

Happy are they who hear the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.

Luke 8:15 (RSV)

Ezekiel 2:1-3:4

¹ He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” ² As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

³ He said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. ⁴ The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says.’ ⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶ And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. ⁷ You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

⁹ Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

³ ¹ And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.” ² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

³ Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

⁴ He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them.

IGNATZ SEMMELWEIS WAS REJECTED

He knew the truth, but no one would listen, and it hurt. Ignaz Semmelweis (*IG-nass SEM-mel-vice*) was a doctor in the 1800s who discovered a truth that recently changed my life. But when he told the truth to the other doctors, they called him crazy and kicked him out of the hospital. What was this controversial truth that everyone rejected? He said that when a baby is born, the doctor should wash his hands. See, back in those days, if 100 babies were born, about 20 of them died right away. But if the doctor washed his hands, 19 of those babies would live. Ignaz Semmelweis tested it. He knew it, even if he couldn't explain precisely why. But at that time, in that culture, the truth was hard to believe, so people rejected it.¹

WE ARE REJECTED

Do you ever feel a little like Ignaz Semmelweis when you think about speaking God's truth? Jesus taught a lot of beautiful truths. **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** (Mark 12:31) Everyone can get on board with that one. But I'm thinking of the mother at the table with her grown-up son, a Bible open to Matthew 19. **"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."** (Matthew 19:4-6) It's God's truth, from the mouth of Jesus. Marriage is one man and one woman together for life. But at this time, in this culture, that's hard to accept, and many people don't. It hurts. I've seen that pain in a mother's eyes.

Maybe it's your neighbor who insists all people go to heaven, no matter what they believe, even though Jesus says, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6) Maybe it's your roommate who can't accept that God created our

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignaz_Semmelweis
<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/epub/10.2105/AJPH.2009.185363>

world in six 24-hour days. These days, in this culture, there are Bible teachings that a lot of people reject, and it hurts.

EZEKIEL WAS REJECTED

I bet that's how Ezekiel felt. Ezekiel was a Jewish prophet about 600 years before Jesus was born, and he lived through one of the most traumatic eras in Jewish history. God loves the Jewish people. He gave them a beautiful temple in the capital city of Jerusalem. But they did not love him. For centuries they rejected the Lord and worshiped false gods. So God tried to get their attention. He sent prophet after prophet, but they refused to listen.

When a kid doesn't listen, sometimes a dad will take away her favorite toy to try to get through to her. That's what God did. He said, "I'm taking away the city of Jerusalem, and I'm taking away your temple. The army of the country of Babylon is on its way here, and they are going to deport the citizens, crush the city, and burn the temple." Like any good father, God still loved them. He promised that after 70 years, he would bring everyone back and rebuild the city. But they didn't even hear that last part because they were so freaked out about the Babylonian army. It was a tragic message, and Ezekiel had to preach it. At first, only some Israelites went to Babylon, and they were holding out hope that God might change his mind and save their homeland. Ezekiel had to tell them, "No." You can imagine how that went over. They took it about as well as a kid without a toy. God even told Ezekiel, "Don't think of it like you're talking to human beings. **"You live among scorpions."** (Ezekiel 2:6)

Today, people reject God's truth, but we are certainly not the first people to face that problem. Ezekiel got rejected by people, and it hurt. Even Jesus got rejected when he went to Nazareth, and he was amazed at their lack of faith. It turns out, what happened to Ezekiel is not all that rare. Rejection is what typically happens when Christians preach God's truth in a sinful world. And it hurts.

HOW WILL WE DEAL WITH REJECTION?

So how are we going to deal with that hurt? I suppose we could stop witnessing to people; then we wouldn't get rejected. Of course, Jesus did say, **"You will be my witnesses."** (Acts 1:8) So, ignoring him isn't a good idea.

We could preach only what people want to hear and tear out the pages of our Bible that might offend them. A lot of Christian churches do that nowadays. Of course, that's the opposite of what God told Ezekiel to do. God's instructions are, **"Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them."** (Ezekiel 2:4-5) We don't say whatever we want. We say what the Lord says, and we are not responsible for whether or not people listen.

