

Proper 9 – Pentecost Year B
July 7, 2024
Pastor Jasper Sellnow



Theme: Why won't they just listen!?

Text: Ezekiel 2:1-7

¹ He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” ² As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

³ He said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. ⁴ The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’ ⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶ And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. ⁷ You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious.

The Word of God we'll focus on today is the 1st Lesson from Ezekiel. Let us pray: *Lord, we must speak the truth of your Word. Sanctify us by that Word so we can be messengers of your truth. Amen.*

“Preach you the Word and plant it home to those who like or like it not...” Those are the opening words of our first hymn today. And while this might seem at first like a hymn written to remind Christians of what God wants them to do with his Word, namely, to share it with others... it was actually a hymn that was written for a congregation to sing to their pastor. And that really takes it in a bit of a different direction, doesn't it. You basically just sang to me: “Preach us God's Word, pastor, even when we don't like it... even when we don't want to hear it.” And of course, we all need to have such a request on our lips don't we. There are plenty of times when our sinful nature does not want to listen to God's Word... or does not want to actually apply God's Word to our lives. But it is precisely at such times that we need to hear God's Word more than ever.

And it's not easy. It's not easy for me as a pastor to speak hard truth to you when you need it, just as it's not easy for you to speak the Word to people in your life who don't care to hear it. *“Preach you the Word and plant it home to those who like or like it not...”* yeah, it's a pretty difficult thing to do because all people have a sinful nature that doesn't like to be called out on sin... doesn't want to listen to God's Word.

The man we meet in our sermon text today, the prophet Ezekiel, he knew what that was like... to preach to people who were not really interested in hearing what he had to say. But he also knew what God commanded him to do regardless. The final verse of our text summarizes that command well: **You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are**

rebellious. And that's just what Ezekiel did... he preached the Word. But many of the people didn't seem to care. In fact, by the end of his ministry, and at many points throughout I'm sure, Ezekiel must have asked himself countless times: *Why won't they just listen!?*

Really though this had been God's question about his nation of Israel for a very long time. Ezekiel lived around 600 B.C. But the people of Israel began rebelling against the LORD long before that. 850 year before Ezekiel it was Moses bringing God's Word to Israel, and it was Moses facing the same sinful attitudes as the people rebelled against God right after he delivered them from slavery in Egypt by turning to idol worship in the desert of Sinai.

They went on to refuse to listen when God told them he would protect them in the promised land of Canaan. They also disobeyed his orders to avoid pagan people and instead allowed the worship of false gods to become a regular part of their lives. And even when God sent punishments and prophets with warnings of various kinds to snap the people back to their senses they still did not listen. And so, just as he'd promised, God allowed a foreign nation to destroy their country and take them into captivity. And if you thought that would finally do the trick, finally knock some sense into these people... well you'd be wrong.

Seven times the seven verses of our sermon text God basically calls the people of Israel a bunch of rebels. He also calls them **obstinate and stubborn** in verse 4 – in the original Hebrew that phrase literally is “hard-faced” and “hard-hearted.” Inside and out these were people who had turned away from God. Their hearts were calloused by years of willful sin and indifference toward God and his Word. And it showed. Their faces shot dirty looks at God's prophets who spoke words of warning and coming judgment. Their tongues lashed out with angry barbs that stung God's witnesses. They had set themselves against God's message and God's messengers. And they had no intention of backing down. How frustrating it must have been for the countless believing witnesses whom God sent to call them to repentance. How many times did all of the faithful prophets, priests, and kings ask themselves: *Why won't they just listen!?*

And things never really changed after the time of the prophets. Do you remember Jesus in our Gospel reading today being rejected in his hometown? Not just ignored, no, Mark wrote that **“they took offense at him”** (Mark 6:3). And the apostle Paul, writing in our second lesson today, told the young pastor Timothy that to be a faithful witness would mean he had to, as Paul put it: **Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.** (2 Timothy 2:3)

And today too, don't we continue to ask the question: *Why won't they just listen!?* We witness a culture in rebellion against God. Our nation celebrates pride in homosexuality and perversion throughout the month of June. Our politicians bicker over how soon you can kill your unborn child. Greed is hailed as a virtue so long as we mask it as freedom and hard work. And laziness and theft are excused away under the guise of helping the oppressed.

And of course, it's not just the world “out there” all around us that has us wondering, *Why won't they just listen!?* It's the people closest to us. Your daughter stumbles in the door after curfew and smells like a bar. Your friend tells you she's found a church from another denomination that is more “loving” and “tolerant” than this one. Your son moves in with his girlfriend and expects you to get with the times and go along with it. Your husband ignores your repeated pleas to make God's

Word and God's house a priority in his life. It's painful, isn't it, when your family's reaction to you speaking God's Word is anger or apathy? Or maybe that thorn in your side is a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker – who seems to revel in opportunities to put you down because of what you believe?

