

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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Carrie Gleeson
Ezekiel
Ezekiel 36:24-32**

Good morning! Welcome! All who are visiting or members, we are so glad you are here. My name is Carrie Gleeson. I am the director of Student Ministries, so along with Van Chounlamountry, I get to spend all of my time with our students and leaders and volunteer teams. Student Ministries and Kids' Ministries run all of our own camps during the summertime, and we just returned from taking 140 senior high students to Colorado along with 40 adult leaders. They had a blast taking hikes at 5:00 in the morning. The hikes were optional and I opted out of every one of them. There are some things that sleep is just more important than! The students did so many things. They played volleyball and hung in hammocks, and at night they got to hear about how Jesus wants to have an encounter with us and through that encounter, transform us. It was beautiful and they responded in many ways. Some of them took really big steps of faith and some of them took baby steps of faith and we are praising God for all of it. That's a little bit about Student Ministries right now.

We are continuing our series on the prophets. We've covered Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Isaiah, Amos, and this morning we are going to be looking at Ezekiel. The prophets have a lot to teach us. Some of their lessons are not lessons we want to hear; they aren't lessons we want to be taught because some of their lessons are pretty harsh. God speaks through His prophets in a very direct and bold way. Sometimes that's not what we are looking for in life. I can only imagine some of the prophets not wanting to teach it, too. I kept thinking to myself as I was studying Ezekiel, "You know what, God? I don't really love this. I mean, I don't want to be Your messenger." I can imagine that's how some of them felt, but they were compelled by the message they were receiving and the God they served to go to a people who needed time out or who were in time out. Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites would draw near to God and love Him and then they would say, "Nope, we've got this. We're good. We don't need You." and they would become very rebellious. This made me think of a verse in Hebrews that says,

¹¹ No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way [Hebrews 12:11].

So we are going to dive into Ezekiel this morning and get to know this prophet a little bit better, but first, let's pray.

Jesus, we thank You for the lessons the prophets have for us. We thank You that we can spend an extended amount of time sitting in the Old Testament, learning from their voices. We pray that Your Holy Spirit would fill this room this morning, that we would hear what You would like us to hear and learn what You would like us to learn, and that our

hearts and ears and eyes would be open to You and You alone. Speak, Lord. In Your Name, we pray. Amen.

Let's get a little background on where Ezekiel was. At the time Ezekiel was called to be a prophet, the Babylonian Empire ruled over the entire region of what is now the Middle East. The Babylonians just kept extending their kingdom and eventually they reached Jerusalem. They took many Jews and their king into captivity and brought them back to Babylon where they lived in exile as refugees and slaves. The Babylonians were under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, a king we hear about often in another book of the Bible in a story about three men and a furnace. Nebuchadnezzar was on a kick of taking as much land as possible. Ezekiel happens right around the same time as Jeremiah and Daniel, who were also called to be prophets. As I was looking at and studying Ezekiel, I thought it was kind of cool that there were three major prophets who were speaking to God's people all during this time of upheaval and this period when they were exiled, away from their homeland, away from their city, away from their temple. During this time, the Jews had no connection with that which was familiar and comfortable to them, the place where they worshipped and found God.

Ezekiel is an autobiography. His book is told in the first person so we get to learn a lot about who he is from his perspective. He was of a priestly family. He was being raised to be a priest, which means he would have been accepted by the Jewish people. He would have been comforting to them, especially in their time of exile. However, in the midst of this he was called to be a prophet, which means that his priestly comfort needed to transition over into more of a bold message, a direct rebuke message, because of the behavior the Israelites had chosen to engage in and the people they had become. Ezekiel had to discern the call and the voice of God and then speak it to the people. More than any other prophet, he was directed to be involved personally in the Divine Word by acting it out in prophetic symbolism. He was called to lie on his side for 390 days to symbolize the sin the Israelites had committed. Again, it was something where I think I'd say to God, "I'm good. I'm sure there is someone else You can use instead."

Throughout the 48 chapters of Ezekiel, we see the theme of God's sovereignty. God is free to *judge* when He chooses and He is free to be *gracious* when He chooses. Ezekiel's message focuses uniquely on Israel as a holy people of the holy temple of a holy city that was deemed unclean at the time. The Israelites were taken into captivity and during this time out, God wanted to have a word with them. I don't believe that much is different today. When I look at the Israelites and at the choices they made, there are a lot of parallels to who we are today and to what we choose to do with our lives. It is totally possible today to live one's life paying absolutely no attention to God. We live in a world where we can live our lives completely independently of God and in the midst of that, live a seemingly purposeful, meaningful life, emphasis on *seemingly*. We can live completely and utterly away from God and think that is totally fine.

The Jewish people were intentionally living independently of God and in that, they began to experience some of the consequences that come with living apart from God, with living isolated from God, and God was not going to stand for it any longer. It reminds me of a phrase my mom sometimes used multiple times a day with my sister and me growing up. It was, "Carrie, you've got to own your choices." By that, she meant "You have to acknowledge that you chose this. You chose to disobey me or your father. You chose to make a decision and you have to *own* your choices." God was coming to the Israelites and saying, "It is time for you to own your choices. You have chosen to live independently from Me. You have chosen to isolate yourself from Me. You have chosen to rebel and walk away from me." Looking throughout the Book of

Ezekiel, there are a few verses that popped out to me as God's direct rebuke or reprimand of these people. He says,

⁷ But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate [Ezekiel 3:7].

