Ezekiel 2:4b-5 I am sending you to them, and you are to tell them that this is what the Lord God says. 5Then, whether they listen or do not listen—for they are a rebellious house—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.

I might have said this before but it is worth repeating. The Gospel ministry of Jesus is a tough gig to be in! There, it has been said. Now, I am sure you will want to know why?

At the last call meeting that was held at St. James our circuit Pastor began the meeting by sharing the age old (seriously, this thing has been around since I began the ministry and probably even before) description of what congregations want from their pastors. It went like this:

*“The Perfect Pastor. The perfect pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes. He condemns sin roundly but never hurts anyone’s feelings. He works from 8 am until midnight and is also the church janitor. The perfect pastor makes $40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates $30 a week to the church. He is 29 years old and has 40 years experience. Above all, he is handsome. The perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and he spends most of his time with the senior citizens. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church. The perfect pastor always has time for church council and all of its committees. He never misses the meeting of any church organization and is always busy evangelizing the unchurched.”*

That’s an example of one type of description of a pastor. I will tell you it was meant to be humorous, but many a pastor recognizes that there is some truth to what is said here. Here’s another one, this one I am told appeared in a Texas paper:

*“The preacher has a great time. If his hair is gray, he is old. If he is a young man, he hasn’t had experience. If he has ten children, he has too many; if he has none, he isn’t setting a good example. If his wife sings in the choir, she is presuming; if she doesn’t, she isn’t interested in her husband’s work. If a preacher reads from notes, he is a bore; if he speaks extemporaneously, he isn’t deep enough. If he stays in his study, he doesn’t mix enough with the people; if he is seen around the streets, he ought to be at home getting up a good sermon. If he calls on a poor family, he is playing to the grandstand; if he calls at the home of the wealthy, he is an aristocrat. Whatever he does, someone could have told him to do better.”*

Again, I have no doubt that was written to be humorous but at the same time there is a good bit of truth in what is being implied in the words. This is just my way of trying to help you grasp that being a pastor is a tough gig to be in.

But let me share a personal perspective. Do you have any idea of the stress there is in preaching every Sunday? Of coming up with a sermon that is solid, doctrinal, applies well, teaches absolute truth and yet doesn’t bore anyone to death? Or to just always be there whenever people want you. On any given day I can be called on to handle sickness, death, marital discord, disobedient children, personal problems, addictions, answer any question of the Bible, and listen to complaints. I am expected to have the answers! To top it all off, the pastor lives in a glass house. Everything he or a member of his family does is up for criticism, challenge and can and often is cited as the reason someone is no longer coming to church. That is I think the toughest part of this work, especially for members of the family because they didn’t voluntarily enter into this like the fully trained Pastor did, they end up in the glass house because of that guy. Like I said, the ministry of the gospel is a tough gig.

Just so you know, there is nothing, absolutely nothing that I would rather do. I could do anything I want, but I would always choose to be a Pastor and a servant of the Lord. It is true, it is a tough gig, but again, there is nothing I would rather do! I love the ministry of my Lord and Savior Jesus. I have that perspective and attitude about it because I recognize that no matter what tough day I might have it is still nothing compared to what Jesus did for us on the cross! A tough gig, but a gig I absolutely love!

Now you might think, “Boy, this guy is talking smack against us!” In truth I am not. I am only speaking what is truth and if you paid attention to our text you would realize that it is the words of our text that got me to thinking about this life of ministry. Because in truth, if you would have asked Ezekiel, or asked the Holy Spirit who is helping Ezekiel you would have heard the same thing: the ministry is a tough gig. Let’s look more closely at our text under this theme: **SENT BY THE LORD.**

Perhaps a bit of background into Ezekiel. He was, by descent, a member of the priestly family of Judah. In 597 bc along with many other top Jewish people, Ezekiel was carried off into exile to the land of Babylon. Yep, Ezekiel was among the first wave of exiles carried off to Babylon. For the next 5 years Ezekiel simply existed as an exile and then it was that the Lord God, called Ezekiel to be his prophet, his spokesman of truth to the children of God. Ezekiel doesn’t seek this job but rather it is the Lord who chooses Ezekiel as the one who is going to serve Him and his Word. We are told Ezekiel experienced a tremendous vision demonstrating the glory and majesty of God and it was God who sent his Holy Spirit upon Ezekiel so that Ezekiel could and did hear clearly the call and Word of God. The text before us is a portion of that call to Ezekiel that Ezekiel should serve the Lord God and speak only the Word of the Lord.

There is no doubt that Ezekiel is called and sent of the Lord. Called at a time when faith and God were not a favored and good topic. Called at a time when most of the people of Judah considered that God had abandoned them and failed them. Called at a time when the majority of so-called prophets and priests who were running about had all sorts of false and misleading messages on what the Lord, actually, the numerous gods they served were up to. And let me make it clear. What the majority were saying is not even close to what Ezekiel is being told to say! Ezekiel is going to proclaim further destruction, further judgments of God, and at the same time Ezekiel is going to call for sincere and clear repentance, a true return to the truth and facts of God even though the exile that has started is going to continue for the next 80 years! Ezekiel’s message is not popular!

