

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus for the gift of this day. Lead me through its joys and its trials, and guide me through everything that happens. Make Yourself known to me within everything that happens, so that I come to appreciate Your presence and all that You do for me. Lord Jesus, I praise you for this day; may I be found worthy of Your call and obedient to Your will. All glory be to You Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

If possible, say your prayers out loud today. Chose a time and place where you will not be interrupted, and tell God what is on your mind as succinctly as possible. Give time to think and listen in response.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the ministry of God's people on TV:** Pray for the many technicians and staff required for the production of quality TV. Pray that those with skills will be of great service to their Lord
- Continue to pray about the on-going unrest in North Africa and Arabia, for disenfranchised people and for the whole world.
- Give thanks for the blessing of communication, and the ability we have to get in touch with people across the world.

Meditation

Jesus, we glory in the love You show us;

You give us courage to stand in the struggles of life,
When we are overwhelmed by problems ahead:

You give us hearts to watch for the needs of others,
Despite the temptation to live for self:

You give us strength to stand and be firm in Faith,
To apply what we know, and be loyal to You:

You give us love when all compassion runs dry,
The power to forgive, when hurt by offence:

You give us the power to rise above the ordinary,
To do what is greater, and aspire to the best:

You give us hope that is real and a vision of eternity,
The security of knowing our ultimate destiny:

We glory in the love You show us, Lord Jesus.

Bible passage - Ezekiel 2:8-3:11

⁸ 'But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.'

⁹ I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. ¹⁰ He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe. ¹ He said to me,

'O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.'

² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. ³ He said to me,

‘Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’

Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. ⁴ He said to me:

‘Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. ⁵ For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel, ⁶ not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. ⁸ See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. ⁹ Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not fear them or be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.’

¹⁰ He said to me:

‘Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; ¹¹ then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them,

“Thus says the Lord GOD”;

‘whether they hear or refuse to hear.’

Bible Study

Review

After seeing a vision of Almighty God, Ezekiel obediently stood before the Lord; a man was required who would be an obedient prophet, and faithfully deliver God’s Word. The relationship between the Lord God and His people Israel had broken down (2:1-7) because of their disobedience, and this had led to their catastrophic exile in Babylon. But whether the Israelites were willing to hear God’s Word or not, it would be delivered, and the dramatic call of Ezekiel demonstrates the importance of his prophetic task.

Our passage today reinforces what we have already learned about the impossibility of what lay before Ezekiel (2:1-7). He was to declare God’s Word to people who would not listen, in the same way Isaiah had done a century and a half previously. This is what the Lord told Isaiah just after his call:

‘they keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking but do not understand ...’ (Isaiah 6:9)

Ezekiel was therefore joining a distinct and famous band of prophets who were required to be completely obedient to God, not knowing what their message might be. Our reading begins with God’s call to Ezekiel to listen and pay attention, he was not to be rebellious, like Israel! To test him further, a scroll was produced and Ezekiel was told he must eat it! Clearly, this is a visionary experience on the very edges of reality!

Other great prophets of the nation’s past, notably Elijah, Elisha and his contemporary Jeremiah, had to live on the very edges of society. Their messages were at odds with the wisdom of their times, and if Ezekiel was to join this select band, then his life had to change completely. From this point onwards the motivation for all his words and deeds would be God’s Word, implanted within him. Eating the scroll was a dramatic sign of this and Ezekiel’s obedience to God; the prophet had to be at one with the Word.

In verses nine and ten, we discover a little more about Ezekiel’s message. As the scroll was placed in his hands, he saw two important things. Firstly, it was written on its back and its front, and secondly it was full of *‘words of lamentation and mourning and woe’*. This should come as no surprise, but it is the first indication of the challenging message Ezekiel would have to bear. God could have tried to change the heart of Israel through love and compassion, but His past attempts at this had failed and the time had come for raw truth. If Israel was to turn the corner and find her way again, she would have to heed the warnings of her God. Furthermore, the scroll had these warnings written on both sides. Now in ancient times, scrolls were written normally on one side only, so the use of both sides indicates that there was no room for additions. God’s Word was not to be tampered with!

When Ezekiel ate the scroll, he found it *‘as sweet as honey’* (3:3). What an extraordinary picture this paints. The difficult prophetic message was also sweet, life-giving and sustaining to the prophet! Again, Ezekiel’s experience was remarkably similar to that of Jeremiah, who said:

'Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart ...' (Jeremiah 15:16)

The sweetness may have gladdened Ezekiel's heart, but in comparison to something bitter, something sweet can easily be swallowed, allowing more to be eaten. This suggests that God had far more for Ezekiel to do and say. Secondly, the sweetness of the scroll means that despite the difficulty of the message, it was sustenance to the soul. The privilege of Ezekiel's call outweighed all the hardship.

So after he had eaten, the Lord reiterated His call to Ezekiel (3:4-11). He explained that although it might not be difficult for a prophet to speak to his own people (3:5), in this instance, it would be. Israel's rebellion was more than mere turning away from the Lord, it was persistent and repeated rebellion, the nation was accused of having a *'hard forehead and a stubborn heart'* (3:7). In the face of this hardness, though, God had decided to make His servant harder. Ezekiel was to be like *'the hardest stone, harder than flint'* (3:9). Stubbornness would be met with resolute obduracy on the part of God, and Ezekiel would have to demonstrate this in his work. He would deliver God's Word whether it was heard and received or not (3:11).

What a remarkable picture of prophecy this is! There is no room here for kindly reassurance of a kind so often offered as prophecy today. Here, God is about the business of delivering the truth to His people, warning them of their sins so they will repent. Although this passage is from the Old Testament, God still needs to deliver difficult messages to His people today, especially when they go their own way. Ezekiel's prophecies were certainly important for God's people of old, but God still speaks through prophets to make sure that His people do His will today.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Why did God ask Ezekiel to eat the scroll? What do we know about the scroll, and what can it tell us?
2. Why does God command Ezekiel to eat the scroll? What does the eating of the scroll tell us about Ezekiel and his prophetic role?
3. What do we expect of prophets today? Do prophets today have the same role as prophets of ancient times?

Personal comments by author

There is a considerable wealth of information within this passage about the work of the prophet. A prophet is someone who is so close to God that he or she is frequently obliged to remain at the very edges of God's earthly people, and often with sharp words of warning. Too often, we look for prophets who will tell us what we want to hear about the love of God, the return of Christ, or the judgement of the world. Yet God will deal with all of these things perfectly well if His own people are doing His will. If they are not, then He will speak through His prophets to correct His people, and we should expect prophets today to do this.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think carefully about the prophetic role. Who are the prophets of today, and who are spoken of as prophets? Do they bring a consistent message from God? Do they say different things to different people? Do they say what people wish to hear? Use your God-given faculties to discern the difference between true prophets and false prophets.*
- *Read what you can about prophecy, and check out biblical references in the New Testament and the Old Testament to prophecy. Make sure that you do not speak about prophecy in ignorance.*

Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, break through the darkness and the crowds of human experience. Bring light to our dulled eyes, bring energy to our tired limbs, bring relief to our weary thoughts, bring zeal to our flagging spirits. Let us taste of You again, and find that You are good. AMEN