiel 2:6-8 NKJV

“And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. ⁷ You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious.

v 6 **Do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words:** “God warned Ezekiel that many would reject his message. *Their rejection would sting like **briars**, like **thorns**, and like **scorpions**—yet it should not drive the prophet to fear and despair.*” (David Guzik)

“Note how Isaiah (6:9–12); Jeremiah (1:17–19) and Ezekiel, here (3–7), were all given a depressing call. They were needed in a desperate situation, and had to be prepared for a large measure of rejection and even threats on their life.” (Wright)

I hope we realise that the situation we face in today's dark, sin loving, rebellious, and deceptive world is much the same as Ezekiel faced. Like in Ezekiel's day, in these last days “*people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. ³ They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. ⁴ They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. ⁵ They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly*” (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

Because of the condition of the world we live in, we must expect that there will be many who will reject the message God gives us, just like God told Ezekiel that very few people would listen to or receive his message. However, what is most important is that we are faithful—“*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Again, we leave the results up to God.

Also remember that “This difficult call was easier for Ezekiel to embrace because it came from a genuinely awesome encounter with God. Because he was absolutely convinced of the power, majesty, and glory of God it gave him strength and courage to stand against the stinging rejection of men” (David Guzik). Again, it's all about perspective—if God is big and man is small, then we won't be scared. Do I serve a big God or a small God? Do I need a greater understanding of who God is?

v 6 **Do not be afraid... nor be afraid... do not be afraid:** Why does God repeat this 3 times? Because God knows our human tendency to fear—we so easily forget who God is and fear man instead.

v 6 **Do not be... dismayed by their looks:** The verb “dismayed” is a very strong word, meaning ‘to be shattered’, filled with terror, disheartened, broken down with fear.

v 7 **Whether they hear or whether they refuse:** Again, we are to continue proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God regardless of whether people hear and respond, or reject it and us. Like Paul exhorted Timothy, he was to preach the word in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2)—which means *all the time*—not just when people like us or treat us well or when we feel like it.

“This tells us *when* the pastor should be ready to preach the word. He should be ready *always*. He should preach it when it is easy and preach it when it is hard. He should preach it when the fruit is evident and preach it when the fruit seems invisible. He should just preach it.” (David Guzik)

There was once a Church of England clergyman who was gloriously saved. When Jesus changed his life he started preaching the gospel to his whole parish and they all got saved. Then he started preaching in neighbouring parishes, and the clergymen of those parishes were offended. They asked the bishop to make the man stop. When the bishop confronted him he said, “I hear you are always preaching and you don’t seem to be doing anything else.” The changed man answered, “Well bishop, I only preach during two seasons of the year.” The bishop said, “I’m glad to know that; what seasons are they?” He replied, “In season and out of season!”

Application: The Fear of Man

v 6 **Do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words...** having the fear of man means that we don’t fear or respect God enough. This is a clear revelation or observation that our understanding of who God is is far too small.

If we serve a small God, then men will seem big to us, and so we will be scared of people.

If we serve a big God, then men will seem small to us, and so we will not be scared or intimidated by people.

How much we fear man is a clear and true indicator or measure of how much we do or don’t fear God—just like a thermometer measures temperature. Also, *how much we fear God is also a measure of how close we are to God.* Consider the following:

As I draw near to God with my whole heart → I see God as bigger, more powerful → Less fear of man

As I pull away from God → God becomes distant and smaller → I fear man

Paul understands the struggle it is to fear man and therefore be ashamed of the Gospel.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 NLT

So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don’t be ashamed of me, either, even though I’m in prison for him. **With the strength God gives you,** be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News.

So how do we avoid being ashamed of the gospel—where does this **strength** come from? Here’s an illustration that helps us to understand what Jesus said in some of His final words to the disciples “***I am with you always***”. In the great commission Jesus says, “*I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations,...* And be sure of this: ***I am with you always, even to the end of the age***” (Matthew 28:18-20 NLT). This is the New Testament version of what we are reading today in Ezekiel. God reveals Himself to Ezekiel as the God who has all authority over all the earth, the great God, the big God, the only God, and only then does He tell Ezekiel numerous times, “**do not be afraid of them.**”

In the Narnia movie *Prince Caspian*, there is a inspiring scene where the little girl called Lucy stands on the one side of a large, wide, wooden bridge with the retreating evil enemy army, all armed to the teeth with swords and bow and arrows, wearing body armour, and riding war horses, need to cross over to escape the Narnians. Lucy sees this vast horde of blood thirsty soldiers come at her and she raises her tiny dagger and smiles—no fear. It looks for all intents and purposes that she is about to be smashed, crushed, trampled, and run over by the charging army. Then the camera angle shifts, and you see that standing next to Lucy is the mighty Aslan, (in the allegory Aslan the lion represents Jesus, the eternal creator King who died for His creation as the payment for their sins and has all authority over all of his creation). Aslan roars, and the scene changes from sure defeat to an easy victory—the invading army lays down their arms in fear of the mighty Aslan who demonstrates his complete authority and total power over all creation.

