

Made to Eat His Words

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Date: 04 January 2009

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. God, our Heavenly Father, you've caused all Holy Scripture to be written, to rebuke and correct us, to teach us and train us in righteousness, to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ.

So we pray, give us ears to hear and heed your word tonight for the sake and for the glory of your Son. Amen. On Thursday, you may have heard in the news that a garbage truck driver died at a level crossing in North Queensland near Innisfail.

Just one day later, would you believe, a bus driver with 12 passengers went straight through the warning lights at a level crossing in North Queensland.

No one was hurt. There was no accident this time. The bus driver was fined. But it's astonishing, isn't it, when there are warning lights and flashing bells or stop signs or whatever it is, and how frequently we ignore them.

And even when the risk has been sort of highlighted, even the day before in that case, with a fatal accident at a level crossing near Innisfail. But it's the same for us.

[1 : 1 5] We often ignore warning signs. The warning signs to slow down on the road. And yet, so often we don't. The warning sign when your oil light is very low in your car, as I found out to my car's death a couple of years ago.

Or the medical annual check-ups that we men, in particular, refuse to have when you get to middle age. Or the UV warning that the Bureau of Meteorology puts out, and we fail to heed it when we go on what looks to be an overcast day at the cricket.

Again, my stupid mistake. On Monday. Warning signs abound, and yet so often we're deaf or blind to them. What a responsibility it is to heed warnings.

But what a double responsibility it is to issue the warnings. To make sure things are as safe as possible. To put up signs where there should be warning of some danger.

Whether it's a level crossing or the danger of sunburn or speeding or slippery roads or whatever it is. And what a triple responsibility it is.

[2 : 2 8] When the warning is something that comes from God. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew, when he said this, in Matthew chapter 10.

Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. So how much weightier a warning from God ought to be when we're confronted by it or issue it.

And for those who issue warnings from God, what a high level of responsibility that is. As Paul said in effect on this same issue.

When he wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 2. Who is sufficient for these things? Ancient cities were usually walled to keep out the enemy.

Not everybody would live within the wall of a city. Many would live in the farms and so on around about the walls. But if the warning horn was sounded, they would beat a retreat inside the wall.

[3 : 36] The gates would be shut. And so there's a great responsibility on the person whose job it was to be on the tower of the wall of a city. Looking out for an enemy who might be coming with hostile intent.

The watchman or the sentinel as it's translated in this passage tonight. The horn was called the shofar. Linked to the name the shofar, the horn.

The long sort of trumpet type horn that would be blown. In this case to warn the people, the inhabitants of the town or the city. That an enemy was on the way.

So when the Babylonians or the Assyrians came down like a wolf on the fold. The horn ought to be blown. So that the inhabitants were alerted and race inside the city walls for safety.

Ezekiel the prophet, prophet called by God, was called to be that watchman. And that's what we see tonight in these chapters. But watch out.

[4 : 42] Because it's not the straightforward expected enemy that he is to be a watchman for. He's called to be a watchman not to look out for Babylonians. In fact they've already overrun Jerusalem.

Not to keep looking out for them even though in a few years time they'll destroy Jerusalem. Not to look out for another human enemy or army either. But as we'll see in this passage tonight.

A very surprising alarm will be sounded by this watchman. A very surprising danger to the people of God.

Last week we saw the opening vision of this book. Ezekiel ends prostrate in worship and awe before this vision of a holy God. And then he hears a voice.

Because as I said last week, what in the end matters most is not what he sees, but what he hears. And what he sees is indisputably God himself.

[5 : 44] Which lends authority and validity to the words that he hears. And the words that he then relays to the people of God. As a prophet. And so chapter 2 begins.

This voice, clearly God, speaking to Ezekiel. O mortal. Literally O son of man. One of those debated translations. This translation trying not to be too gender specific.

And probably O mortal one is fair enough in the thrust of it. But it loses then the connection when Jesus calls himself the son of man. One of those difficult debates of translation I think.

