

[i wish i had a title]

:: ezekiel ::

So there I was, sitting in my Tuesday night biology lab, trying to acclimate to the smell of formaldehyde and the dead frog in front of me. The assignment that night seemed simple: **observe the frog**. But that task proved much more interesting and much more enlightening than I could've imagined.

It was a 2 hour lab, but we weren't dissecting the frog that evening. That was coming later in the week. We were to observe the frog without the assistance of opening up his body. Every 20 minutes or so we were to bring the observations we'd written up to the front where our professor was sitting. He'd look over our notes and simply say, 'there's more.'

We would return to our seats to further observe the frog. 20 minutes later, we'd approach our professor again with our additional observations. We'd hand him our paper, he'd read, then hand it back and say, 'there's more.'

Now, I was struggling to understand the concept of the assignment. I was essentially stalled in my observation and so on one of my trips to the front of the classroom, my professor quietly leaned forward and said to me, '*what color is the frog?*'

It then dawned on me that I had failed to report the color. I didn't write down how many legs the frog had. I didn't take note of his shape or any other major, obvious features. Suddenly, my list of observations became much longer. My lens had been adjusted to take a wider look at the object of my study.

I learned two things that night. **The first** is that there is always more to observe. The longer I sat and stared at that little creature, the more I found something new, something to write down, something to notice. **The second thing I learned** is that oftentimes when I'm studying something, I forget to adjust my lens and take a different look at my subject. I fail to either take a wider view at the larger whole, or I fail to take a closer view at the deeper workings. And if I never adjust my lens, I will consistently miss out on much that can be discovered.

As Christians, we are students of God's Word. We are to take the Scriptures and apply them to our lives.

2 Timothy 3.16-17 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

It is imperative that we study the Bible. That we learn from it and apply it to our lives. That is what we must do if we wish to enjoy the 'abundant life' that Christ provides for us.

What we find when we observe the Bible is that we will never stop learning *from* it or finding new insight *in* it. One of the reasons why is because of how this Book is organized. You have first the Book

as a whole. The inspired, inerrant, complete message from God to man about life and salvation and godliness. The love letter from the Almighty Creator, once and for all delivered to mankind.

Within you have 66 books, broken up into large sections like history or prophecy or poetry or narrative. Within those groups you have individual books which each have their own unique message and style.

Within the individual books you find specific teachings and characters and situations which each reveal something about God and man and our relationship together. They reveal how to follow after God and live the life that He has made for us. They reveal to us how to worship and how to evangelize and how to pray and how to treat the people around us and how to raise our children and how to be good citizens and on and on and on. Each book, expounding truth one story at a time, one character at a time, one teaching at a time.

Within each story or chapter you find verses and words that carry a huge amount of wisdom and information and truth. You find words like 'agape' or 'surrender' or 'Elohim' which we could spend *years* studying and talking about and learning from. You find types that speak of Jesus Christ. You find themes that are strung through different sections and many other rich stores of understanding.

All of this is to say that each level of observation is important and useful. Think of a microscope. Most of us have had this experience in high school. You have a little glass slide. You hold it in your hand and you can observe it with your naked eye. There are things to learn from that level of observation. But then, you slide it under the lens of the microscope, and to snap the lens into the 10x position. You've magnified the subject to 10 times it's size. From that observation you can learn much about your specimen. But, then you realize that you want to see more, so you rotate the lens over to the 40x position. Suddenly there is much more to see on this little piece of glass. And you learn marvelous things and see what you couldn't see before.

But as if that weren't enough, you have the 100x lens. And you snap that lens into place and look and find that a whole new world of observation has been opened up to you. There is a whole other depth to your study. Things you never could've imagined or conceived right before your eyes.

As students of God's Word we are to take the Scripture and observe it so that we can learn what God has presented us with. So that we can take what we find in these chapters and apply them to our daily life, that we might live with power and live with the strength and the peace and the grace and the effectiveness that God has made available to us.

That's why here at Calvary we endeavor to study chapter by chapter and verse by verse. So that we're observing the whole counsel of God thoroughly and methodically.

This morning, we're taking a break from our verse by verse study through Colossians and we're going to do a character study on one of God's major prophets. I really enjoy character studies, because sometimes, if we adjust our lens a little bit, we'll find something that we've never seen before.

Today we're going to be looking at the prophet Ezekiel. You'll find his book after Lamentations. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel. If you hit Revelation you've gone too far.

Ezekiel is a wonderful book. It seems to be one of those less popular books of the Bible, but within we find a wealth of knowledge and insight into the character of God and His dealings with mankind.