We could get a little feisty about the truth and get mad at people who reject it. That's what Iganz Semmelweis did. After the medical community rejected his idea of washing hands to save babies, his compassion for babies turned into anger at doctors. He wrote nasty letters calling them names. He had a mental breakdown, and he died in an insane asylum.

DON'T BE AFRAID

That is not what God has in mind for you. No, God gives us everything we need to speak the truth and face rejection without going mad. He said to Ezekiel, **"Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people."** (Ezekiel 2:6)

IT'S GOD'S MESSAGE

We don't have to be afraid of rejection for two big reasons. First, remember where your truth comes from. God said, **"You must speak my words to them."** (Ezekiel 2:7) Whose words? God's words. The very rejectable message came from the God who loved the Israelites for centuries while they hated him. It came from God who rescued them from foreign countries in the past, who promised to do it again. It was hard to hear that God would take their city and their temple. But it came from a

trustworthy source—a God who loved them and promised to stand by them.

It's the same today. What I believe about marriage is a hard truth about many people today. It breaks their hearts! But where did we learn this rejectable teaching? You didn't make it up. I didn't make it up. And it didn't come from some curmudgeon in the sky who lives to ruin our fun. Our message comes from a God who knows our pain. He who knows your deep regrets, the tears you've caused, and the guilt you feel. You see, Jesus has been here before. When he died on the cross, he took the worst this world had to offer. He did it so you can have the best that heaven has to offer. Jesus loves you more than any person you've ever met. He's done more for you than anyone else. That's where we get our teaching about sin and hell, and marriage. I don't believe those teachings because it makes sense. I don't believe it because it's popular. I believe it because it comes from my Savior. When you face rejection, it helps to remember who your truth comes from.

EAT THIS BOOK

And it helps to listen to it. God told Ezekiel, **“But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people.”** If we want to faithfully speak God's truth, we've got to listen to God's truth. More than listen. God said to Ezekiel, **“Open your mouth and eat what I give you.”** Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, **“Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.”** So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, **“Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.”** So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. (Ezekiel 2:9-3:3)

Don't just listen to God's word. Eat it. When you eat an apple, you don't just learn about it; it becomes part of you, whether you like it or not. And when I eat a party-size plate of nachos all by myself, it becomes part

of me, whether I like it or not. You can read the Bible without making it a part of you. But if you want to faithfully speak God's truth, eat this scroll! Eat the word of God. Make it a part of you. That means you don't just know that God saved the world. You take two minutes to cheer up because you are going to spend forever in heaven. You don't just know that Jesus said, "love your neighbor as yourself." You let loving your neighbor interfere with your schedule this week. When God's truth is a part of you, you'll speak it even if people reject it.

TELL GOD'S TRUTH

This is all getting real for me in a brand new way. Today my son, Soren, will be baptized. (You didn't think I was going to preach the whole sermon without talking about Soren, did you?) In the baptism liturgy, I will make a promise and the entire congregation with me. We promise to **"teach God's precious truths [him] so that Soren might remain a child of God until death."** Soren is not going to like some of God's precious truths. As cute as he is, he's a sinner who deserves nothing but God's wrath and punishment. That's not fun to hear. But our job is to tell him the truth, whether he likes it or not. It helps to remember that God's truth comes from Jesus, who loves Soren more than I ever could. Rachel and I are going to have to eat this scroll, make that part of us so we can tell it to our son. Just like it was for Ezekiel, it will be sweet. Even the most challenging conversations prepare Soren's heart to trust Jesus, who died for him, who adopted him, and who's got a spot in heaven for him.

Who is it in your life? Who needs to hear God's truth from you? It's not easy to face rejection. But you don't need to be afraid. Your truth comes from Jesus. So, gobble up God's truth and make an appointment this week to share it with someone who needs it. It will be sweet.

Amen.