The message of the Bible always has been and will continue to be “counter-cultural.” And people's reactions to you when you speak the truth of God's Word, well, they can often feel like thorns and thistles and scorpions – painful! Just like God told Ezekiel it would be. And Jesus says the same thing too: **Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also** (John 15:20). And the most frustrating thing for us as Christians is that we are just trying to help! We don't speak God's Words of warning out of self-righteous anger or in order to make ourselves feel better than others (at least we shouldn't). No, we speak **the truth in love** (Ephesians 4:15) – **with gentleness and respect** (1 Peter 3:15), just as our Savior commanded, so that everyone we know can hear that message of forgiveness and peace with God. We're just trying to keep people outta hell! *Why won't they just listen!?*

But you know the reason... don't you... You know the reason that so many people ignore God's Word and reject his messengers. You know the reason they won't just listen... Because you know your own heart. Yes, as you and I read the words of warning today in our Scripture lessons we don't simply read them as an interested spectator of the corruption of society, or the unbelief of family and friends. No, we read them as people who daily find themselves in a battle with the old sinful nature that lurks inside each of us. That corrupt nature that is the utter picture of rebellion.

Because when you stop and think about it, what else would you call the bad behavior you see in yourself so often? Do I not rebel against my God whenever I seek my own personal gain instead of his glory? What else would you call neglecting his commandments than rebellion, plain and simple? And when I refuse to serve in the callings he has given me – as parent, child, worker, friend – what would you call that other than revolting against the LORD? And the LORD does not mince words when he says through the prophet Isaiah: **rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish** (Isaiah 1:28). Can you imagine how often God must wonder about us: *Why won't they just listen!?*

Yet just like God did with the people of Ezekiel's day – even though they had rebelled against him – so too, despite our rebellion God sends us messengers to share his Word... to call us to repentance... to remind us of God's love... especially his love shown to us by his ultimate messenger, Jesus. Jesus – who is of course the LORD himself, but who also took on our human frailty and mortality and became the perfect Son of man. And he did this for a reason. Jesus says of himself: **the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost** (Luke 19:10). And that's just what he did. He lived a life that was marked not by rebellion, but by perfect obedience to his Father in heaven. The Father never once said of the Son: *Why won't he just listen!?* No Jesus always listened, always obeyed, and it was all for you and me.

Think of the night Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before he died... he asked the crowd who came for him: **Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?** (Matthew 26:55). The answer of course was no. Jesus didn't come to incite a rebellion. He came to die for a world in rebellion against its Creator. He came to

lay down his life for those rebels on the cross – the cross where the Father refused to listen to the agonizing cry of his Son who wondered aloud why his God had forsaken him. Yes, that saving cross where the Son of God was abandoned by the Father so that we would never be.

That's why Jesus came. He came to bring an end to God's anger over our sin-hardened faces and hearts. He came so we could know his Father's love and be given new hearts – softened by his Father's grace. He came to turn us from a house of rebellion into the house of the living God. And that's just what he's done for you! Just think how Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into your heart through baptism, through his Word, and raised you to new life... just like the Spirit raised Ezekiel up when God spoke his Word to him. And through the Holy Spirit you have been transformed from a rebel of a pagan nation into a citizen of the kingdom of God. A citizen whose home waits in heaven with your resurrected and ever-living Savior!

And just as God sent his Word again and again to his people Israel who daily fell into sin, so today he reaches out with his sweet life-saving Word to you over and over. Because **the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God** is still **slow to anger**, and **abounding in love and faithfulness – forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin!** (Exodus 34:6-7) Our Lord is a merciful God whose depths of love for us are unfathomable. This is what keeps us from becoming frustrated when we don't seem to be successful sharing God's Word. This is what keeps us from giving in to despair when we fall into the same sin today that we asked forgiveness for yesterday.

This is why we return to the sweet good news God offers in his Word. Because God desires us to taste his goodness no matter how badly we've behaved. And so as we continue to feed on his Word let's savor every bit of it – even the parts that might be hard for some people to swallow. And then let's proclaim that Word boldly as we announce the truth of God's law and God's forgiveness in Christ to the rebellious world around us. As we do this we'll reflect the heart of our gracious God... our God who loves to share his saving Word with all people, even with rebels like us. Amen.

The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Amen. (Psalm 100:5)