

## **Preaching Copy: Ezekiel 2:5-7 “Rebels Witnessing to Rebels”**

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost-Proper 9

Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### **Text: Ezekiel 2:5-7**

<sup>5</sup> And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. <sup>6</sup> And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. <sup>7</sup> And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

### **Exegetical Statement**

Ezekiel, along with other important people from Jerusalem has been taken into exile into Babylon. He was training to be a priest when that vocation was cut short. Now, at the age he would've been serving as a priest in the temple, which soon will no longer exist, the LORD appears to him in a glorious vision of His holiness, power, and might. This vision comes from behind enemy lines, in Babylon, to emphasize to Ezekiel that the LORD is God over all nations, and that He is truly and really present with His people in exile. He calls Ezekiel to instead be His prophetic voice to His people who are stiff-necked, hardheaded, and will be unwilling to hear what he has to say. He gives to Ezekiel his Spirit to enable him to stand, hear this call, and to enable him to fulfill it. Ezekiel is to preach the word just as the LORD gives to him. He is not to be dismayed at their response, either physical or verbal, but realize that they are stubborn. Whether they listen and heed Ezekiel's message or not, when his prophetic words come true, they will know that he was a prophet speaking God's very words. That word will either save them or stand against them on judgement day.

### **Focus Statement:**

The LORD came in a glorious vision to call Ezekiel into ministry. The Spirit has come to us in the supernatural power of Baptism to call us. Through the Spirit we proclaim His message of salvation and forgiveness through faith in Christ, the same forgiveness that covers our unwillingness to serve as His witnesses in the world.

### **Function Statement:**

#### **Why it's important to know:**

We are sent out among stiff-necked and hardhearted people to be apostles bringing God's Word of Law and Gospel. We are to know that just as Ezekiel and the Twelve encountered resistance, we will too. And we are among the stiff-necked and hardhearted, especially when it comes to answering God's call to share in His ministry.

#### **What the hearer should do as a result:**

Realize that He is with us just as He was with Ezekiel. He empowers us just as Jesus did His disciples. We will receive the same kind of rejection that Ezekiel and the Disciples did. They are not rejecting us, but rejecting the LORD who sent us. We are not responsible for our hearer's response. The Word stands as the source of their salvation or as the judgment witness against them.

### **Subject Sentence: Regardless of reception, share God's Word**

## **Introduction: We Like to Be Liked, People Like to Rebel**

I like to be liked. I think that's true for most of you here today, you like to be liked. It's not a pleasant thought that there are those who actively dislike you. That's the reason its hard being a parent sometimes. Parents are occasionally going to have to make decisions that make them unpopular with their children, so unpopular that at times you may even hear the word "hate" come out of their mouths directed at you. We all like to pretend that Christian families are the modern-day representations of "Leave it to Beaver". For those who are too young to remember or have seen that TV show it depicted a family where everyone is always polite with one another, even when parents are disciplining their kids. Where the kids "acted out" occasionally but never really outright rebelled against their parents or authority. However that's not what life is like in the real world.

In the real world rebellion starts young, as can be witnessed by spending some time with my two-year-old (almost three-year-old) granddaughter. She can look and act like the cutest little angel. But just wait until its time for her to do anything that she doesn't want to do. For example when she doesn't want to leave Denny alone in the bedroom. She likes to boss her big brother around, and yell at him when he doesn't do what she wants him to. Denny, who has a soft heart for her will, more often than not give in. I think he feels he will get in trouble if she throws a fit. So when he and Nora are over, we let him hang out by himself in our bedroom to have a break. It's a "Nora free" zone. It used to be all he would have to put up with is her knocking on the door and yelling his name. When we heard that we could easily call her back into the living room to play with a toy, or watch videos, or go outside. But now she can open the bedroom door by herself. She will go in there, invading the "Nora Free" zone to see what Big Brother is up to. But soon she is grabbing at his switch controller, or phone, or whatever else he may have that she has decided should now be hers. Denny will put up with her for a while until she got too bossy, and will hear him say "Nora, no!" To this Nora responds even mor loudly "Yes, Denny!" Once, when this scenario was playing out not to long ago, I went in the bedroom and told Nora to come out with me and leave her brother alone. This time she looked at me and said "No!" I told her that she cannot say no to Papa. I told her I was going to count to three and if she didn't listen, I would carry her out myself. Well, three came, and she wasn't moving. So I walked in and gently but firmly took hold of her and carried her out kicking and screaming. She ran to Susan and cried, not wanting me to come near her for a while. She eventually got over her anger and warmed up to me somewhat again. But when it was time for her to go home, there was a kiss for grandma, but none for Papa.