A little girl with a tiny dagger could confidently stand up to an entire army simply because God was with her—the allegory is perfect. *Do we really believe that God is with us like He promised to be in Matthew 28:20? Do we act like God is with us?* Think about David when he fought Goliath. Do you think that David thought that God was with Him?

1 Samuel 17:45-47 NLT

David replied to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! ⁴⁷ And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. ***This is the Lord’s battle***, and He will give you to us!”

If we really believe that the God we serve is big, awesome, mighty, all powerful, all knowing, everywhere at once, and we trust His promise to be with us and protect us, then, like David, we will not be afraid of any Goliath. In any situation, we would say like David, “***This is the Lord’s battle***”—we will not be scared or intimidated by what others may think about us, what they may say to us, or what they might do to us.

As I have emphasised over the last few weeks, we will only know that God is “big” if we singleheartedly or wholeheartedly seek Him through His word and allow God to reveal Himself to us. David is one of the best examples of someone seeking God with their whole heart, and just look at how completely fearless he was. We must be committed to daily seeking God through His word if we are going to have the victory over our fears.

Again, it’s only when we do choose seek God with our whole heart that we will have the confidence to obey God’s “Go” (Matthew 28:18) and we will find without fail that God’s promise is true, “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Application: Overcoming The Fear of Our Sinful Nature

Paul links not being ashamed of the gospel with living a holy life in:

2 Timothy 1:8-9 NLT

So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. ⁹ ***For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace [help, strength, power, favour] through Christ Jesus.***

In a similar way to the fear of man, our sin can seem to be too big to overcome, and we will give into it, if we serve a small God. It's so easy to forget who God is and think of our trials and temptations as being too big for us; we feel or believe that we are not able to resist or endure them. However, we must remember that our sinful nature was defeated at the cross. As Paul said, God wants ***“to show us his grace [help, strength, power, favour] through Christ Jesus.”*** Our living a holy life is the evidence of God's grace (help, strength, power, favour) in our lives. When we continue to seek God we will find Him, and when we continue to ask of God, we will receive. Dear saints, take these precious truths from Romans 6 to heart:

Romans 6:6-11 NLT

We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. ⁷ For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. ⁸ And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹ ***We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him.*** ¹⁰ When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹ So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Do you see how seeing Jesus as bigger than our sin is the key to overcoming our sin? ***“We are sure [that sin has lost its power in our lives and we have been set free from sin] because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him.”*** (Romans 6:9 NLT)

The Solution to a Rebellious Heart—Submission to the Word of God and Making it a Part of You

Ezekiel 2:8 NKJV

But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

v 8 **Hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house:** The proud house of Israel (the house of rebellion), forgot, neglected, refused, rebelled against, disobeyed, and in at least once instance literally cut up and burned the word of God (Jeremiah 36:22-24)—their hearts were hard and proud. But for Ezekiel to be used, he must be different, he must have a humble heart. He must have a soft and tender heart that is willing to hear the words of God and surrender and submit to them, walking in obedience to them. He must be willing to receive correction and change as described in:

James 4:7-10 NLT

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. ⁹ Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honour.

Why do we so often struggle with reading the word of God? Why do we so often choose to block our spiritual ears, choosing to rebel against God's simple command "**Hear what I say to you**"? *I would suggest that it is because we don't like what it says! If we loved what it said we would read it more.* But because the word of God proclaims death to our sinful nature, death to our own desires and selfish ambitions, and with great clarity reveals the utter depravity, deceitfulness, and wickedness of our heart (see Jeremiah 17:9), *our appetite for it diminishes very quickly if our hearts are hard and unrepentant.*

However, if we are poor in spirit, having soft, repentant hearts which are seeking God, and we have broken spirits which are mourning over our sin, and if we are meek, having a soft, humble and teachable heart, and we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness (see Matthew 5:3-6), then we will be desiring the word of God like a deer panting in the desert thirsts for water (see Psalm 42:1-2).

