

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 31 January 2021

Sermon Title : Prophetic Ministry 101: The Making of The Messenger

Speaker : Rev Chan Mei Ming

Text : Ezekiel 3:1-15

INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel was a dejected prophet with a worn-out faith. Though his name means “God strengthens” his feeling was all but strong. It seems that all that was important to him had been left behind in Jerusalem as he lived a shadowy existence in exile, without hope, only a bleak future. He was an Israelite cut off from Jerusalem, a priest cut off from the Temple and from God whom He loved. All these were made worse by the so-called people of God who were probably resigned to their lot as exiles in Babylon. Or they had grown hard against God whom they thought had failed them. So, they refused to learn from past lessons and prostituted themselves to the pagan influences around them. In the midst of his dejection, God did meet Ezekiel in an amazing manner as recorded in the opening chapter of this book. Unfortunately, the book of Ezekiel did not end there. All was not well because God’s children did not choose to obey their heavenly Father. So, God called Ezekiel to the prophetic ministry of bringing His message to Israel, His chosen people. Today, we too are called to bring God’s message – to the Gentiles. As such, the messenger of God’s message is vitally important.

Three things we can learn in the making of the messenger of God:

- 1) **God has to do a work in us before He can do His work through us** (3:1-3)
 - Does your life and ministry reflect truly God’s Word?
 - Guard against a compromised heart!

Ezekiel followed the command to eat the scroll and said it tasted as sweet as honey. It is important to make God’s Word personal to us. Ezekiel ingested and digested the scroll and it became a part of him.

- If our life and ministry are to reflect truly God’s Word, we must take it in and allow it to penetrate into every area of our lives and every fibre of our being, whether it is good news or bad news.
- If we do not keep a daily intimacy with God and obey what He is saying each day, we will surely be overcome by circumstances and when crises loom before us.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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- Jesus who is the Prophet, the Priest and the King intends that there should never be a message that comes from our heart and out of our mouth that is not first incarnated in our individual life. Jesus is the very incarnation of everything He ever taught and preached for He, the Messenger was the message.

Guard against a compromised heart:

- Today, God's truth is challenged almost with impunity and our moral compass is undermined. God is seeking to raise for Himself men and women of integrity who say what they mean, mean what they say, and above all, do what God says – nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.
- The messenger must not tarnish the message.

2) **God's work through us may find little if any fulfillment in results** (3:4-11)

- How do you judge the effectiveness of a ministry?
- Guard against compromised motivations!

The people of Israel were unwilling to listen to Ezekiel because they were unwilling to listen to God. They were rebellious, obstinate and stubborn (Chapters 2: 3, 4, 6, 8). Yet, Ezekiel was commanded to speak God's Word exactly to them.

- If God has given you a message to deliver, you cannot judge success by how others respond. You can only evaluate success by whether you did what God wanted you to do with a right heart.

Guard against compromised motivations:

- How the messenger speaks God's Word matters: When we speak truth without grace, it becomes a bludgeon but when we speak grace without truth, it becomes a license.

Confronting someone's sin is never easy but it is easy to get in the way of someone responding in the right manner. If we look forward to confrontation, then our heart is not right nor ready. But if we dread confrontation yet have a sense of compulsion before God to speak the truth in love, then our attitude is likely right. If God has given you such a compulsion, obey it even if you think or know the person is not going to respond. Trust God will honour your obedience some day in some way.

- God wanted Ezekiel and us to know that faithfulness in life and ministry cannot always be measured in numerical terms – be it by numbers, bottom lines or profits.
- The primary goal of Ezekiel's ministry was not to see people turning back to God, but to bring glory to God by preaching and modelling the message that God had given to him to give.

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- 3) **God's work through us is by His Spirit's empowerment of us** (3:12-15)
- This age of the "prophethood of all believers"...
 - Our greatest need is for the Spirit to be more active in and through us!

While faithfulness cannot be measured in numbers, we must labour to the utmost of our ability to remove any stumbling block (such as our lives) to our listeners – becoming all things to all men that by all means we might save some. Yet we should never forget that it is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit to convict hearts.

- The role of the Holy Spirit has changed radically from the Old Testament period to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Spirit is given specifically to specific people to accomplish specific tasks especially in speaking God's Word to His people. But the expectation of a universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit was actually in the Old Testament though it remained something for the future.
- In the New Testament era this was fulfilled and the Spirit had been poured out on all God's people, commissioning, equipping them for the prophetic task and ministry. (Joel 2:28-29) Thus, we now live in the age of the "prophethood of all believers". To fulfill this ministry we must be people of the book and as vitally important, we need to be people of the Spirit. The veracity of the Word and the reality of the Spirit need to characterize our Christian life.

Our greatest need is not to be more active but for the Spirit to be more active through us:

- Ezekiel couldn't stand up without the Spirit's empowerment, yet we frequently feel able to lead, preach, counsel, worship, even equip the saints for ministry in our own strength and it would be tragic if 95% of the Spirit was removed from our ministry or our daily Christian life, and we still go on as if nothing has happened.
- Many feel that the pandemic acts as a reset button. Are we resetting our lives in light of our daily lives? – If before the pandemic we were too busy or distracted for intimacy with God, are we still too busy, living a practical theology of self-reliance?
- Since Pentecost, Christ is the founding member of the new Spirit-filled community into which the Holy Spirit builds us. Yet, our busyness is not necessarily Christ's, nor necessarily Spirit directed.

CONCLUSION

We belong to the people of God and we too are called to be His messengers – albeit to a greater or lesser degree. The world may or may not listen. It is the Spirit's prerogative as it concerns open and close doors of the hearts of men and women. With the Spirit's empowerment we are to discharge what we know to be our responsibility before God. May our life and living teach the whole counsel of the Word of God.

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As a group, spend some time to share your success and struggle in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do at the previous meeting.

A. Review Sermon Content

Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.

Appoint someone to read Ezekiel 3:1-15 twice, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, ‘This is the Word of the Lord.’

All to respond, “Thanks be to God.” Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now.”
- a. As God’s word was read, which verse speaks to you the most?
- b. (i) What is the key takeaway for you from the sermon “The Making of the Messenger”?

(ii) How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 2a. We are all called to be God's messengers. Why is it important that God's messengers understand that "God has to do His work in us before He can do His work through us"?
- 2b. How does knowing "God's work through us may find little if any fulfillment in results" impact:
 - (i) your view on the meaning of success or failure in your ministry?
 - (ii) your attitude in doing God's work?
- 3a. Is your life and ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit?
- 3b. What is one thing you need to change/do for the Spirit to be more active through you so you will not be living a self-reliant life?
- 3c. How can your group members encourage or help you achieve 3b. above in the following week(s) until your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies and Prayer

Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.

4. Share your personal testimony on a “Spirit’s empowerment” experience when God helped you to do His work that He called you to do.

OR

Give thanks to God for giving us the honour to be His messenger.

5. With a prayer partner, take time to pray for the concerns shared in questions 3a, 3b and 3c. Commit to encourage one another to be God’s messenger, asking for the Holy Spirit to do a work in you first, so He can do His work through you in the following week(s), until your next meeting.

As a group, submit to the Holy Spirit’s leading so He may be more active through you, empowering your life and living to speak the whole counsel of the Word of God.

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