Even at two she knows how to rebel against authority. She wants to do what she wants to do when she wants to do it. And she doesn't like anyone to correct her, she doesn't like anyone to tell her "No". Looking at our text today you might say that Ezekiel is being sent to a bunch of grown-up Nora's.

## Ezekiel's Call

Ezekiel is a young man from one of the lines of Jewish priests. He was probably in training, being groomed to become a priest himself when King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, and conquered Jerusalem. As a sign of his authority over them, and in an effort to force the remaining people in Jerusalem to comply with his edicts, and to pay tribute to him, he took back to Babylon the brightest and best Jerusalem had to offer. Anyone in a leadership position was a candidate, and Ezekiel would've been considered an important person since priests had authority over the people. He was looking forward to his vocation as priest, but that was taken away by Nebuchadnezzar. Our Old Testament reading finds him in Babylon, 30 years old, the age when he would've begun serving in the temple, yet there is no chance now for him to become what he always dreamed he would be.

The setting when the text opens finds him standing beside one of the irrigation canals in Babylon. It is there that a fantastic supernatural vision appears before him. It's coming to him from the north, the same direction that the Babylonian army came to conquer Jerusalem, as well as the Assyrian Army before it. But the One who is coming is a far greater than either of those. The vision is of the LORD God, seated on a throne, with mighty angels in attendance around Him. He is surrounded by brightness and fire, representing the power and glory of the LORD. It was by His mighty hand that both Assyria and Babylon came to Palestine, destroyed cities, and took people away as captives. Through these earthly means the LORD brought punishment and discipline to his wayward and rebellious people. In this vision Ezekiel is to know that the LORD God was in control then and is still in control now. And His presence here in Babylon was meant to prove to Ezekiel and the captives that He did not remain in the temple in Jerusalem. He comes here where His people are, to watch over them, care for them, and continue to call them to repentance.

And that is where Ezekiel's call comes in. He is being called by the manifested presence of the LORD Himself to a vocation greater than priest: to be the prophetic voice of God to His exiled people. But this will not be an easy task. **Ezekiel 2:3-4** <sup>3</sup> **And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. <sup>4</sup> The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'** He is being called to a nation of stiff-necked, hard hearted people stuck in their sinful ways. A nation of grown-up Nora's who only want to do what they want to do. They have been and remain disobedient to the LORD who gave them the Promised Land and Jerusalem, making a Covenant with them that He would be their God and bless them in the land if they would be His people and worship Him. They refused to listen and had been kicked out of the land. And they were still rebelling against Him, even while in exile. Regardless of whether they want to hear the message or not, Ezekiel is called to say to them only what the LORD tells him to. Not to water it down, but to tell it like it is.

**Ezekiel 2:5-6** <sup>5</sup> **And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.** <sup>6</sup> **And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.** As Ezekiel was told before, this won't be easy.

While some may smile and nod their head agreeably while letting his message go in one ear and out the other, many will react rebelliously. Ezekiel's ministry will be as pleasant as walking through briars and thorns with shorts on or sitting in a mess of scorpions. Yet Ezekiel is not to be afraid of them, not to be afraid of what they may say or what they may do or how they may look and regard him. Because Ezekiel too likes to be liked, the LORD reminds him over and over again who he is going to. "They are a rebellious house."

## **Our Call to Share God's Word with Rebels**

What the LORD says to Ezekiel He is also saying to you and to me, and to the Church at large. He is sending us out to share His word with a rebellious world. He sends us out with a message that the world doesn't want to hear. They do not want to hear that there is a God who they must answer to. The God who created some men and some women and didn't give them the right or power to change the role He gave at birth. The God who created marriage to be one man and one woman. The God who gave the gift of sexual relations for those who have given marriage vows in His presence, and not to just any who want to shack up together. The God who gives life as a gift, and regards it as precious, who sees all life, even the life of the unborn baby in the womb as precious. The God who declares that ending that baby's life in the womb is murder.

The world doesn't want to hear these messages. The world doesn't want to be confronted with a God that demands their obedience. And so, just as the Jews with Ezekiel, the world rebels against God's Word that we are called to share. And that can make life for us difficult. After all, we all like to be liked, don't we? We think "It would be so much easier just to keep our opinions to ourselves." But we are not called to share our opinions. We are called, in a loving and gentle way, to share God's message, God's Word, God's Law that cannot be countermanded by mankind, that is not open for debate. The LORD's instructions to Ezekiel also stand for us. **Ezekiel 2:4 The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'** We share with them His Word, in a loving and gentle way, but not His Word watered down. Not His Word changed to fit our current society.

