

### **A Hard Head and a Full Stomach**

When you were going through the vacancy and a dozen or so call meetings, you had a chance to refine what you were looking for. What sort of pastor did you want? Did you want a pastor who was married or not, young or old. What kinds of experiences would it be nice for him to have? What roles and responsibilities did you want him to do - outreach, teaching, family ministry, administration? As with any pastor, I'm sure you wanted someone who fit the biblical qualifications to be a public minister. You might've looked at Scriptures like Titus and 1 Timothy and prayed to God for a pastor like that.

Ultimately, you wanted someone who could regularly share the Word of God with you. Someone who would be there week after week, for worship and Bible study and devotions and hospital visits and shut-in calls and counseling - all drawn from God's Word. When you thought of all those qualifications, did you ever ask God for a pastor with a hard head and a full stomach?

As we give undivided attention to the want for workers in God's kingdom, we see how he prepared the prophet Ezekiel for his ministry by giving him these seemingly bizarre qualities, a hard head and a full stomach. But when we look closer, we see the same thing you desire: a leader to proclaim the Word of God. The LORD gives his ministers a hard head to speak what must be said whether people listen or fail to listen, and the LORD fills his servants with his own words, sweet as honey.

The prophet Ezekiel stands out because of the way he received God's message. Ezekiel experienced many extraordinary visions where God whisked him across the sky or asked him to perform strange signs that symbolized what would happen for God's people. Ezekiel was one of the prophets in exile. After the people of Israel were taken captive from their nation, God still spoke to them. And while Ezekiel was a unique prophet because of his visions, his message was quite similar to the other preachers. God sent this son of man to proclaim retribution and restoration.

For the first portion of his ministry, Ezekiel warned his fellow people about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Far from their home, the people held out hope that they would be freed from captivity soon to return to their

country. But God told Ezekiel to speak to these hardhearted people, to proclaim the consequences of their rebellion. Because they had continuously spurned the LORD and his ways, they were carted off to Babylon, and their enemies would burn their holy city and God's Temple to the ground. Israel had defiled God's house by their idolatry, so God let his sanctuary be destroyed.

Do you think Israel wanted to hear this? Nobody likes bad news. Who wants to listen to the preacher that says, "Sorry, I know you're already suffering and you're far away from your home, but that home is as good as gone. And, it's all your fault. You're to blame for this"? Israel's rebellion caused their captivity, and because they were a rebellious people, they rejected Ezekiel's message. God warned his prophet that this was an obstinate and stubborn nation. God went so far as to say it would've been easier for Ezekiel to preach to nations with obscure speech and a strange language - even though Ezekiel couldn't understand them, they would at least be willing to try to listen! But his fellow countrymen understood his words and made the choice to deny them. "No way, not true, we're not listening."

The trouble is that Israel isn't the only stubborn, hardhearted nation. Humanity is altogether a rebellious people. Our inherent sin leads us to play the blame game, shifting any fault off ourselves. We reject any insinuation that we've done wrong, and we close our ears to anything we don't want to hear. Instead, we look for messages that seem sweet to us, words of only comfort and prosperity, that we will always have a blessed life with no troubles. People today find it easy to chase after what they want to hear, even if it's laced with false teaching. And with such easy access to other preachers - whether by changing churches or simply watching services online or listening to podcasts - why stick around to listen to what you don't want to hear?

How could Ezekiel or any preacher be willing to go and preach such a hard message? It would be so tempting to shift the speech so that people like you, so that you gain a following, so that your church grows. In the face of such temptation and the rejection of hardheaded people, God gives his messengers even harder heads. He told Ezekiel he would make him just as unyielding as Israel, and his forehead would be harder than the hardest stone, harder than flint or diamond or any manufactured material cooked up in a lab today. Why could the prophets be so firm in their preaching, even

when the people stubbornly refused to listen? God gave them an unshakable foundation. His Word remains true, even when others reject it.

