

How Do You Preach The Impossible?

God's people were a rebellious house. The LORD brought them out of Egypt. But they complained about the food and made up gods to worship. He brought them into a land with pre-built cities and vineyards. And instead of praising and worshipping the God who gave this land to them they ran after the unbelieving women and worthless gods of the lands they were conquering. They were a rebellious house. Elijah went to them and told them to repent. And they didn't. Elisha went to them. They remained rebellious. The ten northern tribes were dragged away because of their rebellion. For over a hundred years the LORD sent prophets to warn the two remaining tribes to repent. But they were rebellious. So, the Babylonians came and dragged them away to Babylon. And, you would think with all that pain and punishment they would see how stupid they had been. You would think that they would realize the the path of rebellion against the LORD is not the road to peace. Finally then, the LORD sends Ezekiel to preach to the exiles in Babylon.

In the words we read this morning from Ezekiel, chapter two, we hear what sort of people these Israelites were. The LORD told Ezekiel that he would be dealing with two types of people. In verse four he says: *"Ezek. 2:4 The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn."* They had hard faces and hard hearts. They were the sort of people that whether you demanded or pleaded, you begged or asked, it didn't matter. Nothing you would say would break that cold, unbending exterior.

That was one group. We find the other in verse 6: *"Ezek. 2:6 And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house."* The first group was apathetic. The second group was violent. They were thorns and thistles and scorpions. They hated what Ezekiel so much that they made life miserable for him.

Six times in these verses we read the word "rebellious." Their hearts were cold and unbending. Their hearts were violent and stinging. How could Ezekiel go to a people like that? How could he preach the impossible? How could he preach that simple message of peace and repentance to a people who were so rebellious?

It's easy for us to put ourselves in Ezekiel's shoes. About a year ago Priscilla and I were alone. It was lunch time. I made her some food. She wouldn't eat her food. Minutes, hours went by. I got angry and put her in her room. She still wouldn't eat. I took away her toys and put them in the attic. She still wouldn't eat. I tried everything I could. But, how do you preach the impossible to a rebellious child?

Our LORD has called on all of us to carry out the sort of call Ezekiel had. We know that person in our life. Our child, our parent, our friend our family member, our co-worker. And that person is rebelling against God. That person is putting something in his or her life above God. And no matter what you do, that person's heart is hard and every word that comes out of his or her mouth stings. How do you preach the impossible to a rebellious people?

And what's worse, is that as we do this, week after week and month after month, we become exhausted. We become demoralized. And finally we become terrified to speak the truth to such hard hearts and stinging voices. And when that happens, then we begin to understand what life was like for Ezekiel. To endure such opposition and rebellion can only lead to one result: fear.

And yet, listen to what the LORD tells Ezekiel: *"6 And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house."*

Four times in this one verse the LORD tells Ezekiel 'do not be afraid.' But, what's important is to know *how* he says this. He is not saying: 'Ezekiel, do not ever, ever be afraid!' No, instead, it's a soft imperative. He is saying: 'Ezekiel, there's no reason to be afraid.' And that makes us ask the question: How could the LORD tell him this? How could Ezekiel preach the impossible to such a rebellious house and with such a fearful heart?

We find the answer to that in chapter 11, where the LORD says: *"Ezek. 11:19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. 20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God."*

My Priscilla was a rebellious child. I put her in her room. I took away her toys. I did even more than that. Finally, I picked her up and cradled her tightly in my arms. I looked into her big, blue eyes, as I asked her ‘why won’t you eat your food?’ I tried to find some reason some answer. And instead, I saw myself. I saw all the times I rebelled against my parents. I saw all the times they told me to do what was good and right. I saw all the times they asked me to stop doing what was so rebellious and evil.

You see, the only way we can preach such impossible words to such rebellious people is when we see that *we* are just as rebellious as they are. Look at what the LORD has done to you. He has taken your hearts which are just as hard and made them soft. He has taken your voices that sting like thistles and scorpions and made them sing of his forgiveness. Jesus has taken away your rebellions by *never* being rebellious. He has taken away your rebellions by being punished in your place for all of your rebellions. He has taken away your stinging hearts of stone and given you loving hearts of flesh.

You see, *that’s* how Ezekiel could preach the impossible to such a rebellious house. First, the LORD showed him his own rebellious heart. First, the LORD took away his heart of stone and gave him a heart of flesh. First, Ezekiel saw the LORD’s unyielding, unmoving, undeserved love for him. Then he was able to go out and serve. Then he was able to go out and speak that impossible message which achieves impossible results.

My brothers and sisters, continue to remain in God’s word. Continue to come to worship and bible study. Continue to read God’s word at home. Then you will how hard and rebellious your sinful heart is. Then you will see with such joy in your heart what our LORD Jesus has done with your heart. He had given you a heart of flesh where before there was nothing but cold rebellion.

Then you can continue to preach the impossible. Then you can continue to reach out to those around you and tell them to follow the LORD and turn from the evil. Then you can endure their violence and outlast their cold hearts. Then you can overcome their rebellion with the love Jesus has shown to you instead of your own weak strength.

So then, preach the impossible. Though the people may be rebellious, your LORD is forgiving. Though your heart may be fearful, your LORD is strong. Preach that impossible message of repentance because your LORD Jesus has forgiven you. Amen.