And when they rebel against what we are to say, we should remember who they are really rebelling against. They may get angry with us and call us bigots, fanatics, sexist, prudes, out of touch with reality, or any number of other, more crass things. But we are not sharing our opinions. We are the messengers sharing the LORD God's Word. It's His message they are rebelling against. The anger they have directed against us is really being directed against Him. We should not take it personally.

But they aren't the only ones who are rebellious. When God sends us to share His Word with the unbelieving world, He is sending rebels out to witness to rebels. We too have a history of standing against God's Word. We don't want to listen and obey when the LORD tells us we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. When He tells us that we are to forgive those who have wronged us. When He tells us that we are to love and forgive the brother who gets on our nerves because He loves them just as much as He loves us. When He tells us to love all people regardless of race, color, or creed. And, of course, we rebel when the LORD commands us to share His Word with others.

### **The Message of Forgiveness for Rebels Like Us**

But that message He tells us to share with the rebels in the world is also the message we need to hear as rebels living within His Church. Jesus came to be the answer for our rebellion. He never rebelled against His Father but obeyed Him perfectly His entire life. So when He went to the cross, He could load up all the rebellion from your life and mine and take it from our permanent record. In its place we receive the credit He earned for perfect obedience. Jesus Christ, our Savior, loves us even when we are stiff-necked and stubborn. He sends His Spirit into our hearts and lives to show us our disobedience because He loves us. He does this so His Spirit can apply His gift of loving forgiveness and restoration from the cross. Through His Spirit He creates in us daily, even hourly, a new heart that wants to obey and new life that wants to serve our God and not our sinful selfishness. That's the gift we have in the resurrection, a new life lived out now in loving obedience to our Savior and eternal life with Him forever. The Gospel that we share is the answer for those rebels outside the Church as well as for us inside the Church.

### **Our Ministry to Rebels**

And we are not sent out alone in this ministry. Just as Ezekiel received the Spirit which enabled him to stand on his feet, a sinner in the presence of the Holy Lord, so too have received the same Holy Spirit. It is He who empowers God's Word so that it can change hearts and lives. And He goes with us and is there at work when we share the Gospel Message of Jesus Christ. He is there with the same power that filled that glorious appearance Ezekiel saw. He goes with us just as He did when Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. Now, He has not given us the same authority as the Twelve had to heal by anointing and to cast out demons. But He does go with us to provide what is needed for His mission of witness, both for us as individual Christians heading out into our Vocations and as the Church working in the world around us.

And we should take heart from the experience of the Disciples. Even though they were given miraculous power to heal and cast out demons, Jesus told them there would be those who were so rebellious they would refuse to hear their message or welcome them to their village. Jesus told His Disciples in **Mark 6:11 And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.**" In other words don't carry their rejection upon you heart as if it was your fault. By their refusal to believe they have brought judgment upon themselves for rejecting the LORD and His message meant to save them. As the LORD told Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 2:5 And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.** God's words of Law and Gospel come to convict and save. But if they are refused then they will stand in judgment upon those who refuse them on the Last Day.

But thank God our Savior is merciful, and loving, and patient with them and with us. While He marveled at the unbelief of those in the synagogue in His hometown, He did not give up on them forever. He went all the way to the cross for them and rose again for them. He sent His Spirit on Pentecost to bring many of them to faith. And He is still at work through us today to call to Himself the rebels living outside the Church, as well as call us rebels living within the fellowship of His Church back to Him. He is at work to keep us close to Him.

## **Conclusion**

Nora eventually got over her anger towards me. Even though she wouldn't give me a hug and kiss goodbye that day, she still wanted to play hide and seek with me. And the next weekend when she came out it was as if all was forgiven and forgotten. Now I know that won't be the last time Papa will have to lay down the law to her, but when I do it will be in love towards her so that she learns how to respect authority and be loving and gracious toward not just her brother, but others in life. Some of those rebels we are called to share God's word with including both those outside and living within the Church may also express anger over God's Word being shared with them. But the same Spirit that forgives me forgives them. The same Spirit that moves me to share God's Word can move them to forgive me, even when I may have lacked a certain amount of tact in my sharing. And when the word we share seems to have no effect, when those who hear it either actively rebel or passively let it slide over top of their heads, all is not lost. The power of God's Word is His Spirit, and He can work in hearts and minds long after we've shared the word with them. He can and does bring others into the person's life to reinforce what we've shared. And Jesus is gracious and merciful. He desperately wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Even rebels like them. Even rebels like you and me. Amen.