So O son of man, O mortal one, O human being. Is probably the thrust of it here. Stand up on your feet. No longer be prostrate. And I will speak with you.

And when he spoke to me a spirit entered into me. And set me on my feet. And I heard him speaking to me. Here is Ezekiel responding to God's word.

[6 : 45] But actually in a sense lifted up by God's spirit. And the spirit of God we saw last week moving in a sense the vision of God. And the same role of the spirit along with God's word will have effect on Ezekiel.

As we see in these chapters tonight and beyond in this book. He is charged then to be sent to the people of Israel. In verse 3.

That is to be a prophet. A messenger, an agent of God. To God's own people. Ezekiel is an Israelite. We remember from last week in chapter 1 that he is a priest.

He is probably of the tribe therefore of Levi. And he is 30 years old. About the time the priests enter the service of priesthood. But he is in exile. He is in Babylon. He is one of those who in 597 or 598 was taken off and transported away into exile.

As one of the leaders of society. But notice how Israel is described. It is not I am sending you to my poor people who have been overrun by this big bad enemy wolf.

- [7 : 52] The Babylonians. And I am going to give some compassion to them. Comfort. Pat them on the back. I am not sending you to my poor little people who somehow have been defeated by this vicious Babylonian.
- Exiled from their land. No. In fact there is no hint of compassion whatsoever in the way that Israel is described here. I am sending you to the people of Israel to a nation of rebels.
- That is the people of Israel. Not a different group. Same group being described. Normally when Israel is described they are described as God's own people. My people. And the word people has got a sort of stronger relational sense about it.
- But here he uses now the word nation. Goyim. And for Jews or Israelites the Goy. The nation. Or the nation's plural Goyim. They are somehow looked down upon.
- Despised. Israel in God's eyes is a nation. A nation of rebels. One of the most frequent word roots in these two chapters.
- [8 : 57] You will see it coming time and time again. They are rebellious. They are a rebellious house. A rebellious house time and time again. For they have rebelled against me. They and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day.
- That is it's not just a one-off sin. But it's a whole history of sin. Their ancestors have rebelled against me all the way up to this present day.
- Even presumably those Israelites in exile. As well as those still back in Jerusalem. Verse 4 describes them as being impudent and stubborn.
- That is it's not just a little misdemeanor coming out of some ignorance. A little slip up. There is some sense of deliberate impudence and defiance against God.
- There's a sense of hardness about those words. Both in the way they in a sense present a hard face towards God. But a hard heart of stubbornness in resisting God's word.
- [10 : 00] There is a hardness from the people of God to their own God. Is how they're described. And Ezekiel is to relay to them God's words.
- Thus you shall say to them. The end of verse 4 says. Thus says the Lord God. Not thus says me Ezekiel a prophet or a priest. Thus says the Lord God.
- And regardless of their response. Whether they hear or they refuse to hear. Verse 5 says. Not whether they hear or they don't hear. But whether they hear or they refuse to hear.
- That is they'll all hear. But it's whether they refuse to listen. If they turn a deaf ear. The word hear has got the sense of heed or obey as well. It's not simply did you actually hear audibly the word.
- But have you actually responded to it correctly. Whether they hear or they refuse to hear the word of God. They shall know that there's been a prophet among them.
- [11 : 02] That's in a sense the point of Ezekiel's ministry. That they will know that a prophet has been among them. That is that the things that the prophet says. Will come true.
- Because it's God's word. And what God says will happen will happen. And the words of judgment that Ezekiel will go on to warn them about. Do indeed happen. Seven to eight years later.
- Jerusalem is finally destroyed by the Babylonians. They will know that a prophet's been among them. Whether or not they hear the word and repent. Or they don't hear the word and they don't repent.
- They'll remember that a prophet has been among them. That God has spoken therefore to them. Well you would think that if you were called to be a prophet.
- You'd probably be pretty pleased with yourself. Commentators speculate that maybe Ezekiel was a little bit despondent. Because at the age of 30 as he now is. He would have been entering the priesthood.

