

Bible Study Lecture Notes: Week XIV

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Ezekiel 2:1: And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.

Daniel 8:17: So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.

1 Corinthians 15:45-47: And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven.

Ellicott's Commentary: Son of man. — The voice that now came to Ezekiel was articulate, and spoke to him in words which he could understand. It is not said who it was that spoke, but the "He" in connection with the vision before him could be none other than the Most High, whose glory that vision was given to reveal. The phrase "son of man" is common enough throughout the Scriptures, as meaning simply man, but is never used in an address to a prophet, except to Ezekiel and Daniel. To Daniel it is used only once (Daniel 8:17), while to Ezekiel it is used above ninety times. The reason is, doubtless, that since he was the prophet of the captivity he was addressed in the common terms of the language where he lived. "Son of man" for "man" is so common in the Aramaic languages that it is even used of Adam himself in the Syriac version of 1 Corinthians 15:45-47. The address to Ezekiel here as "man," just as in similar circumstances to Daniel when he had fallen upon his face through awe of the supernatural presence (Daniel 8:17), is doubtless in compassion to his weakness. And then comes the strengthening command, "Stand upon thy feet," that he may be able to receive the communication God will make to him.

The use of the “Son of Man” title for Adam in the Syriac translation of 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 is very telling. Yes, as Ellicott explains, “Son of Man” is an Aramaic phrase for “Man,” and therefore calls to mind Ezekiel’s weakness in contrast to the divine presence. Nevertheless, it is also used in the context of a man as representational of “mankind” and, specifically, of the relationship of mankind to God. So, in 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 Adam is translated as “Son of Man” because the passage is referring to Adam’s role as representational of man’s natural state, while Christ Jesus, the New Adam, is the “Son of Man” as representational of man’s spiritual state when man has been restored through Christ Jesus. If we understand that a particular man is “Son of Man,” we then can infer that because of the representational character of his ministry his life will serve as a further revelation of God. Thus, the one time that Daniel is referred to as “Son of Man” ends with a phrase describing the apocalyptic (revelatory) character of his prophetic ministry (*“for at the time of the end shall be the vision”*). The many times that Ezekiel is called “Son of Man” tells us more than just the Aramaic influence on Jewish speech during and after the Babylonian Exile. This also serves to remind the reader that Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry is primarily about setting the stage for the coming of Christ Jesus, the “Son of Man” in the fullest sense of the phrase, for Christ Jesus will be the one man who himself perfectly embodies mankind and a restoration of mankind’s relationship with the Father.

Ezekiel 2:2: And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.

Romans 8:26: Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary: Lest Ezekiel should be lifted up with the abundance of the revelations, he is put in mind that still he is a son of man, a weak, mortal creature. As Christ usually called himself the Son of man, it was also an honorable distinction. Ezekiel’s posture showed reverence, but his standing up would be a posture of greater readiness and fitness for

business. God will speak to us, when we stand ready to do what he commands us. As Ezekiel had not strength of his own, the Spirit entered into him. God is graciously pleased to work in us whatever he requires of us. The Holy Spirit sets us upon our feet, by inclining our wills to our duty. Thus, when the Lord calls upon the sinner to awake, and attend to the concerns of his soul, the Spirit of life and grace comes with the call. Ezekiel is sent with a message to the children of Israel. Many might treat his message with contempt, yet they should know by the event that a prophet had been sent to them.

St. Augustine, On Grace and Free Will, Chapter 13: From these and similar passages of Scripture, we gather the proof that God's grace is not given according to our merits. The truth is, we see that it is given not only where there are no good, but even where there are many evil demerits preceding: and we see it so given daily. But it is plain that when it has been given, also our good merits begin to be — yet only by means of it; for, were that only to withdraw itself, man falls, not raised up, but precipitated by free will. Wherefore no man ought, even when he begins to possess good merits, to attribute them to himself, but to God, who is thus addressed by the Psalmist: "Be Thou my helper, forsake me not." By saying, Forsake me not, he shows that if he were to be forsaken, he is unable of himself to do any good thing. Wherefore also he says: "I said in my abundance, I shall never be moved," for he thought that he had such an abundance of good to call his own that he would not be moved. But in order that he might be taught whose that was, of which he had begun to boast as if it were his own, he was admonished by the gradual desertion of God's grace, and says: "O Lord, in Your good pleasure You added strength to my beauty. Thou did, however, turn away Your face, and then I was troubled and distressed." Thus, it is necessary for a man that he should be not only justified when unrighteous by the grace of God — that is, be changed from unholiness to righteousness — when he is requited with good for his evil; but that, even after he has become justified by faith, grace should accompany him on his way, and he should lean upon it, lest he fall.

