

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 21 March 2021**

Children's Talk: Messages from the Lord in Things We See

- [Build siege around brick and lie on side.]
- There were a number of different ways that prophets of the Lord shared their messages from the Lord with the people.
 - Sometimes they would go into the streets and cry out at the top of their voices, "This is what the Lord says:..."
 - Other times they would write down their messages on scrolls, like Jeremiah did in the story from last week where the king got the message and ripped up the scroll and threw it in the fire.
 - Other times people would specifically come to the prophet to ask for a message from the Lord.
 - Other times a prophet would do some miracle with the Lord's help, like Elijah calling down fire from heaven.
- The prophet Ezekiel did some of those things too but there were also times when he was told to do something different.
 - It was at a time when people were so evil that they would not listen to anything the prophet said, would not read his scroll, would not come to him to ask for a message from the Lord.
 - So the Lord commanded Ezekiel to do something different to get their attention and make them listen: to do something very strange thing in a public place where all the people who walked by would see it and wonder what he was doing.
 - And then he would show them that the strange thing was a message from the Lord.
- What you saw me do at the beginning was something that Ezekiel was commanded to do.
 - Ezekiel 4:1-6 (NKJV)
 - ¹ "You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem. ² Lay siege against it, build a siege wall against it, and heap up a mound against it; set camps against it also, and place battering rams against it all around. ³ Moreover take for yourself an iron plate, and set it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.
 - ⁴ "Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. ⁵ For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. ⁶ And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.
- Did you hear how long Ezekiel had to lie on his side?
 - It was over a year!
 - Do you think people would have noticed him doing this?
- He also was told to do other strange things, including only eating a very little bit of food and drinking a little bit of water.

- And he was supposed to cook his food with poo.
- All of these things that he did were showing people the bad things that were coming and the bad things that they were doing.
- For us today, one thing we can learn from this is that messages from the Lord don't always come in words.
- I could say to you, "You shouldn't do or say things to hurt other people" and that message might affect you a little bit.
 - But let's imagine that you lose your temper and do or say something that hurts another person and you see just how much they're hurting because of what you did.
 - Oof! That's hard to look at.
 - But there's a strong message from the Lord there that will help you become a better and happier person if you're willing to get the message.
- Remember that the Lord sends you messages in lots of different ways and this week try to notice the messages that come through actions instead of words.
- *Amen.*

(This talk drew on "Ezekiel: The Prophet as an Example" by the Rt. Reverend George De Charms. Find it on newchurchvineyard.org)

Finding Jesus in the Lives of the Prophets, Part 3: Ezekiel

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
21 March 2021

Intro

- Joel and I have had fun working on this series on the lives of the prophets.
 - Neither of us had ever really studied Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel as whole books before.
 - And, as it is, we've still only barely scratched the surface.
- One of our secret plans is that maybe, after hearing these sermons, you'll try reading these books for yourselves.
 - They are very challenging books to read and, if I'm being honest, I've found that there's a lot in them that I don't understand and don't know what to do with.
 - But I've also found that it's really satisfying to feel like you understand a bit more than you did before.
 - Maybe our sermons can give you a little head start in that process.
- It feels a bit like being in a game park looking at a whole landscape through binoculars.
 - There's so much to see and it can be hard to know where to look and how zoomed in or zoomed out to try to focus.
 - And even if you spend hours looking you still will only have seen a very small fraction of all that there is to be seen.
 - But when you manage to get something into focus you can see all sorts of amazing and beautiful things.
- Today, we're going to do some zooming *out* to look at the book of Ezekiel as a whole and some zooming *in* to a few specific visions and prophecies.
 - Because the sermon series that we're doing is "Finding Jesus in the Lives of the Prophets", we're going to try to focus on what can we learn about Jesus' life and work from the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel's Historical Context

- First, let's zoom in on the beginning of the book of Ezekiel and talk about the historical context in which Ezekiel lived and prophesied.
- The book of Ezekiel begins with these verses:
 - Ezekiel 1:1-3 (NKJV)
 - ¹ Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. ² On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ the word of Jehovah came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of Jehovah was upon him there.
- There are a lot of names, places, and dates mentioned there; what's going on?
- Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Babylonian Empire, had besieged and conquered Jerusalem and had taken into captivity King Jehoiachin and a lot of the most important people in Jerusalem.
 - It seems that Ezekiel, who was a priest in Jerusalem, had been taken captive to Babylon with this first group of captives because, when the book of Ezekiel begins, Ezekiel

reports that he was “among the captives by the River Chebar” in Babylon and he writes that it was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity.