[11 : 59] But in exile there's no priesthood in effect. There's no temple. No sacrificial system. What's he going to do? And so this call on Ezekiel might. We might think. Wow. I'm being called by God here to be a prophet.

Isn't that exciting? Someone in the line from Moses even. But not so. Remember for Jeremiah. Roughly Ezekiel's contemporary.

How difficult his life had been. Thrown in a cistern despised by many. Rocked, mocked and ridiculed. There's actually a lot of influence of the words of Jeremiah. Running through the book of Ezekiel.

Clearly there's some correlation between the two. The things of Jeremiah were known it seems by Ezekiel. In exile. And no.

It's not a good thing. Or an easy thing at least. For Ezekiel to be a prophet of God. Because his words are words of judgment. Chapter 2 verse 6.

[13 : 02] God says to Ezekiel. O mortal do not be afraid of them. And do not be afraid of their words. Though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions.

Do not be afraid of their words and do not be dismayed at their looks. Four times notice in effect in that verse he's being told don't fear. Clearly fear is a real danger.

A real possibility for Ezekiel. For they are a rebellious house. And a rebellious house does not want to listen to the word of God. You shall speak my words to them.

Whether they hear or refuse to hear. For they are a rebellious house. See all that repetition? For they are a rebellious house.

They're rebels. They've rebelled against me. They are a rebellious house. Again in verse 8. You mortal hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. And we see that language coming all the way through to the very end of chapter 3.

[14 : 02] Well God is urging Ezekiel here not to fear his task as a prophet. Because actually it's a daunting task. To be a prophet issuing forth mainly words of judgement.

He's warning Ezekiel of the obduracy of Israel. They are stubborn. They are impudent. They are defiant against God and death to his word.

Don't expect success. If you're going to go and preach don't expect waves of repentance and conversions. He's saying. How frequently that occurs in the scriptures. Isaiah 6 expected the same thing when Isaiah is called to his ministry.

Jeremiah experienced the same thing. Jesus says as much of his ministry and Paul warned Timothy the same. That is people will not respond in numbers of faith and conversions and repentance.

It's not an easy task to be a spokesperson for the almighty God. And yet how frequently today it seems to me. Ministers of churches or preachers.

[15 : 05] Rattle up their success in numbers. And think that numbers is a sign of God's success. And yet so often. Sadly it seems to me. What they preach may not actually be accurately.

The gospel of God. Ezekiel then is strengthened by God. He's encouraged not to fear the people. He's now strengthened for this task.

Who is sufficient for these things? Not Ezekiel. At least on his own. Ezekiel strengthened by God. Yes. But not on his own.

And so in the last few verses of chapter 2. Verses 8 to 10. Ezekiel is perhaps symbolically. Maybe really. Given a scroll to eat. A hand is stretched out to him.

And a written scroll was in it. The hand clearly is coming from God. Ezekiel is told to eat it. The scroll is written on both sides in verse 10. That is the word has already been written down.