A distinguishing characteristic of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry is that the emphasis is always put on God's action. Remember how with Isaiah and Jeremiah the prophet responds in his own way

to the divine commissioning. Here, Ezekiel can hardly be said to be responding at all, for Ezekiel is not even standing up on his own, but rather is being pulled back up to his feet by God's Spirit. Ezekiel is not denying his own free will, so much as he is affirming God's Providential action with respect to his ministry as the overriding factor. We have free will, but God is the author of life in general and of our own lives in particular. The debate as to where the line exists between man's free will and God's Providence will continue into the history of the Church. This debate will give rise to the heresy of Pelagianism (Man's free will overriding God's Providence, thus allowing for Man to merit Heaven by virtue of his own works) and Calvinism (God's Providence so overriding Man's free will that Man is predestined either for the elect or for damnation). Ezekiel's focus on the Holy Spirit literally pulling him up from the ground, thus making it possible for him to obtain God's commission, is a reference to what theologians later will call "prevenient grace," the grace God gives to a man before a man has turned his will over to God which makes it even possible for that turn to happen. God sets the stage not only for His return in glory but for man's capacity to receive Him in glory. Denying God is therefore not just an affront to God but also an affront to the prevenient grace offered unto all men in their natural state that makes it possible for them to ascend into a spiritual state through Christ Jesus.

Ezekiel 2:3: And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day.

Hosea 1:9: Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

John 8:39: They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

Ellicott's Commentary: I send thee to the children of Israel. — Here properly begins the distinct commission of the prophet. After the captivity of the ten tribes, the two forming the kingdom of

Judah, with such remnants of the others as had been induced by Hezekiah and others to cast in their lot with them, are constantly spoken of as "Israel." (See Ezra 2:2.) The continuity of the whole nation was considered as preserved in the remnant, and hence this same mode of expression passed into the New Testament. (See Acts 26:7.) It is only when there is especial occasion to distinguish between the two parts of the nation, as in Ezekiel 4:5-6, that the name of Israel is used in contrast with that of Judah.

A rebellious nation. — Literally, as in the margin, rebellious nations, the word being the same as that commonly used distinctively for the heathen, so that the children of Israel are here spoken of as "rebellious heathen." There could be no epithet which would carry home more forcibly to the mind of an Israelite the state of antagonism in which he had placed himself against his God. (Comp. the "Lo-ammi" of Hosea 1:9, and also the discourse of our Lord in John 8:39.) Yet still, the God from whom they had turned aside was even now sending to them His prophet, and seeking to win them back to His love and obedience, in true correspondence to the vision of the bow in the cloud about the majesty on high.

The following verses enlarge, with a variety of epithets and repetitions, upon the hard-heartedness and perverseness of the people. This had always been the character of the Israelites from the time of Moses (see Exodus 32:9; Exodus 33:3; Exodus 33:5, &c), and continued to be to the end (see Acts 7:51); so entirely without ground is the allegation that they were chosen as a people peculiarly inclined to the right. It is to such a people that Ezekiel is to be sent, and he needed to be prepared and encouraged for his work.

In Hosea 1:9, God is instructing Hosea to name his third child *Lo-ammi*, which means *Not My People*. Thus, from the start the child's name will be a prophetic reminder to the people that God has abandoned Israel to her sinfulness. God's abandonment is not wrath so much as it is acknowledgment that by Israel's intransigence in sin Israel has rendered herself in effect *Not God's People*. Thus, in John 8:39, Jesus reminds His interlocutors that they have abandoned Abraham, contrary to their insistence otherwise, since they are not doing Abraham's works.

Man is the words he chooses to say and the actions he chooses to do, and since God is just in all things, God will not sugarcoat the reality of what man is. God will provide man a means of total salvation, but first God will condemn man by giving man a Law that, without Christ, man cannot fulfill. From this we see that man's identity may start with his bloodline (Israel as the people of the tribe set apart by God's covenant), but it is ultimately realized in his words and actions. The children of Abraham are first identified by their blood affinity with him and with other children of Abraham, but in time they will be identified by their fidelity to Abraham's example. Thus, we are seeing the stage set for the covenantal relationship rooted in a bloodline to become, finally, in Christ Jesus a covenantal relationship rooted in faithfulness to Him. This is not as much of a change as may appear, for traditionally *bloodline* referred to the character of the people of the *bloodline* as much as to the amoral, genetic bond between them. The character of the people is determined by the extent of their faithfulness to God. Jesus is not offering a New Law contrary to the Old Law but rather fulfilling the actual meaning of that Old Law (see Matthew 5:18: *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*) The fulfillment of the Law is for the Law to be followed through grace, which is to say, for the Law to be the occasion of a man's justification instead of condemnation through the grace afforded to that man by Christ Jesus. Until then, the Law can only condemn, and Israel, a nation of condemned men, cannot but be counted among the *rebellious heathens*.