- This timing is significant because it’s *before* the final destruction of Jerusalem.
 - When Nebuchadnezzar left Jerusalem after conquering it for the first time, he set up a man named Zedekiah to be his puppet ruler.
 - Ezekiel’s early prophecies and the scenes that he acted out—like the besieging the model of Jerusalem from the Children’s Talk—were predictions of the worse destruction that was going to come upon Jerusalem when the people rebelled.

Ezekiel’s Recurring Vision of Glory of the Lord

- In this context, the heavens were opened and Ezekiel saw his first vision.
 - His visions are one of the distinctive feature of the book of Ezekiel.
- This first one is a dramatic and detailed vision of a fiery cloud with four cherubim or winged angel creatures with four faces within it.
 - And there are wheels within wheels beside each of them that are full of eyes.
 - And above them was the likeness of a throne with the likeness of a Man on it.
 - And Ezekiel summarises all of this by saying, “It was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah” (Ezekiel 1:28).
- Ezekiel periodically experiences further developments of this vision throughout the book of Ezekiel.
 - You might remember that the glory of Jehovah was a symbol of Jehovah’s presence with His people in the Old Testament.
 - For example, when Moses finished building the tabernacle and later when Solomon finished building the temple, they were both filled with cloud and the glory of Jehovah (Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11)
 - So this recurring vision of the glory of Jehovah seems to represent an ongoing exploration of whether Jehovah can be present with His people or not.
 - Jehovah was supposed to be able to be present with His people in the Temple in Jerusalem but that had become terribly corrupt.
 - In chapter 8 Ezekiel has a vision where the likeness of the Man from the throne picks him up by his hair and takes him in a vision from captivity all the way to the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - And Ezekiel sees all the abominable and idolatrous things that are going on in the temple.
 - And Ezekiel also sees the glory of Jehovah depart from the temple and go to a mountain on the east side of the city (Ezekiel 11:23)
- In Jesus’ time Jerusalem was also under the rule of a foreign empire and He also predicted a coming destruction.
 - He said this about Jerusalem:
 - Luke 19:43-44 (NKJV)
 - ⁴³ “[D]ays will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”
 - Directly following that we read about Him seeing the corruption going on in the temple:

- Luke 19:45-46 (NKJV)
 - ⁴⁵ Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, ⁴⁶ saying to them, “It is written, “My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’ ”

- A few years after Ezekiel had his first vision and acted out what would happen and prophesied about it, the puppet ruler in Jerusalem, Zedekiah, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and all the scenes that Ezekiel had acted out came true (see 2 Kings 25).
 - Nebuchadnezzar came back and besieged Jerusalem.
 - There was a horrible famine in the city.
 - And eventually they broke through the wall and burned Jerusalem to the ground, including the temple or “the house of Jehovah” as it was called.
 - And Nebuchadnezzar took even more people away into captivity in Babylon.

- This would have been catastrophic for the Jews.
 - They had been taken from their promised land.
 - Their temple had been destroyed and so they could no longer connect with God through their rituals and sacrifices.
 - Had God abandoned them completely or could He somehow still be present with them?
 - Maybe He was working to move people away from worshipping Him through animal sacrifices and towards living according to what He taught.
 - One way God could still be present with the people was through prophets like Ezekiel who delivered messages from God and also embodied them in their actions.
 - If we can understand the role that Ezekiel played in his time as an embodiment of God’s Word to the people, we can learn a lot about the role that Jesus played when He was on earth.

Ezekiel and Jesus’ Role as Prophets

- One parallel between Jesus and Ezekiel is that they are both, repeatedly, referred to as “the Son of Man”.
 - For example, Jesus said, referring to Himself,
 - Matthew 20:18-19 (NKJV)
 - ¹⁸ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”
 - And when Jesus prophesied about the end of the age and His second coming He said this:
 - Matthew 24:30 (NKJV)
 - “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”
 - And the teachings of the New Church explain that “Son of man” is a phrase that means the Lord as to the Word (*The Lord* §28).

- So Jesus was saying that, as to the Word, He would be abused, crucified, and would rise again.
- And He was prophesying that, in His second coming, people would see Him with power and great glory in His Word.

- The other prophets use the phrase “son of man” a little bit but the book of Ezekiel uses it ninety-three times!
 - That would suggest that Ezekiel has something important to tell us about the Lord as to the Word.

- The teachings of the New Church explain that the prophets were commanded to do things like Ezekiel did in the story we talked about in the Children’s Talk because it was part of their role as prophets to portray the state of the church (or the state of people’s relationship with the Lord) and what people were doing to the Lord’s Word.
- Here are a few examples listed in the teachings of the New Church.
- *The Lord* §15:4-5
 - The prophet Isaiah was commanded to represent the state of the church by removing the sackcloth from his loins, taking his sandals off his feet, and going naked and barefoot for three years, as a sign and a wonder (Isaiah 20:2-3).