Ezekiel is sort of a miniature Bible unto itself. If you zoom back and take one snapshot of the book as a whole you see that it begins with God revealing Himself to man. The man is presented with a choice to follow the Lord. He does, and then God spends many years using this man to tell the world about their need for salvation and the redemption that God offers. There are miracles and visions and all sorts of messages to the people of the earth, and then, at the end of the book, the Lord gives a vision of the future. He lays out His plan for eternity and the place where His people will dwell. It's a mini Bible.

But let's look at Ezekiel the man. Character studies are useful because they are examples to us. The characters of the Bible were real people who really did and said what we read about, but they're also spiritual examples that God has given us so that we can line ourselves up with them and see how we measure up. Whether it is a good character or a bad character, we can ask ourselves, 'am I like this person? Am I like Ezekiel? Has God spoken to me in similar ways? Am I in the middle of a similar situation?' And when we line ourselves up with these men and women in the Bible we can gain incredible insight into our attitudes and our decisions and our relationships and our walk with Christ. And so, character studies are wonderfully devotional, but they are also immensely practical.

Ezekiel opens up in chapter 1 verse 1 and says:

Ezekiel 1.1 - Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel was a priest and he was one of the Israelites that had been taken captive to the land of Babylon. His name means "strengthened by God." And already we can start to see parallels between this man and ourselves as Christians.

Leviticus 25.23b - You are strangers and sojourners with Me.

*1 Peter 2.9 - But **you** are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Like Ezekiel, we are priests and strangers on the earth, looking forward to that day when we will be reunited with God in the city of heaven, the place of our eternal citizenship. And, like Ezekiel, as Christians we are strengthened by God, who daily provides the filling and empowering we need.

2 Corinthians 1.3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

1 Peter 5.10 - But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you.

Ezekiel the captive priest is our example. He was a Believer who was captive in the land of Babylon but there was a lot that God wanted to do in and through him. God desired to strengthen Ezekiel. He desired to establish him. He desired to show him mercy and to comfort him during his life. Ezekiel is a person we can observe and study and look face to face at and ask 'Do I look like this man? Do I act like him? How do I measure up to him and his relationship with the Lord?'

We can do that this morning by looking at his **visions**, his **message** and his **obedience**.

First, his visions. Ezekiel had some of the most mind-blowing visions in all of the Bible. He was privileged to witness some of the most powerful and glorious displays of God ever recorded.

The book opens with one of these visions. While Ezekiel sat with some of the other captives by the Chebar River he saw a magnificent vision of God. There were creatures and wheels and a whirlwind and a raging fire. There was a stunning brightness and the noise of many waters. In the midst of all this activity a throne came down, with the Lord seated in glory, and Ezekiel says in chapter 1 verse 28:

Ezekiel 1.28 - Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around [the throne]. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

And now it's time to observe this vision. It's time to question ourselves and search our heart and to ask: **'has God been revealed to me?'** I think we have a tendency to feel a little envious of guys like Ezekiel. He got to **see** this amazing vision. Yet, we should be quick to remind ourselves that we have seen it too. We have this vision and many, many others recorded for us in the Scriptures. We are not constrained to 1 vision of God. We have been delivered dozens from Moses and Elijah and Isaiah and John and Stephen and the others. And so, as we observe Ezekiel's vision, the question is: *have I seen God? Do I know who God is? Have I opened up this Book and seen Him revealed in His glory and His majesty and His power?*

Then the second question here is: *have I known His mercy?* How beautiful that Ezekiel says that around the throne there is 'the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day.' The rainbow, a symbol of God's mercy. The sign He created and put in the heavens as a covenant with man that He would never again destroy the world with a flood. That He would always offer a way out of destruction to those who would trust in Him. Have you known the mercy of God that surrounds His throne? That mercy is available to you today.

In Ezekiel chapter 8 there is another vision recorded for us. Zeke was meeting with the leadership of Judah in his house when the Lord fell on him and gave him a vision of the temple.

Ezekiel 8.5-6 - He said to me, 'Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north.' So I lifted my eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, was the image of jealousy in the entrance. Furthermore He said to me, 'Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations.

The people had turned to idolatry. They had perverted temple worship. They had abandoned the precepts of God and His word. Thus, God's judgment was coming on the nation. In this specific vision, God showed that the temple was full of wicked, ungodly things.

We observe this vision and are reminded of 1 Corinthians 3.16:

1 Corinthians 3.16 - Do you not know that **you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

We are now bold to ask ourselves if **we** have brought anything into our lives that would defile the temple of the Lord? Not just substances, not just deviant behavior, but *anything* that would divert our worship away from God and toward something else? Any idol. Any habit. Any attitude that might cause us to draw away from God. To draw away from serving Him.

There is another vision Ezekiel delivers to us. It's in chapter 9. It is especially chilling as we see God call for 6 men who have power to slay the people of the city. Then, a seventh who holds a writer's inkhorn. God instructs these men starting in verse 4:

Ezekiel 9.4-5 - And the Lord said to him [who had the inkhorn], 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.' To the others, He said in my hearing, 'Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare nor have any pity.'

