

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"How to Eat a Sweet Scroll"

2:8 - 3:3

Job said, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

What food is to the natural man, God's Word is to the spiritual man.

God's Word is compared to bread, water, milk, meat, and honey. Each metaphor in its context suggests many important meditations.

Three of God's prophets were commanded to take the metaphor of God's Word as food literally. They each were commanded to eat God's Word.

Jeremiah - "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" (Jeremiah 15:16).

John - "Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth." So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth" (Revelation 10:8-9).

The third prophet commanded to eat God's Word was Ezekiel and he does so in the verses we will be covering tonight. We want to see in his physical act the spiritual application.

Ezekiel is in exile, having been forcibly removed from Judah during the second siege by the Babylonian army. He is living by the River Chebar. One day the heavens opened to him and he saw a vision of Jesus Christ controlling the ebb and flow of the history of the world. The Lord was raising up nations and striking down nations according to His plan to come into the world as a man through the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel would never get to serve in the Temple at Jerusalem as a priest. He was instead being called to be a prophet. In Babylon he would first prophecy that the glory of the Lord was departing from Israel and from the Temple. It would be gone a long time. But His glory would return in a yet future time when the kingdom of God would be established upon the earth. Jerusalem would be its capital.

We are in the middle of God's call and commissioning of Ezekiel. In the opening verses of chapter two we saw that Ezekiel was commanded to do something that he could not do. He had fallen prostrate before the Lord and could not get up. But when God told him to "stand" he was enabled and empowered to obey by the power inherent in the Word of God. We thus learn the lesson that God's command is His enabling.

In fact we were told that the Spirit entered him. The Spirit is mentioned fifty-two times by Ezekiel. One-seventh of all the references to the Spirit in the Old Testament are in this book.

As we encounter Ezekiel in these next few verses he is a Spirit-indwelt man for whom God's Word is God's enabling.

So are we Spirit-indwelt men and women for whom God's Word is His enabling.

On his feet before the Lord, indwelt by the Spirit, Ezekiel is given a portion of God's Word and commanded to "eat" it.

What can we make of this?

We first apply it in a general way and say along with Jesus (quoting Moses) that “man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord” (Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

I would note that Ezekiel is given a particular portion of God’s Word that will constitute his ministry to Israel for some twenty-two years. While we are to take in all the Word of God, all the Bible, like food it is taken in a portion at a time.

In other words, there is an overall understanding that the Word is my spiritual food. But we must also sit down and take in portions on a regular basis.

Some interesting things happen as Ezekiel is commanded to eat a portion of God’s Word. I hope we can learn something from him. Mostly I want to point out what I’d call his predisposition to God’s Word. By that I mean Ezekiel had settled some things in advance of taking in God’s Word.

We will get more out of God’s Word if we, too, have settled these same things in advance of taking it in.

Ezekiel 2:8 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."

We must “hear” the Word of God. This would include any method of encounter with it: reading it, listening to it read, listening to it taught, etc.

But we are of course talking about something more than just the physical hearing. There is an aspect of hearing, a spiritual aspect, captured by Job who said,

Job 42:5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.

His “eye” didn’t literally “see” God because no one can see God and live in these current mortal bodies. No, there is a hearing that causes us to be able to see God. I’d put it like this: We want to hear the Word in such a way that we see God revealed in it.

Simply put, we're looking for Jesus in the Word. He said of Himself that He came in the volume of the book (Hebrews 10:7). The entire Old Testament is about the coming of the Savior. The phrase "volume of the book" literally refers to the knob on the end of the roller of the manuscripts of Scripture. He's there in prophecy, in poetry, in types, in metaphors – in every conceivable way. If He is there, we must find Him.

This seems obvious but even as a Bible teacher I find that there are times I can teach an entire study and not even mention the wonderful name of my Lord! We can get caught-up with important doctrines and details and duties and forget to connect them to the Lord Who loved us and loves us.

Did you hear me? **Everything in the Word is important.** But we must connect it to Jesus. That is how we are to "hear."

