

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Rebels Without a Conscience”

2:1-7

There’s a certain romantic fascination with being a rebel. I know there is because ad agencies use the images of the social rebel to sell their products.

One current TV ad for MasterCard features a young Marlon Brando in a scene from *The Wild One* wearing jeans as a rebel motorcycle rider. It’s for their promotion to win the perfect pair of jeans. You want to be like him, a totally cool rebel free-spirit in an otherwise conformist world.

Unfortunately the rebel attitude can creep into our walk with the Lord. We can get tired of conforming to the expected Christian norms. We can begin to test the limits of our liberty, taking on habits and participating in activities that are on or over the edge.

You know what happens when a Christian acts like a rebel in his or her walk with Jesus? **They conform to the world!** Christians see them on or over the edge but the world looks at them and says, “Welcome back!”

They’re not rebels in a romantic sense. They’re rebels in a pathetic sense.

In our text the Lord Jesus will call Ezekiel and commission him for his ministry to the Hebrew people. No less than seven times Jesus refers to the Jews as rebels or rebellious.

And here is something else along those lines that is somewhat startling. In verse three the Lord will refer to them as “a rebellious nation.” He doesn’t

call them “My people,” or “My elect,” or “chosen” or anything endearing. He simply referred to them as a “nation.”

Though the Jews remained and remain God’s elect, chosen people, they were behaving as if they were just another nation in the world. They were acting just like the Gentiles surrounding them. Their rebellion against God had led them to conform to the world.

We want to be transformed, not be conforming to the world. Let’s see what we can glean from Ezekiel’s experience with the Lord.

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

We left Ezekiel on his face before the Lord. It’s the only possible response to a vision of the glory of God.

There are times when physical posture can be expressive of your worship. Kneeling for prayer or lying prostrate on the ground in awe of God come to mind, as well as raising your hands or simply standing in His presence. When it comes to posture at public meetings we like the solid advice of the apostle Paul. In First Corinthians 14:32 he tells us that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” One of the things he meant by that is we can and should exercise control over ourselves when in public so as to not cause attention to be directed toward ourselves and away from Jesus. So we look at our meetings and determine what postures are most appropriate to bring the most glory to the Lord.

People say, “Well look at Ezekiel. He was overwhelmed by God. He couldn’t help but fall down.” True. And he was alone, doing business with God alone.

Be ultra-pentecostal at home and be ultra-considerate in the meetings of God’s church.

Before we leave verse one please notice the title, “son of man.” It occurs over ninety times in Ezekiel. The only other Old Testament prophet

addressed as “son of man” was Daniel. In the New Testament it was a favorite title of Jesus for Himself.

In the case of Jesus it underscores that He was, in fact, fully human at the same time He was fully God. Applied to Daniel and Ezekiel it is intended to emphasize their utter dependance upon the Lord. They were mere men, but men whom the Lord would use mightily.

We see this in what immediately follows, in verse two.

Ezekiel 2:2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to “stand” but he could not stand until “the Spirit entered” him. Then God “set [him] on [his] feet.”

God commanded him to do something he could not do in his own strength and then immediately enabled him to do it by the power inherent in His Word.

Thus we are fond of saying that God’s commands are God’s enablings.

If you are a believer then you **can** do everything God tells you to do in His Word. You can love your wife the way Jesus loved and loves His church. You can submit to your husband as unto the Lord. You can raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You can obey your parents.

If you find you are not doing the things you are commanded to do in God’s Word there are two possibilities:

1. You are unable to do them because you are not saved.
2. You are unwilling to do them because you are rebelling.

We could also talk about those who appear to be doing what God has commanded but are really walking in their own energy. They are not really depending upon the Holy Spirit. They are not being led by the Spirit. Their trust is in their own discipline and wisdom and experience.

Having begun in the Spirit we do not want to go forward in our own energy. We must therefore remain in the attitude of being prostrate before the Lord and letting Him raise us up to walk as His servants. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.

Ezekiel 2:3 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.

I get a sense of great compassion in this statement from the Lord. Despite all His many promised blessings and amidst all His warnings His chosen, elect people had been rebelling against Him for generations.

Think of this in terms of your own children (if you are a parent). You only always want what is best for them. Any boundaries you set are realistic and with an eye towards giving them the greatest possibility of success. If your kids rebel you want to restore them.

God was simply stating the facts. He can still do that in each of our lives. If we submit our lives to Him for examination, He can say "You're rebelling" when we think we are being edgy and walking up to the line of our liberty.

Ezekiel 2:4 For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'

Those that think they are so mature that they can dabble in the things of the world are really acting like "impudent and stubborn children." Liberty in Christ, by itself, is never a measure of maturity.