- [16 : 05] Before it becomes spoken by Ezekiel. Often people think about how do we get the Bible. And how do we get the book of Ezekiel. Well Ezekiel spoke some words. And somebody wrote them down.
- And hence we have it. But actually the first stage is ignored in that. God wrote them down. Gave them to Ezekiel. Who ate the scroll. Spoke the word.
- And then again it was written down. Presumably. For our record. For subsequent generations. And for our benefit. Ezekiel you see is not free to make up his own message. That's part of the significance of this symbolic action of eating the scroll. It's God's word to him. Not Ezekiel's own invention. Or construction.
- They are words. The end of verse 10 says. Of lamentation. Mourning. And woe. Not a nice easy message. Not a pleasant message.
- [17 : 01] A message of judgment. Because rebelliousness. Requires the response of wrath. From almighty God. And so chapter 3 begins.
- Verses 1 to 3. With Ezekiel eating the scroll. And finding it as sweet as honey. As the end of verse 3 says. Again there's echoes of Jeremiah here.
- Jeremiah 15. Chapter 15 verse 16. Verse 16. Oh Lord you know. Remember me and visit me. And bring down retribution for me on my persecutors.
- Sorry verse 16. I'm reading the wrong verse. Your words were found and I ate them. And your words became to me a joy. And the delight of my heart. Same idea is found here in Ezekiel 3.
- Not because Ezekiel is looking forward to and finds it great to preach a word of judgment against his fellow Israelites. Not sweetness because of the message. But sweetness because they are God's words.
- [18 : 03] They are true and right words. And throughout in fact this book from opening vision to closing vision and all the way in between. The overriding theme. Over and above judgment or hope.
- Is the glory of God. I'll title this whole series. The prophet of glory. And so because it's bringing glory to God. Whether it's in judgment or the promise of salvation. There is sweetness in God's word.
- That is the perspective of God is brought to bear. That's what makes the word sweet. And again we see a parallel with Jeremiah. Similarly of course in Psalm 19.
- Your word is sweet like honey. Now this giving of the scroll to Ezekiel is to strengthen and empower him for the ministry that he's been called to and commissioned by God for.
- But it also sets him apart from Israel. He's an Israelite. He's one of them. And until God's hand just came out of the blue with that vision in chapter 1. He was presumably impudent, stubborn, defiant along with they.
- [19 : 12] But verse 8 says of chapter 2. But you mortal. You're not to be rebellious like they are rebellious. That is you are to be different. That is the calling to be a prophet actually sets him apart from the people.
- He's one of them. He's a human being. He's a son of man. A mortal one. But he's also to be different. He's a spokesperson for God. So if we're putting a line between God and Israel. Ezekiel is in a sense to be on God's side.
- And therefore in a sense distinct from. Alienated from in this case. His own very people. The people of Israel. He's to be different from them. Very like Paul issued the charge to Timothy.
- But as for you man of God. Shun these things. Timothy you ought to be different from others. As a minister of God's word. And in contrast to the false teachers in that case.

What's going to make Ezekiel different? Digesting the word of God. Receiving it in his heart. Is the expression used in chapter 3 verse 10. Ezekiel is being filled and nourished and empowered.

[20 : 19] By God's word. That will set him apart from the people. In his own behavior. In his own responsiveness. To almighty God. It also becomes his spiritual armor in effect.

Against the rebellious house of Israel. So having then fed him the scroll of God's word. God then reissues the commission. To be a prophet.

To be sent to Israel. In chapter 3 verses 4 through to 7. In effect it parallels chapter 2 verses 3 to 7. Sorry chapter 3 verse 4 to 11 I mean.

That paragraph. And it parallels chapter 2 verses 3 to 7. But now he's been strengthened by receiving and eating that scroll. And so the charge is issued again.

That is Ezekiel is not going to fulfill this ministry of a prophet. In his own strength and ability. But rather empowered. By God's word. Given to him.

[21 : 17] But in these verses the definition of Israel. Is even more striking. Even more startling in effect. Ezekiel is told in verse 5. You are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language.

That is you're not going to be a missionary far across the sea. And have to learn Mandarin. Or Urdu. Or something like that. No. Not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language.

Whose words you cannot understand. Because surely if I sent you to them. They'd listen to you. That doesn't seem quite the logical conclusion that you might expect. You might expect him to say.

If I sent you to people of a strange language. They're not going to listen to you at all. But actually they will. You see how he's putting down Israel. Because he goes on then to say.

That the house of Israel. Will not listen to you. For they are not willing to listen to me. It would be easier Ezekiel. To send you to China. Than to speak to the very people of Israel.

[22 : 16] Israel. And how often of course we find that. Where often it's the people who've never heard the gospel. Who are much more responsive. We've found that in this church over the last 10 years.

With many people from China. Converted. And becoming Christian leaders in our congregations here. At Holy Trinity. But what it's saying about Israel.

Is that they are so deaf. And so defiant. So rebellious. And stubborn against God. That it would be easier for Ezekiel to preach in a foreign language in China.