In chapter 12 God says to Ezekiel,

² "Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people [Ezekiel 12:2].

⁴ Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any of the Israelites set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces and then go to a prophet, I the LORD will answer them myself in keeping with their great idolatry [Ezekiel 14:4].

¹⁵ "But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his [Ezekiel 16:15].

²³ "Woe! Woe to you, declares the Sovereign LORD. In addition to all your other wickedness, ²⁴ you built a mound for yourself and made a lofty shrine in every public square [Ezekiel 16:23-24].

²⁸ You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied [Ezekiel 16:28].

² "In the pride of your heart
you say, "I am a god;
I sit on the throne of a god
in the heart of the seas."
But you are a mere mortal and not a god,
though you think you are as wise as a god [Ezekiel 28:2b].

These people were lost. They were acting with incredible foolishness. They weren't just in physical captivity, they were in mental, emotional and spiritual captivity. Captivity is anything that has a grip on you. As I was reading and studying, the question that kept coming to the forefront of my mind was "Carrie, where are you in captivity? What has a grip on you? Where do you think that God's authority and God's sovereignty don't apply to you? And where do you try to live independently from God?" I really like having control of my own life. I'm a fairly independent person and so as I was processing this and reading through Scripture, it kept coming back to me that I live in a lot of the same ways. I want my independence. I want my own control. God's authority is difficult, but what God wanted to show the Israelites, what He wants to show me and what He wants to show you, wherever our captivity is found, is that His authority isn't awful. His authority is actually liberating because His sovereignty provides a way for us to live fully.

Sovereignty is talked about over 65 times in the Book of Ezekiel. Over 65 times God says, "Then they will know that I am the Lord." They had forgotten who God was. They had forgotten

who was the created and who was the creator. He called them out of this, but as we see throughout the book, His tone also is that of one who wants to call them back. He doesn't just say to them, "You are a rebellious people. Good night." He says, "You are a rebellious people but I have a way. I have a life for you. Follow Me." He pursues them and He gives them hope. He says in Ezekiel, chapter 11,

¹⁷ "Therefore say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.'

"I am going to pursue you. You might be rebellious. You might not deserve the grace and the love and the compassion that I have for you, but I am going to give it to you anyway because you are My people." He says,

²³ therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD.'" [Ezekiel 13:23]

⁵ I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.' [Ezekiel 14:5]

⁴² Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry [Ezekiel 16:42].

Toward the end of Ezekiel, His tone continues to change. His pursuit of these people gets stronger and stronger and He repeats Himself and says,

²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes. ²⁴ "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.

He continues to repeat Himself, saying, "I am here. I am going to get you. I will pursue you."

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God [Ezekiel 36:23-28].

37 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you

and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.” [Ezekiel 37:1-6]

God pursues the Israelites and He pursues us. He said, “You might be a rebellious people. You might be an independent people who turned to your own ways, but I am going to come and get you. I am going to follow you with My love, with My pursuit. I’m going to get you and follow you so far as Calvary so that you can have a right relationship with Me, so that you can know and experience, in the depth of your being, My love for you.” God said, “If they only knew what life I could give them” He’s talking about breathing life into dry, dead bones, putting them back together so they are fully human again and fully living again. Jesus did that for us. God saw us as a people and said, “They need life. They need life on earth and they need eternal life so I’m going to go to them and I’m going to live a perfect life. I’m going to pursue them to the ends of the earth, to my execution, my death and burial, my resurrection, so that they know I am the Lord and I will stop at nothing to get them back.” The Israelites heard from Ezekiel that their sin and their foolishness didn’t just make them bad. Their sin and their foolishness made them dead. But God came to them and God came to us through the person of Jesus Christ to say, “I’m not making you good. I’m going to make you alive.”

I know that we all come through these doors and into this place with different circumstances, different situations, and in different places on our spiritual journeys. Some of us have been walking with Jesus and have had a relationship with Him for decades and some of us are still unsure, and that’s okay. God pursues us exactly where we are no matter what life has thrown at us, no matter where we have been or what we have done, no matter what has been done to us or what circumstances we are facing that we don’t understand. He comes and wants to breathe new life into us.

Paul says that Jesus

²⁰ . . . is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine [Ephesians 3:20]

He is able to breathe life into dead bones. He offers life. He offers a new breath.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! [2nd Corinthians 5:17]

Life has been breathed into him or her and they live. Ezekiel’s story is a story of hope, hope of God’s relentless pursuit of His people. It is a story of God trying to help His people see that their foolish choices end in captivity. God is in control. God is sovereign and that sovereignty provides liberation for us from our captivity. It is a story that was offered to the Israelites and it is being offered to you wherever you find yourself right now. Let’s pray.

God, thank You that You provide a way for us to know You, to know You deeply in the midst of our captivity, in the midst of our desire to live independently from You. I pray that You would meet us there. I pray that You would provide a way for us to find freedom through Jesus Christ. May we be a people who are willing to be authentic, to be vulnerable, to admit that we need You, to admit that our foolishness has led us to captivity. Meet us where we are and breathe life into us. In Your Name, we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.