The prophet Ezekiel was commanded to represent the state of the church by passing a barber’s razor over his head and beard; by then dividing the hair, burning a third in the midst of the city, striking a third with a sword, and scattering a third in the wind; by binding a small number of them in the edges of his garment; and by finally throwing them in the midst of a fire and burning them (Ezekiel 5:1-4).

The same prophet was commanded to represent the state of the church by making containers for departure, by departing to another place in the eyes of the children of Israel, by bringing out the containers by day and digging through a wall at evening and going out through it, and by covering his face so as not to see the ground, so that he was thus a sign to the house of Israel. And by the prophet’s saying, “Behold, I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them.” (Ezekiel 12:3-7, 11)

- This is also why Jesus, as the greatest or ultimate prophet, was beaten, had a crown of thorns put on His head, had His garments divided, etc. and was ultimately crucified.
 - Jesus Himself said, “All this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matthew 26:56).
- And the teachings of the New Church explain what was going on in more detail:
 - *True Christianity* §129
 - The reason why the Lord was willing to undergo temptations even to the point of suffering upon the cross, was that He was the ultimate prophet[.] [P]rophets in ancient times... represented the church in its state at that time by the various unfair, harsh and even criminal acts imposed on them by God. However, since the Lord was the Word itself, by His passion on the cross as the ultimate prophet He represented the way in which the Jewish church profaned the Word.

- Maybe you followed that line of reasoning and maybe you didn’t.
 - But even if you did understand it, you might still be feeling like, “Ok. But so what?”
 - Why does all of this matter?
- To try to understand that we’re going to turn to another of Ezekiel’s visions.

The Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones

- Let's turn one of the more well-known visions from Ezekiel, the Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones.
 - Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NKJV, modified)
 - ¹ The hand of Jehovah came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of Jehovah, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. ³ And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"
So I answered, "O Lord Jehovih, You know."
⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of Jehovah! ⁵ Thus says the Lord Jehovih to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am Jehovah.'"
⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.
⁹ Also He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord Jehovih: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'"
¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.
¹¹ Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'
¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord Jehovih: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. ¹⁴ I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, Jehovah, have spoken it and performed it," says Jehovah.'"
- When we read the Word it can seem an awful lot like that valley of bones—it can feel rather dry, lifeless, and depressing.
 - Even reading the book of Ezekiel and the other books of the prophets might feel like that.
 - Can these bones live?
 - We don't know.
- When Jesus was on earth He said to the scribes and Pharisees, "you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition" (Matthew 15:6).
 - They had killed the spirit and life in the Word of God and had reduced it to a valley of bones.
 - But Jesus had come to change this.
 - He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

- How did He bring life back into the Scriptures?
 - He directly confronted their false interpretations of Scripture.
 - And He taught them new and deeper ways of understanding familiar scriptures, like the 10 Commandments.
 - Matthew 5:21-22 (NKJV)
 - ²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.
 - In these ways He was connecting the bones of scripture to each other again, fleshing them out, and finally breathing into them the spirit and life that they needed.
- But, even more important than His teaching was the way that He *embodied* everything that He taught with His actions.
 - He brought flesh and life back to those bones with His own flesh and life.
 - He reached out to and healed the sick and the maimed and the leprous.
 - He ate food with people that everyone else thought were evil and beyond hope.
 - He confronted the powerful and the corrupt.
 - He was also brutally killed because of it.
 - But He also rose again.
- On a personal level, the most important thing to take away from this might be the simple fact that it is possible to live according to the Lord’s Word.
 - I heard someone recently say that knowing things versus living according to them is like having the brochures about a place versus actually going to that place for yourself.
 - The two are related to each other but the brochure is no substitute for reality.
 - The teachings of the Word are meant to be lived and when we do live according to them we can experience the truth and wisdom of what the Lord teaches in an entirely different way.
 - And we can experience the presence and glory of the Lord in a new way.

Conclusion

- The final nine chapters of the book of Ezekiel are an extended vision of a beautiful new temple to replace the one that had been destroyed.
 - And Ezekiel sees the glory of Jehovah again, like his very first vision, and he sees the glory of Jehovah fill the new temple (Ezekiel 43:1-5).
 - God can be present with His people again in this new temple.
- When Jesus was driving the money changers out of the temple He said,
 - John 2:19-21 (NKJV)
 - ¹⁹ “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
 - ²⁰ Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”
 - ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

- In His body Jesus rebuilt the temple.
 - In His complete embodiment of scripture, even more than the prophets before Him, Jesus built a new way for God to be present with His people and for people to see the glory of Jehovah.
 - Or, as it says in John,
 - John 1:14 (NKJV)
 - And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
- *Amen.*