The text moves away from the children of Israel per se to the prophet. They are his audience and they will be a very tough crowd. But the emphasis is on Ezekiel, on his faithfulness despite the difficulties these people will present.

Ezekiel is told, "you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'" Two things are going on in that phrase:

1. First, this is a call to be God's prophet. Ezekiel was born into the line of priests. He trained to serve as a priest but would never get the

opportunity to do so in the Temple at Jerusalem. Instead he would be God's prophet.

2. Second, his message was nothing more and nothing less than what God said. He wasn't to add or subtract from the Word of God as it was given to him.

With regard to the switcheroo from priest to prophet, it encourages us to remain flexible in God's sight and service. God is looking for servants to do what needs doing and not necessarily what they want to be doing.

With regard to the message, we must remain solid in the Word as inspired and authoritative - meaning it is inerrant and infallible. Even if we are in the minority.

Geno is going to present the leanings of those in the emergent church movement this Sunday night at Cal-TEC. Some in that movement merge Scripture with experience and mysticism, thus denying the authority of the Bible. In a previous study Geno did he gave us this quote from one of the acknowledged leaders of this movement, Brian McLaren:

Although I do find the term inerrancy useful...I would prefer the word 'inherency' to describe my view of the Scripture. (Meaning that the Bible contains the 'word of God' but is not the infallible, inerrant word of God).

Ezekiel 2:5 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.

Ezekiel was not going to be judged on results. He had no numbers to crunch, no thermometer to fill with pledges. It wasn't about how many people filled his auditorium or how many were baptized, as it were. It was about being a "prophet... among them."

Numbers and achievements aren't bad in and of themselves. It's just that they must be produced by a genuine move of God and not from our own efforts.

Let me say a word about prophecy. It means *to speak forth* the Word of God. It can, of course, be predictive as we often think of it. But it is really just speaking forth what God has said.

I totally believe that there is to be a prophetic sense whenever God's Word is taught. By that I mean it is God's message for you right now where you live and work. You should have the expectation, at least, that you are going to hear from God - that He will by His Spirit through His Word talk to you.

Sure, you are learning about God in general. You're learning doctrine and history and ethics and many other things. There is a sense that you are studying the Bible as if you were in a classroom setting.

But simultaneously you must have a sense that the Lord is in our midst and talking to you personally. You are not just learning about Him. You are learning of Him, learning from Him.

I took this so seriously that I always listened to every Sunday message more than once and every other message my pastor taught as much as I was able. I wanted to know what the Lord was saying to me through the prophetic Word as it was taught. I figured that if God led me to my church then He would speak to me from its pulpit.

Ezekiel 2:6 "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.

"Afraid" and "dismayed" were the natural reaction to how Ezekiel was going to be received. But he was no natural man. He was filled with, empowered by, the Spirit of God.

Their "words" would be weapons to inspire fear. Think about what you say. How will it sound? How might it be received? Do your words build-up? Or do they have the potential to tear down?

Their "looks" would be weapons to inspire dismay. Dismay can mean *to dishearten thoroughly; to break down the courage of completely*. Your countenance can do that to God's servant. Be aware of the effect you can have - for good or for bad.

Listen. If you serve the Lord in any capacity you will be attacked by words and looks. *Let it go!* Listen only to the Lord's words of encouragement or

correction. Look only into the Lord's beautiful face. Let His perfect and perfecting love for you cast out all fear.

The response of the Hebrews to Ezekiel was compared to "briers and thorns." It would be as if Ezekiel was coming to them on behalf of the Lord but they constructed a wall out of briers and thorns. Think razor-wire. Still Ezekiel must climb the wall.

Have you ever tried to climb over or through razor-wire? You're not going to get over or through without being wounded.

The response of the Hebrews to Ezekiel was compared to the danger of "scorpions." You usually get stung by a scorpion when you tread into their path. Ezekiel was definitely going to be crossing the paths of these rebels, exposing their hiding places. Cornered, they would sting.

Ezekiel 2:7 You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious.

This verse is a neat summary of the initial call of Ezekiel. He was to speak God's words to the rebellious "house of Israel."

Rebels and rebellious houses. Let's be careful those words cannot ever be used to describe us! Let's not live on what we think is the edge because it's really not the edge, it's just stepping back into the world.

We believe these are the last days. The regathering of Israel in unbelief to the Holy Land - something the book we're reading predicted some 2500 years ago - is happening. It gives credibility to the other prophetic trends we follow.

If you think you want to serve the Lord, do it now.

If you think you want to sacrifice for the Lord, do it now.

If you think you want to give to the Lord, do it now.

Do you want to be the rebel? Or the prophet?