Or Australia. Than it would be to preach to the Israelites. Note again the comfort to Ezekiel. In verse 7. The house of Israel will not listen to you.

For they are not willing to listen to me. That is don't take it personally Ezekiel. You will be rejected. But not because of you. But because of me God. That is it's God who's being rejected.

[23 : 14] And therefore Ezekiel will be rejected. Often in Christian ministry. Even today. There is much rejection. Much of it becomes very personal.

In an attack against a Christian preacher or minister. And to be thick skinned enough to cope. These words of God of comfort to Ezekiel are worth heeding.

It's not because of you. But because of me. Of course sometimes their personal attack may be justified. But if it's an attack on preaching God's word. Which is being done faithfully.

Then it's opposition to God. Not to the preacher. That matters. Ezekiel is further strengthened or steeled for the task before him.

In verse 7 at the end. Because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead. And a stubborn heart. That's their problem of course. It's their heart. They're meant to love the Lord with all their heart.

[24 : 16] As the Shema. The command of Deuteronomy 6. Made so clear. But they don't. See I've made your face hard against their face.

That is Ezekiel. I've strengthened you. To resist or cope with their rejection. Their obduracy. Their rebellion. I've made your forehead hard against their foreheads.

Like the hardest stone. Harder than flint. I've made your forehead. Do not fear them or be dismayed at their looks. For they are a rebellious house. How thick skinned.

A preacher of God's word often needs to be. And in his mercy God has made Ezekiel hard. To cope with the rebellion. The deafness.

And the defiance. And again the exhortation in that verse. Not to fear. Because he'll be alienated. Mocked. Ridiculed. Ostracised.

[25 : 10] Because of standing with God. And not with Israel. It's a terrible indictment on the people of God. It's a terrible indictment on the people who've got the scriptures.

Who've got the Torah. The Pentateuch. Who know the laws. Who know their history. Who know the warnings. And the failures of previous generations. In the wilderness. And in the period of the judges.

And in the monarchy. And yet. Persistently. Perversely. Consistently. Failed. And were deaf to God's word. Their hearts are harder. Indeed. Than pagans. And the same sort of warning comes to us Christians.

Take the writer to the Hebrews. For example. Make sure that your hearts don't grow cold. Well how would you respond to all of this?

Ezekiel is taken aback. I guess. From this. Because we're told in verse 12. That the spirit lifted me up. And as the glory of the Lord rose from its place. I heard behind me the sound of the loud rumbling.

[26 : 14] It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures. Brushing against one another. And the sound of the wheels beside them. That sounded like a loud rumbling. We saw a bit of that last week. And then the spirit lifted me up.

And bore me away. I went in bitterness. In the heat of my spirit. The hand of the Lord being strong upon me. I came to the exiles of Tel Aviv. Who lived by the river Kibbar.

And I sat there among them. Stunned. For seven days. I imagine we wouldn't be much different. If we'd be confronted by this vision.

And by this charge and commission. To be a preacher of lamentation. Mourning. And woe. To your very own. But stubborn people. It suggests I think.

That Ezekiel was pretty angry. Bitter. Maybe it's a sort of. Why me? I don't want to do all this. Maybe it's an anger at God. For somehow. Giving him such a difficult task.

[27 : 11] Maybe it's a sense also. Being overwhelmed. By the magnitude of it. Some suggest that Ezekiel spent this week. Debating in himself.

Will I do this or not? Am I too angry and bitter? Am I going to be like Israel? Am I going to be deaf to God's word? And not heed this commission or charge? It may just be that he was waiting.

Angry. Bitter. Yes. Stunned. Yes. But waiting for God's next word. After all. Who is sufficient for these things?

No one. Unless God strengthens and supplies. Well finally after the week is over. God commissions Ezekiel to be the watchman.

The sentinel as it's translated here. The analogy of the watchman suggests urgency and danger. It suggests an enemy. It suggests a life and death situation.

