

God's Response to a Rebellious People

6th Sun. after Pent. – 7/4/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Ezekiel 2:1-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 3, [The LORD said to Ezekiel,] **“Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.”**

Introduction

- ⌘ 242 years ago today, in 1776, the American Rebels signed the Declaration of Independence. But this was not the beginning of the conflict between the American Colonies and the British Empire.
 - ➔ Our American history courses teach us that the American Revolution began years earlier when the British Parliament and King George III instituted a series of taxes upon the American colonies without those colonies having any say in the matter.
 - ➔ But, as with most things, there is always a different side to the story. From the King's perspective, these colonies in America owed the British government a great deal of gratitude. After all they had provided a tremendous amount of money, supplies and protection to the new settlements that made it even possible for them to settle and survive.
 - ➔ So now, when Great Britain needed help in fighting their war against the French, King George III believed these new colonies owed it to him to return a portion of the profits that they were beginning to realize now in America.
 - ➔ When the Americans rebelled against this tax and lack of representation, the King scoffed at their concerns and only further entrenched his heels against them, ramping up the violent war that he would eventually lose seven years later.
- ⌘ Here in our Old Testament Reading today we hear of another King, the Almighty King of kings and the people whom He provided with so much more than earthly supplies and protection.
 - ➔ He's the one who rescued them from 400 years of slavery under the oppressive Pharaoh in Egypt and brought them to The Promised Land where they settled and became a great nation; the LORD's chosen people.
 - ➔ But those people rebelled against their merciful and loving God. They engaged in false worship and broke the covenant God had established with them years ago through Moses.
- ⌘ How would God respond to these rebellious people? Would He declare war as King George III did against the American rebels? Or would He be different in His response from that of earthly kings and rulers still today?
 - ➔ This is the topic that we consider here today on Independence Day, 2021.

I. God speaks to a rebellious people.

- ⌘ In the short interaction that we have in our Old testament Reading, we see a dramatic difference between the way that God reacts to those who rebel against Him and the way that most earthly rulers react in the face of rebellion.
 - ➔ Where earthly rulers and authorities respond defensively at first and then aggressively with force, we see that our gracious, merciful and loving God reacts quickly by giving of Himself instead for the sake of His people.

- ⊗ In verse two Ezekiel tells us that “as [the LORD] spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard Him speaking to me”. You see, before Ezekiel could even respond to God’s call, He was already taking charge of the situation, not relying on the prophet’s ability to perform even the most basic of human functions.
 - ➔ The Spirit entered him and “set (him) on (his) feet”; empowering him for his mission. Most certainly this had to give Ezekiel confidence in his role as the LORD’s spokesman; as the one set aside to receive God’s Word and then to deliver it to God’s people.
- ⊗ But what was that message; what is it that God expects His prophets and preachers to proclaim? Two primary messages: first, God’s Law that shows them the realities of their rebellion and sin.
 - ➔ In Ezekiel’s case, he was to explain to these people why they were currently in exile in Babylon, away from the Promised Land in Judea. This was a difficult message to bring to the people. They were God’s “chosen people” after all, but as God says in verse three, they have now sunk down to the level of being called, “nations of rebels”.
 - ➔ That’s what our sin and rebellion against God does. It creates a divide between us and God; a relationship barrier. And it’s all our own fault, not God’s so that it effectively removes us from the privileged spot of “chosen” people to that unenvied place of just being among the “nations”; that is the pagans; the unbelievers.
 - ➔ The Hebrew term translated as “rebel” (marar) literally means one who is “hard of face” or “stiff of neck”. It’s one who refuses to turn away from self to listen to and follow God and His Word instead. This rebellious attitude must first face the facts of its own sin and disobedience toward God and see, in this case, the loving hand of discipline from the LORD so that it can then hear His Gospel and receive His grace.
- ⊗ And that’s the second message that Ezekiel and God’s prophets and preachers are called to proclaim – God’s Gospel; His Good News of love and salvation!
 - ➔ Ezekiel did speak God’s Gospel as He reminded the people of God’s promise to send a Savior, a Messiah; one who would come and do the sacrificial work to save His people from their sins. That is to bring them back, out of the realm of the unbelievers and into the privileged spot again of God’s “chosen” and redeemed people!
- ⊗ As verses 4 and 5 show us, God’s intent with Ezekiel and His prophets is to get the undisputable truth of Law and Gospel before the people in such way so that “they will know that a prophet has been among them” (v.5).
 - ➔ It means that all excuses will be removed, so that “whether they hear or refuse to hear” God says in verse five, they can no longer use the lie that “no one ever told me”.