Ezekiel 2:8-3:3: *But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.*

Revelation 10:9-10: *And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.*

Keil & Delitzsch Biblical Commentary: *After the Lord had pointed out to the prophet the difficulties of the call laid upon him, He prepared him for the performance of his office, by inspiring him with the divine word which he is to announce. The prophet is to announce to the people of Israel only that which the Lord inspires him to announce. This thought is embodied in symbol, in such a way that an outstretched hand reaches to him a book, which he is to swallow, and which also, at God's command, he does swallow; cf. Revelation 10:9. This roll was inscribed on both sides with lamentations, sighing, and woe. The meaning is not, that upon the roll was inscribed a multitude of mournful expressions of every kind, but that there was written upon it all that the prophet was to announce, and what we now read in his book. These contents were of a mournful nature, for they related to the destruction of the kingdom, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple. That Ezekiel may look over the contents, the roll is spread out before his eyes, and then handed to him to be eaten, with the words, "Go and speak to the children of Israel," i.e., announce to the children of Israel what you have received into yourself, or as it is termed in Ezekiel 3:4, "my words." The words in Ezekiel 3:3 were spoken by God while handing to the prophet the roll to be eaten. He is not merely to eat, i.e., take it into his mouth, but he is to fill his body and belly therewith, i.e., he is to receive into his innermost being the word of God presented to him, to change it, as it were, into sap and blood. Whilst eating it, it was sweet in his mouth. The sweet taste must not be explained away into a sweet "after-taste," and made to bear this reference, that the destruction of Jerusalem would be followed by a more glorious restoration. The roll, inscribed with lamentation, sorrow, and woe, tasted to him sweetly, because its contents was God's word, which sufficed for the joy and gladness of his heart (Jeremiah 15:16); for it is "infinitely sweet and lovely to be the organ and spokesman of the Omnipotent," and even the most painful of divine truths possess to a spiritually minded man a joyful and quickening side. To this it is added that the divine penal judgments reveal not only*

the holiness and righteousness of God, but also prepare the way for the revelation of salvation, and minister to the saving of the soul.

Notice the similarity between receiving the Word of God for a specific prophetic vocation and the kind of sacramental grace we associate with Holy Communion. For the Word of God to be efficacious to the prophetic ministry, it must be “eaten,” which is to say, totally internalized to the life of the commissioned man. The Word is his sustenance (see Matthew 4:4: *It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*). The Word is his identity (see Deuteronomy 18:18: *I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him*). Similarly, Holy Communion is our spiritual sustenance (see John 6:53: *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you*), and Holy Communion binds us to Christ in such a way that His identity and ours become one (see John 6:56: *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him*). Ezekiel is able to eat the roll because God has handed it to him, so again we see how God acts first to make it possible for a person to receive Him. Similarly, we can receive Christ Jesus in the Holy Sacrament because Christ Jesus first had given Himself to us in the Last Supper (culminated in His Crucifixion, which is to be understood as completing the Last Supper). Merely studying the Word of God is not going to cut it. We have to internalize it, which is to say, orient our lives going forward by what has been revealed to us in that Word. This means that the Word cannot be one among many “words.” Nor can we follow only that portion of the Word with which we are comfortable. With the Word of God, it is all the Word or none of the Word, just as with God it is all or nothing (see Exodus 20:5: *Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God...*).

Ezekiel 3:17-19: *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I*

require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

Hebrews 13:17: Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Gill's Exposition of the Holy Bible: Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel,.... Not in a civil sense, a watchman of a town or city, or of the whole country, but in an ecclesiastical sense. So the Targum renders it by "a teacher;" whose business it was to instruct the people in divine things, to warn them of their evil ways, and of the danger they exposed them to; such were the prophets of old, and such are the ministers of the New Testament: the office is the same with that of bishops or overseers; and lies in watching over the souls of men, as shepherds over their flocks, that they go into right pastures, and not astray, and so preserves them from beasts of prey; and as watchmen of cities, to give the time of night, and, notice of approaching danger; to the discharge of which office are necessary quick sight, diligence in looking out, sobriety and vigilance, courage, constancy, and faithfulness: and they are "sons of men" that are put into this office, and not angels; sons of fallen Adam, sinful men; men subject to infirmity, weak, frail, mortal men, and oftentimes of a mean and low extraction, and greatly unworthy of so high an honor; but Christ counts them faithful, and puts them into this office; they are not made and constituted watchmen or ministers by themselves or by others, but by him; and they are given by him as such to the church of God: "son of man, I have given thee a watchman" (t), &c. they become watchmen through gifts bestowed upon them, qualifying them for this office; and they themselves are gifts to the churches over whom they are placed, signified by "the house of Israel"; for a church is a house of Christ's building, and where he dwells, and a family named of him, which he takes care of, and consists of Israelites indeed.

The idea of the Prophet as Watchman harkens back to the Judges raised by God but also looks forward to the Bishops of the Church. There is continuity in how God raises responsible leaders.