[28 : 11] As I hinted at earlier on. But this is where the surprise comes. He's not to be a watchman watching for the Babylonians. He's not to be a watchman watching for an enemy of the Babylonians.

After all they're in exile in Babylon. Surprisingly. He is to be a watchman. Watching for God's word. Against Israel. For the real danger comes not from the one who can kill the body.

Alone. But who can kill body and soul in hell. God. At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me. Mortal. I've made you a sentinel for the house of Israel.

Whenever you hear a word from my mouth. You shall give them warning from me. God is both the enemy who's coming. And the one who sets up the watchman to alert the people to his own very coming.

Paradoxically. There's an element of grace in setting Ezekiel up as a watchman. But there's an element of in a sense. Heightening the culpability. For a deaf defined people.

[29 : 18] It's not new either. Because the same sort of idea is combined in Jeremiah 6. In the scenarios that follow. In his role as a watchman. The issue is not will Israel repent or not.

But rather will you be a faithful watchman. Or not. So in verse 18 to 21. There are a variety of scenarios of what might happen.

All of it is focused on the watchman. Not Israel. If I say to the wicked you shall surely die. And you give them no warning. Or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way.

In order to save their life. Those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity. But their blood I will require at your hand. That is you must warn them.

If I warn you to do that. Otherwise their death is on your head. Even though they deserve death. For their iniquity. But if you warn the wicked.

[30 : 20] And they do not turn from their wickedness. Or from their wicked way. They shall die for their iniquity. But you will have saved your life. That is your success. O watchman Ezekiel.

Is not whether or not the people repent. But is whether you issue the warning. That comes from God. That is you don't have responsibility. For their response.

You have responsibility. To speak the warning. And if I warn you to do that. And you fail. Their blood is on you. But if you warn them. And they don't heed the warning.

Then their blood is on their heads. But not on yours. Verse 20. Here now the scenario is about.

Addressing the righteous people. If a righteous person turns to iniquity. And you don't warn them. Then their blood is on your head. But if a righteous person. Heeds your warning.

[31 : 41] And stays righteous. And ignores. And avoids the evil. Then indeed you have saved your life. The issue is faithfulness. Will you Ezekiel.

Issue the warnings. That I will give you. Will you be a watchman. Their response. This. Is not your responsibility. Your responsibility.

Is to issue the warnings. That I give. What a responsibility. On Ezekiel. What a responsibility. That's placed on a. Preacher or prophet.

Of God's word. To be faithful to God. Even when it's hard. Even when it's a word. About judgment. About hell. And even today.

Like for Ezekiel. Great courage. I think. Is needed. For a preacher. To be faithful. To the warnings. Of God. In scripture. You think about.