Next Ezekiel was told "Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house." There was a clear separation between Ezekiel and his fellow Israelites. He was to maintain that separation. The only way he might reach some of them was by maintaining separation.

We must be separate from those who are rebelling against God. It's the only way we might reach some of them.

Biblical separation is the recognition that God has called believers out of the world and into a personal and corporate purity in the midst of sinful cultures.

Separation is your commitment to a godly standard of behavior. It's up to you to set the standard based on what God has said in His Word. Here's an example. Daniel, a contemporary of Ezekiel's, practiced personal separation when he "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine" (Daniel 1:8). His was a biblical separation because his standard was based on God's revelation in the Mosaic law.

We say that you are to be in the world but not of the world. There should be something different about you. And if you are looking for Jesus in the Word then there will be because you will be being changed from day-to-day

to become more like Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate example of separation. He was constantly around and surrounded by sinners. He was the consummate example of being “in the world.” But, though He was accused of sinning by association, He remained separate and thus affected those He was around.

I think the best way to understand separation is to bring Jesus in to the situation. You don’t need any rules or lists or prohibitions if you are in a close relationship with the Lord. And you won’t do anything that will distance Him from you.

There is an attitude to cultivate before you even approach the Word. You’re to “hear” with an ear towards separation. Then you are ready to “eat.”

Ezekiel 2:9 Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it.

We assume this to be the “hand” of the Lord in His pre-incarnate appearance to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 2:10 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.

The scroll was unrolled so Ezekiel could see it better. Writing on both sides was a little unusual and signified a message or messages of great importance. It also precluded you from adding anything to it.

He could see that the content was “lamentations and mourning and woe.” If we want to compare this to physical food we might call this roughage. It was gonna be a rough message. We’ve already said that it involved explaining to the Hebrews that the glory of the Lord was departing from the Temple. *Definitely not what people wanted to hear!*

But remember our comments on hearing. Even in this lamentation and mourning and woe you could find the Lord. In fact, it was to bring His people back to Himself that these events were determined upon them. The Lord had reached out to them in every conceivable way only to be refused.

He must discipline them by departing from them for a time without ever abandoning them.

We want to teach all the Word of God and see Jesus in every part.

Ezekiel 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."

"Eat what you find" means eat what is before you. It was to be an exclusive diet of scroll but it included everything in the scroll, the whole of it.

We do not apologize for believing the Bible to be the authoritative, inspired Word of God. Everything in it; the whole of it. Indeed, if it is not then we've got nothing to say that is of any value to anyone.

After eating Ezekiel was to "go, speak." Ah, a reminder that we never take in the Word only for ourselves. The very nature of God speaking to us is that we might "go, speak" to others.

Notice that Ezekiel was told about going and speaking *before* he ate. This is another predisposition to cultivate. I want to **know** more Jesus so I can **show** more Jesus.

Ezekiel 3:2 So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.

H.A. Ironside is a Bible commentator you want to read. He has an interesting take on this. He says the phrasing indicates that Ezekiel took in the portion but didn't swallow at first. It doesn't indicate reluctance, only patience. He waited on the Lord before swallowing.

You might say that Ezekiel chewed on it for a while. While there is value in reading large portions of Scripture, and in reading through the entire Bible in a period of time, don't neglect waiting on the Lord over a certain passage for Him to reveal its treasures to you.

Ezekiel 3:3 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.

Ezekiel puts it all together. He “ate” and discovered the taste was “like honey in sweetness.” The scroll went down into his belly and was digested in his bowels. It was assimilated into his system, strengthening and nourishing his spiritual man.

Let’s review the predispositions we should cultivate.

- First there is a predisposition to “hear” the Word by looking for Jesus in the volume of the book.
- Second, I want to be practicing biblical separation from the world. I am to be in the world not of the world. Only by remaining separated can I hope to reach others.
- And reaching them is a third predisposition I must cultivate. My relationship with Jesus is intimate but never exclusive. I want to share Him with others.

God is always holding out a portion of His Word for you. Be predisposed to it.