Praise be to God for pastors with hard heads! We need to be able to let the words that the world hurls against us roll off our backs. If the world rejects us, they're really rejecting the one who sent us. It's not about our fame or our prosperity or even "our church." It's about God's Word being proclaimed. Whether the people listen or fail to listen, God's messengers must speak: "Thus says the Sovereign LORD." And God grants his preachers the unwavering resolve to stand firm and proclaim what must be said with the hardest of heads.

If God's messengers are bound to face rejection and adversity, why would anyone line up to proclaim God's Word? It's no wonder that there's always such a need for more workers in the church. But every generation has continued to provide pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and more workers, all because God has filled them with his message. He has stretched out his hand and fed them the wonderful Word of God. In the words that the LORD speaks, these servants have tasted and seen that the LORD is good, and they want to share this sweet treat with others.

God told Ezekiel to eat that double-sided scroll covered with words of lament and mourning and woe. He wanted Ezekiel to take his words to heart, to ingest them, to completely let them fill him up. You might think that eating a lengthy roll of animal skin covered with ink wouldn't be the most enjoyable. But in this vision, it was sweet like honey to Ezekiel's mouth. Complaints and suffering and mourning taste sweet? All, ALL of the LORD's words are good and satisfying to the preacher, because God uses his whole Word to bring salvation. God fills up each messenger so that they become so eager and willing to share the truth with others.

Think of the best meal you've ever had or a favorite food. You love the taste so much that you've quickly become a regular at that restaurant; you ask for that meal to be cooked every day; you would easily spend your whole paycheck at the grocery store to load up your cart with just that snack. If it's so delicious, you tell everybody else they need to try this. Even if they're skeptical, you know that it's good. You're so passionate you almost become pushy. "Just try it, you'll love it."

Do God's messengers have the same attitude toward his Word? Taste and see that the LORD is good! How great is our God! Yes, his words do

proclaim judgment for our sins. But in the goodness of our God, we aren't the ones who bear that judgment. The Israelites wouldn't remain in captivity, and neither do we. Ezekiel prophesied about restoration, but not returning to the way things used to be. God gave his messenger visions of a new and greater Jerusalem with perfect dimensions and a Temple infinitely more beautiful than any man-made structure. How would Israel receive this rescue, this new life?

Taste and see that the LORD is good! In his goodness, God gave his one and only Son who spoke to the world. Jesus came and made God known, through the proclamation of judgment on sin and the proclamation of forgiveness to sinners. Jesus spoke both law and gospel so that all might be saved. How sweet it is to receive loving words of correction from our God! How sweet it is to hear that all those sins that he called out have been nailed to the cross with Jesus, and we don't bear them any more! As we open our mouths to be fed with the message of God, with all the words that he speaks, may we listen carefully and take them to heart. His sweet scroll fills our stomachs so that we're satisfied.

Think again of that favorite meal. So often, we keep eating because the food tastes so delicious until we say, "I couldn't eat another bite." Could we ever reach the point where we can't take any more of God's Word? His message is so sweet, so satisfying, that we keep coming back for more. God has given us this desire to hear his truth again and again, to keep digging and discovering what he reveals to us. God has given his Church faithful ministers who are filled up with the message week after week so that they can share the bountiful meal with those who are hungry for the LORD. Even when preachers face rejection, they're going to keep setting the table. Because God has extended this invitation for all to hear. The kingdom of God has come near. This is what the LORD says.

Pray to the LORD of the harvest that there would be more workers. Pray that they can have heads harder than the hardest stone. Pray that when they run into opposition - because they're working with stubborn people, their own people - they may stand firm in the truth of God's words. Pray that they can have full stomachs. Pray that these messengers have personally experienced the complete satisfaction that only comes through God's salvation story - both law and gospel. Pray that these words are so sweet to their mouth that they can't help but share it with everybody. We thank you, God, for messengers with hard heads and full stomachs. Amen.