Here we pause to remember that what we are dealing with is life and death. The individuals we encounter, the community around us, the people of the world are facing eternal death apart from Christ. God is perfect and holy and can not endure sin. But, He has made a way that we might be forgiven of sin, that we might be redeemed. And He has given us that message so that you and I can take it to the people around us who are moments away from an eternity in hell.

God makes this very clear to us in the book of Ezekiel. Again and again, the Lord says, 'hey, judgment is coming. Go and tell the people that they can be saved.' And to augment that He gives these visions, and then, if that weren't enough, He gives us the analogy of the watchman.

Twice in Ezekiel God talks about our duty as spiritual watchmen.

Ezekiel 3.17-19 - "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

Ezekiel 33.7 - So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.

We are the watchmen. We have been given the end of the story. We have been entrusted with the Gospel message that can save souls and transform lives. Like Ezekiel, we are responsible to share that message with the people around us.

We can observe Ezekiel's **visions** and we can learn fantastic things about our Lord, about our world and about our duty as Believers.

Second, we observe his **message**. Again, we see a parallel between the prophet and ourselves as Christians. Ezekiel's ministry had a purpose and the purpose was to deliver God's messages to the people of the world.

In the course of Ezekiel's ministry he spoke to people personally, practically and prophetically. Like most of the prophets, much of his message was about the coming judgment. The consequences of

sin and rebellion against God. But as you page through this book you find something beautiful; that when God sent a message of coming destruction, He followed it with a message of redemption. That when God showed them the consequences of their idolatry and their wickedness and their evil, He then outlined to them His plan of restoration. His plan to save. His plan to offer a way out to those who would repent and turn and trust in Him. In chapter 11 and in chapter 16. In chapter 17 and chapter 18. In chapter 20 and again and again God says, 'turn and live.' He tells them that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and offers them another chance. More forgiveness. More mercy. A covenant that if they will leave their sin and follow after Him that He will be their God and will restore them and establish them and protect them.

We observe this message and ask ourselves, *what am I saying about Jesus Christ?* How are we representing Him to the world around us? Are we offering grace and hope and strength? Are we telling people the truth that without Christ they can do nothing, but that **with** Christ they can do all things? Are we telling people that they are in *desperate need* of salvation and are we presenting them with a God who loved us while we were yet sinners, a God who died for us and rose again that we might be set free from sin and from death? A God of forgiveness and grace and mercy. Are we presenting to the people around us a God who can overcome the struggles of life? A God who can heal relationships? A God who supports His people? Or are we presenting something else? Something less? Something weaker?

In the 48 chapters of this book, God sends messages through Ezekiel to the leaders of Israel, to Judah, to Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt, to the city of Tyre, to Philistia, to Babylon, to Ammon, to Edom, to Moab, to the false prophets of Israel, to Mount Seir, to Gog and Magog and others.

And in Ezekiel's message we find a very basic observation: *am I willing to speak to anyone?* Am I willing to bring the Gospel to anyone that God might put in front of me? Will I behave like Ezekiel who spoke to any group for the Lord, or will I be like Jonah, who ran away when God called on him. Will I allow prejudice and spite to hinder my usefulness? Or am I willing to go down and meet with the people that God presents to me, no matter who they are? The Gospel message is for anyone and everyone.

Another simple observation is about our methods. If you look at the book as a whole, we find that Ezekiel spoke. He wrote. He sang. He acted. He used parables. He used models. He performed skits. He used object lessons in his preaching. He did many different things, all to deliver the message. The question for ourselves is: *are we open to new methods?* **The message never changed, but the way that this prophet presented the message varied greatly.** If we become too rigid in our methodology then we are not using all of our resources in delivering the truth. As we get older as Christians we have a tendency to become more rigid and less flexible. And we must remember that while the message **can never, ever change**, our methods **will** change.

There are many other messages that we could observe from this book, but we are short of time. We've seen some of his visions. We've noted some things about his message. Finally, we observe his **obedience**. Because all the revelation of God, all the words of God are of little value if we are unwilling to obey Him, if we're unwilling to go and do as He asks us.

At the beginning of his ministry, after God has revealed Himself to Ezekiel, He comes to him and says this in chapter 2 verse 3:

Ezekiel 2.3-8a - 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. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 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.

"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. You shall speak My words to them, **whether they hear or whether they refuse**, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house."

The first thing we notice about Ezekiel's obedience is that it isn't about the reaction of the people around us. Our service to the Lord, our ministry isn't about how *successful* we are, it's about how *faithful* we are. Are we being faithful to our Master in our lives and our hearts?