- [32 : 37] The sort of gospel summary. That people in our world. Might like. Or what the church. Might issue. God loves you. And he's got a wonderful plan. For your life. How do we respond.
- When we see the. Sandwich board. And the. Person speaking. In the city streets. Repent. For the end is nigh. Cringe a little bit. Bit old fashioned. Isn't it?
- No one's going to. Listen to such a person. They're a little bit. Crackpot. But actually. The words of scripture. Issue more warnings. Than we might care to.
- Realise. And the gospel is. Emasculated. If we take judgment. Out from it. And yet so many. Gospel presentations. And gospel courses.
- That are around the world today. Are almost silent. On the final judgment. And the need to repent. The proper warning.
- [33 : 32] To people. In the church. And out of it. About facing the judgment. Of God. Is hard to find. In churches today. How many preachers.
- Abrogate their responsibility. To be. The watchman. To warn people. How many people. Will arrive. Before the judgment seat. And say. My preacher. Never warned me.
- About this. How many preachers. Will arrive there. And find the blood. Of others. On their heads. Of course.
- People don't want. To hear about judgment. Nobody wants to hear. About facing the judgment seat. Of Christ. On the day of his return. Itching ears. Are flocking. To hear. Feel good stuff. The Francis McNabs.
- Of Collins Street. All that. Garbage. And heresy. But that's what the crowds. Like to hear. God loves you. You're okay. Keep on living. Have a fulfilled life. Now. There's elements of.
- [34 : 28] Truth in some of that. And certainly. God loves us. But we can't divorce that. From the very real danger. Of facing the judgment. Of God. God. It's a fearful thing.
- To fall into the hands. Of the living God. What matters. Is faithfulness. In warning people. Not success in numbers. A faithfulness.
- That requires. Courage. To preach. The word of God. Again. Ezekiel. Is confronted by. Briefly now. A vision.
- Like he saw. We saw last week. In chapter one. In chapter three. Verses 22 and 23. Three. Again. I think. A reiteration. Of this is God's word. And God. Is the one to fear.
- Not the Israelites. Even those. In exile. But then. Another surprise. Ezekiel. We've been told. Is to be. Is to be the judge. To be the watchman. Who goes to the people.
- [35 : 23] And warns them. About judgment. So we expect. God. To open his mouth. Wide. And loud. And shout out. The message. Clearly. But what do we find.
- In verse 24. The spirit entered into me. And set me on my feet. And he spoke with me. And said to me. Go and speak to everyone. No. No. Look what it says. At the end of verse 24. Go shut yourself.
- Inside your house. Well. That's a bit of a surprise. Isn't it. For somebody who's called. To be a watchman. We'd expect him to be. On the top of the tower. Speaking out. So that everybody will hear.
- Go shut yourself. Inside your house. As for you mortal. Cords shall be placed on you. And you shall be bound with them. So that you cannot go out. Among the people. Whether God's doing that.
- Or the people are doing that. Or even Ezekiel might do it to himself. In a sense. Maybe doesn't matter. Probably the people are doing this. And I will make your tongue. Cling to the roof of your mouth.

[36 : 18] It seems as though God is self-defeating here. He's called him to be a watchman. To proclaim the warning. But your tongue is going to stick to your mouth. Can't speak a word. Silence.

And for seven and a half years it seems. Ezekiel was silent. Dumb. Unable to speak. God's accept. Accept. What God said to him to say.

See verse 27. But when I speak with you. I'll open your mouth. And you shall say to them. Thus says the Lord. For seven and a half years. Presumably. Ezekiel could not say to his wife.

Could we have roast lamb for dinner. Ezekiel could not say. While you're down at the shops. Could you buy this. For seven and a half years. Ezekiel could not say. I want to pray for Israel.

Out loud. Here now. He's dumb. Speechless. The only words. Ezekiel could not say. Ezekiel could not say. And a half years.

[37 : 16] One and a half years. Were the exact words. God gave him. Words of lamentation. Woe. And mourning. What an astonishing restriction.

Imagine people thinking. How odd this character. Ezekiel is. Modern commentators. List a whole variety. Of obscure medical conditions. they believe he suffered from. They're all wrong.

This was God's doing. A desperate measure for desperate times. These are people who've failed to hear the warnings of generations of prophets. They've failed to hear the warnings of the overrunning of Jerusalem in 598.

And now five years later in exile, they're still oblivious to what God is doing. Desperate measures require desperate times. There is a prophet of God whose only words for seven and a half years are the words we find from this chapter onwards to about chapter 32 or 33.

It doesn't take long to speak those words. There must have been a lot of silence in all of those years. Preaching judgment is never easy.

[38 : 31] How tempting it is to think that God is a sort of benign, warm, fuzzy. And yet to offer that to our world is a cruel hope.

That's why God steals and strengthens Ezekiel. Why he makes him hard. Why he gives him that scroll to eat and digest. Why he gives him a vision of God and so clearly the word of God and the motivation of the spirit of God.

Seven and a half years later, Jerusalem was destroyed, finally, by Nebuchadnezzar. The temple brought down to its foundations. God's wrath unleashed as Ezekiel prophesied.

Ezekiel stands in some ways as a model even for preachers today. For the day is surely coming. A day of judgment.

A day of the Lord's return. Who is sufficient for such things? No one. In their own strength and ability. Unless called, strengthened and supplied by God.