Did you see what God had said about the people Ezekiel would serve? Just in our text alone God says: **“I am sending you to the people of Israel, to disloyal nations, who have been disloyal to me. They and their fathers have rebelled against me to this very day. These children of mine are brazen-faced and hard-hearted…they are a rebellious house.”** As you continue to read and study Ezekiel’s book you will find that God warns that they will persecute and make Ezekiel’s life a difficulty. God understands the very nature of people and how they will react to Him!

This is not new. It is found throughout God’s Holy Word. People who rebelled against the leaders God had provided and who had turned away from the truth of God in so many ways. You can see this truth in Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, and yes even Jesus. Jesus, God’s very Son, was rejected, scorned and put to death for coming to do the Lord’s will. Such is the nature of the sinful world and yes, even of God’s children, should they not hear and embrace the wonder and truth of God. Because in each instance God makes it clear that the rebellion is not really against his prophet but rather against the majesty and power of God himself, because God sent him. Rebellion is always the nature of sin!

And yes, if we are truthful with ourselves, we would admit that some of this is true even in our own lives. We have failed to do what the Lord has commanded. We have certainly done what the Lord has forbidden. We have not made the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament, the heart of our lives. In truth we too sin in thought, word and deed before our God. Even when we are his children we wrestle with sin and all too often sin wins. Why do you miss church? Why have you failed to make use of the gospel so easily provided for you in so many formats? Why did you argue with your spouse? Why did you curse and swear? Why do you withhold your offerings from the Lord? Why don’t you care to make sure that your life is a life of service to the Lord? Why are you so brazen that even right you are saying to yourself, “But I don’t do those things, I am better than most!” because that is the epitome of the problem of sin in our lives.

But God sends his prophets. Ezekiel was sent to proclaim the Word of the Lord. So many other prophets sent to proclaim the truth and wonder of God. Jesus, God’s Son, sent to completely reveal and make clear the salvation of His Father. And today, the Lord our God makes it clear that he still calls and has men serve his Holy Word. God sends his prophets.

Prophets are to speak God’s Word. The greatest prophet is of course, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Jesus came to clarify, to fulfill, and to serve as the very source of God’s salvation. Think of that. Jesus came to be our Savior. Jesus came to save our very souls by grace through faith. Jesus proclaimed what God’s Word always proclaimed: salvation would be of and from God himself. That’s Jesus. God come to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. God taking our punishment and dying our death. God rising from the dead so that we would know our salvation is true and sure simply because of what Jesus, God’s Son has done. You heard in our Gospel reading how many regarded Jesus. And then God made sure this wonder of Jesus was clearly and precisely laid out for us in his Holy Word. The Word, given by the Lord, to men through the Holy Spirit that we might have the truth and marvel of God.

And the majority of the people of the world reject that. They scorn the message of sin. They laugh at the idea that God would send his Son or that God would put his Son on the cross. Lovelessness and foolishness is what the Bible is full of, they say. Yet, in truth, it is the Word of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. That is the instrument, the message that God gives to his servant Ezekiel and every true servant God has ever sent. It is the job of the minister of the Gospel, of the servant of God to proclaim God’s truth and Word no matter what. And note that even Ezekiel is told that the result of that preaching is none of his business. Did you catch that? God has said, **“whether they listen or do not listen.”** Whenever God’s Word is spoken or proclaimed that is going to be the response of every heart. Either that heart will listen or it will not. Either that heart will grasp the wonder of God or it will not. Either that totality of God’s grace will fill you or it won’t. Ezekiel’s job was not to worry about the result of what he said but rather to make sure that what he said was God’s Word. That is the point of the words: **“then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”**

I reminded you a while back of how that truth has played out in history. Doesn’t it strike you that even though in their lifetimes God’s prophets were scorned and rejected still their books, their writings end up being in God’s Word? Though Ezekiel would point out the peoples lack of faith, backsliding, evil, rejecting of God and false faith, those writings still end up being a part of God’s Old Testament. It is a testimony to the truth of God. Once everything Ezekiel would say did come true, then the people would indeed know that a prophet has been among them. God’s Word always stands.

And there is the thing every true minister of the Gospel must get. Preach the Word. Preach the truth of God. God’s truth is clear and precise. God’s truth is about sin and our salvation from sin. Even God’s Old Testament is about sin and salvation from sin. How God’s OT people rebelled and did not keep faith and yet God still carried out his promise to send the Savior through them. And if you don’t grasp that the New Testament is about sin and God’s salvation from sin in Jesus, then I just don’t know what you are reading and hearing.

I started off this sermon speaking of the difficulty of the ministry. That is still true but in truth it doesn’t matter. What matters is the Word of God. What matters is that you consistently hear and learn the truth of sin and the reality of salvation in Jesus. What matters is that you grasp the fact that God acts and moves in your life for your good, all because of the salvation found in Jesus. That salvation of Jesus you know because God has sent pastors and preachers among you to teach the truth of Jesus! Jesus is the heart of ministry.

 That’s really the message of the Epistle lesson isn’t it? Paul and his thorn. Paul given that thorn so that the grace of God might shine forth. So in our lives. We have the call of God to be his children, his servants in all we do. And some of us have a call from God to be his prophet of the Word in all we do. It is the work of the Lord that the grace of God might shine forth all the more.

Thank you Lord for all that you do. Thank you for watching over Ezekiel and using him to serve you. Thank you for watching over all your called servants that they may serve you. Thank you for helping all of us to hear your Word, the power of our salvation. Amen.