The second thing we observe from Ezekiel's obedience is this: don't edit God. Don't put spin on what He's asked you to do. The Lord is very thorough, He is very specific and He is full of compassion. He knows what He wants us to do and what He wants people to hear.

God came to Ezekiel and He said to him, 'Go tell the nation that they're in sin.' Then He cataloged their idolatry and their sexual immorality, their false teaching and their harming of the poor. That they took bribes and they killed the innocent. They gave false prophecies and used uneven scales. They relied on their own power for protection and they ignored the Word of God. They did all of this and God revealed to them their sin so that they could know why judgment was coming, and so that they could see their need for salvation. Ezekiel was an obedient messenger, because the job of the messenger is not to re-write the message, but simply to deliver it.

You and I are messengers, and we need to deliver the message that God has for the world. That means being familiar with His word. It means being in tune with the Holy Spirit so that we can hear from Him. It means putting our faith and our trust and our confidence in the Bible and obeying the tasks that the Lord sets before us.

Ezekiel the man and the book are wonderful examples to us because after all of this, after seeing the many words that God spoke and the amazing visions that he saw, all the things that happened in his life, we step back and pull the lens further as it were, and we see that Ezekiel is simply an example to us of a Spirit-filled Christian. And all that we see happening in this book is a picture of the Spirit-filled life.

The visions: seeing God. The message: hearing from God. The obedience: following God. Living a life that is in submission to the Holy Spirit so that we can enjoy abundant life, full of peace and power and love and effectiveness.

The word Spirit is found 26 times in this book. We see that the Spirit revealed Himself to Ezekiel. Then He entered Ezekiel. And then it lifted him up and it moved him from place to place. It gave him direction and guidance. It fell upon him and gave him the words to speak. He saw by the Spirit. He spoke by the Spirit. He lived day in and day out by the Holy Spirit of God. No matter the circumstances. No matter the situation. No matter the task. He trusted in the Spirit. And because of that trust and because of that reliance, Ezekiel was able to do all that God wanted him to do.

1 Thessalonians 1.5a - For our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance.

Do you know that for the majority of the book, Ezekiel is a mute. Able only to speak when God was speaking through him. For 30 chapters he only spoke by the Spirit and never otherwise. A picture to us of a life devoted to the Lord.

For over a year, Ezekiel went and laid on his side, immobilized by the Spirit of God, as an object lesson to the people how they had sinned. A picture to us of a life empowered by the Spirit to do anything that God desires us to do.

We see Ezekiel choosing to follow the Lord in spite of his circumstances. In spite of the hatred of the people. In spite of their rebellion. In spite of his captivity. In spite of his poverty. In spite of incredible suffering:

Ezekiel 24.18 - So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning *I did as I was commanded.*

At first to us this may seem cold and unfeeling, until we realize that the Lord had come to him and taken away his mourning. Because God had a message to deliver and Ezekiel had a trust and a hope that God's plan for His people is just and wonderful and gracious. He remembered how God had said to him at the very beginning, "DO NOT BE AFRAID." And he exemplifies the person led by the Holy Spirit. Able to overcome any struggle or sorrow. Able to follow God through any circumstance, through any difficulty. Through any valley.

Psalms 23.4 - Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Job 13.15a - Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

Romans 8.38-39 - For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you are not a Christian here this morning, I proclaim to you that you have much to fear. You are moments away from an eternity separated from God in hell. This morning, God is offering you forgiveness and mercy and grace. He's offering you strength and restoration. Will you receive it?

If you are a Christian here this morning, then I proclaim to you that the Spirit of the Living God who empowered Ezekiel and used him to change the lives of countless millions dwells within you. He dwells within you and wants to lift you up. He wants to fill your heart. He wants to set you above your circumstances and above your struggles and above your fears because we have been delivered from fear and sin and death because Jesus Christ died and rose again and sent us the Holy Spirit so that HE might give us strength and HE might give us the words to speak and that HE might give us eyes to see that the people around us are marked for destruction and we have the message of salvation. We have the Gospel of Grace. We have the Savior, the Redeemer, the Lover, Jesus Christ.

God desires to use you. He wants to fill you. He came that we might have life and that more abundantly. He has provided grace and joy and help for all that we experience here on the earth.

And He has given us the privilege of serving Him that others might have their lives transformed and their souls saved for eternity future.

Ezekiel was a Spirit filled man who loved the Lord and served Him faithfully. He is a champion of the faith. He was a remarkable man. But he was just like you and me. He was a person God came to and said, 'will you go somewhere with Me? Will you let Me into your life?' Ezekiel is an example to us of what every Christian can be. An example of how **your** life can be full of God's power and can make a difference in this world.

Observe your life. Observe your heart. Observe God's word. And see what what the Lord will do as you submit yourself to His plan and His Spirit.

Amen

[prayer]