So you see our desire for the word of God is an accurate measure of just how soft and humble our hearts really are.

A hard heart will seek its own way and will not want to submit to God's word. In contrast, a humble and soft heart will be longing to escape the world and will find its longing and satisfaction only in the word of God.

Take the time to ask God to search your heart. Pray Psalm 139:23-24. Be honest with yourself about where you are at with your relationship with God. Ask God to help you change. Put James 4:7-10 into practice.

v 8 **Open your mouth and eat what I give to you:** Before Ezekiel can be use by God to share the word of God to change others, those same words must affect or change his heart first—they must be eaten and digested. This is a great picture or illustration of how we are to take in the word of God (we'll finish wth this illustration). It's not that we just have some words or a message to share, but rather that we become the message. We become a living witness and example of what we are speaking and instructing others to do and be.

v 8 **Open your mouth and eat what I give to you:** In the verses which follow (which we will cover next week) God gives Ezekiel a scroll with God's words written on it and tells Ezekiel to eat it. So the context of this important verse is *eating the word of God*. This is different to just reading it. This means accepting it completely, wholeheartedly, taking it down to the innermost core of our being—it becomes a part of us, or more accurately, we become like it, more like God. This is the transforming power of the word of God—*"Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect"* (Romans 12:2 NLT).

God did the same with the apostle John in the book of Revelation. God, also in a vision, told John to eat the scroll with the words of judgement written on them (See Revelation 10:9). Just like with Ezekiel, John had to first “eat and digest” the word of God before he was able to properly share the word of God.

This is still God’s instruction to us today, nothing has changed. The road to blessing, obedience, and being used by God is always through submitting to and “eating” the word of God. Consider the following verses:

Jeremiah 15:16 NKJV

Your words were found, and I ate them,
And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;
For I am called by Your name,
O Lord God of hosts.

Job 23:12 NLT

I have not departed from his commands,
but have treasured his words more than daily food.

Psalms 119:72 NKJV

The law of Your mouth is better to me
Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.

Let’s now go through how eating our meals is a great illustration of how to effectively receive or spiritually ingest the word of God (Adapted from David Guzik’s commentary)

1. **Deliberate action:** Just like we deliberately schedule and plan time to eat meals each day, so should we deliberately and schedule and plan time to read the word.
2. **Readiness to receive:** Just like we are hungry for our physical food, so we should be hungry for the word of God.
3. **Internal reception:** Just like we don’t just smear our food all over our bodies, so the word of God must be more than head knowledge—it must penetrate the heart.
4. **Repetitious chewing:** Just like we must chew our food many times before we can digest it, so we must reread and meditate or think about what we have read numerous times before we will be taught the proper spiritual understanding by God.
5. **Complete reception:** Just like we need a balanced diet and to eat everything on our plate to be physically healthy, so we need to read the whole bible, and not just the bits that we like the most. We need a balanced spiritual diet as well—the whole counsel of God.
6. **The process of digestion:** For the food to be absorbed into our body, it must be broken down into small bits. In the same way, we must learn to break down the bible into its parts, understanding each verse and how it all fits together (Inductive bible study).
7. **Necessity:** We eat physical food because we must—if we don’t we will die. We need to understand that the same is true spiritually—not reading the word of God will cause us to be spiritually sick and weak.
8. **Sweetness:** Just like we enjoy our physical food and it’s a source of pleasure, so will our reading of the word of God bring us much pleasure if we have the right attitude—it will be sweet to our soul.
9. **Strength and nourishment:** Just like physical food strengthens our physical body, so the bible is the spiritual food that strengthens our spirit and gives us the strength to overcome sin, be bold to evangelise, to endure trials, to love, and to be obedient to what God calls us to do.

Summary

1. The message God has given us to share with people is difficult to receive and will be rejected by many.
2. Revelation means responsibility—once equipped, like the fireman, we have an obligation to share what we know, even if it is only a little—even a child can understand the gospel.
3. We should not be afraid because God is with us.
4. The fear of man is a measure of how close we are to God—the closer we are to God the bigger God will appear to us and the less we will fear man.
5. Overcoming sin is also a result of drawing near to God—we will only experience His power and holiness in our lives if we are close to Him.
6. Our hearts become soft only as we yield or submit to the word of God—*our desire for the word of God is an accurate measure of just how soft and humble our hearts really are.*
7. For the word of God to be effective in us, we must eat it like we eat our meals.