[39 : 42] At root, Israel's heart was hard. Recalcitrant. The prophets' warning. God's word.

The political circumstances. Did not change their heart. What's needed to change a heart? What's needed to bring repentance? What's needed to avert judgment?

We're told that Israel's heart was stubborn in chapter 3. What's needed? In chapter 36, Ezekiel promises a new heart.

But not immediately. A new heart of flesh, not a heart of stone. Hope beyond judgment after the fall of Jerusalem. A hope that will be realized in a new covenant.

A hope of a circumcised heart. Because it's only the death of Jesus that changes the heart. It's only the death of Jesus that circumcises the heart.

[40 : 40] That exchanges a heart of stone for a heart of flesh. It's only the death of Jesus that is powerful enough to change a recalcitrant, stubborn person on the inside.

Powerful death when you think about it. Powerful blood. Only the death of Jesus changes lamentation, woe and mourning into the joy of redemption and forgiveness.

Unless our hearts are changed by Jesus' death. And that's why we are not finished by Jesus' death. And that's why we are not finished by Jesus' death. Judgment looms. Ezekiel's word, you see, continues to warn us that we have so many more pieces of the jigsaw clearly given to us.

He remains a watchman for God, not only to the exiles of Babylon, but to our world today. With urgency, he urges us to repent.

To come before the judge Jesus with a new heart made possible by the death of Jesus, our saviour.

[41 : 52] Let's pray as we respond to God's word. Lord God Almighty, it is a fearful thing to fall into your hands.

It is a terrifying thing to arrive at the judgment seat of your son unprepared. with stubborn hearts, deaf to your word.

Lord our God, you have given us so many warnings in the scriptures through history that we will all face one day your judgment throne.

Lord, in your mercy, open our ears to hear your word. Change our hearts from stone to flesh.

May the power of the death of Jesus change us from the inside so that on that final day we may stand with confidence not in ourselves but in him.

[43 : 14] Forgiven, redeemed, saved, saved, transformed into his image, transformed into glory.

O God, we pray for our world. We pray for the church in various parts of the world where your gospel has been distorted by false preachers, by watchmen who refuse to warn the people.

have mercy, Lord God, on your people. Take away those false watchmen. Strengthen, steal your spokespeople to be faithful to your word even when it's hard.

Thicken their skins against rejection. Help them to persevere being faithful and not looking for human praise. Lord our God, we pray for this world that is so defiant against you, so deaf to your word, so arrogant in mocking your word.

In mercy, Lord God, bring this world to its knees before the judgment seat of Christ in repentance and faith.

[44 : 43] Lord God, we thank you that your word is so powerful, a two-edged sword and when applied by your spirit can pierce to the very inner core of a person's being.

We thank you, Lord God, that your word does not return to you empty. So, Lord God, please keep raising up laborers into your harvest in this country, in the majority world, all over the place to be faithful, loyal servants of your word, preaching it with faith, courage and boldness and love.

And our God, if indeed our own hearts are stubborn or cold or becoming dried up, have mercy, Lord God, and soften our hearts, bring us back to our first love, back to you.

help us to persevere with those of our family, friends, neighbors, colleagues who are not Christian, maybe who've turned away from you, maybe have never embraced you.

Help us to persevere in promoting your gospel to them. Our Lord God, we pray for this church, we pray for the Belgrave Heights ministry, we pray for the Langham preaching ministry, we pray for all other ministries and churches where your word is kept and upheld and pray that you'll strengthen and guard such ministries, bring eternal fruit through them, we pray.

[46 : 28] Lord our God, we thank you that you in your mercy raised up Ezekiel for such an extraordinarily difficult ministry.

Thank you for the testimony of that in this book. Keep teaching us and writing your word on our hearts, we pray, that we may be rebuked and corrected, taught and trained in righteousness, equipped for every good work, wise for salvation in Christ, and ready to stand before you on the final day, singing your praise and the praise of your Son.

upon? sermon.