II. God speaks to rebels of all times.

- ⊗ Well, whether it was at the time of Ezekiel, during the New Testament time of the apostles or right now today, this has always been, and will always be the way that our merciful God works.
 - ➔ He spoke through prophets in the past and inspired them and others to write His Words down in what we now call both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture so that we clearly have the very words of God before us.
 - ➔ Folks, that means the excuses are gone for you and me today! You and I can’t walk out of here and say, “No one ever told me about how serious my sins and disobedience against God really are”.
- ⊗ In fact Paul makes it crystal clear in Romans 5:10 that not only are we by nature rebels against the Lord, but our instinctive, selfish attitude actually means that we are born as “enemies” of

God. In Colossians 1:21, Paul says, “you...once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds”.

→ Yes, we confessed at the beginning of the service the many ways that we have all sinned daily in thought, word and deed, so that not only do we deserve to be listed among the unbelieving “nations of rebels” but even more we should be condemned forever to hell!

→ As verse four says, “Thus says the Lord GOD”. You can’t say now that no one ever told you.

✘ But, the Good News is that there is Good News, folks! Really Good News! because our King is different from all of the other earthly kings and rulers who have ever ruled.

→ Our God responds to rebellious people and their sin, not by blindly and defensively declaring war and seeking to immediately destroy them, but instead He seeks to call them to repentance for their sin and then shower them with the declaration of His grace and mercy and gift of forgiveness and salvation in His Son!

→ Yes, all of the promises that Ezekiel and the other prophets proclaimed as God’s mouthpieces, have now come true in His Son Jesus. This God-man; this Messiah, Jesus Christ took on human flesh and lived the perfect life that you and I could not in our place. That means He did it for us! He did it for you!

→ And then He died on the cross to make payment for your sin. And He rose from the dead to conquer the power of death so that you might have the promise of living forever in God’s holy presence.

III. God Changes Rebels

✘ What a contrast! Because you and I are rebels in our sin, we deserve death. But because of Jesus we receive eternal life! We should be condemned to the flames and slavery of hell, but instead Jesus places us in heaven before the glorious throne of God in the most wondrous freedom ever!

→ This is the message God sent Ezekiel to proclaim in his day. And it is the message He intends His Church to proclaim in our day as well. Yes, we are His instruments for the preaching and teaching of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments to the rebellious nations around us right now.

→ He has called me to be His prophet, His public mouthpiece here in this place, as the “called and ordained servant of His Word”. God has made it my job to make sure there are no more excuses among you – that I make sure you are clearly aware of your sin and your need for a Savior. And that I equally make sure that You know that Your Savior is Jesus Christ and what He has done on the cross and in His resurrection for your salvation.

→ It’s never allowed to be about me, but always about Jesus, so that whether you “hear or refuse to hear” you “will know that a prophet has been among [you]” (v.5) and there will be no doubt about what you deserve as a rebel, and what you receive instead as a gift of grace and mercy from Jesus and Jesus alone!

✘ This is God’s work – not mine, not yours, not the church’s work. He is the only one that changed the people of Israel and restored them back to The Promised Land, and He is the only one who has changed you and me in the restoring waters of our baptism as they connect us directly to Jesus and His saving work on our behalf!

→ No longer are we enemies and rebels of God, but in Jesus we are now those who love Him and serve Him with joy and contentment even as we live here among the “nations of rebels” every day.

Conclusion

✘ But that's part of the joy isn't it. God has given us His Word and His power to share that Word to a rebellious people in hard and challenging times. Yes, it's hard, but is a great joy as well.

→ Why? Because He wants to change them just as He has changed and saved us. The last thing He wants is for them to be destroyed. And so He has filled you and me with His Spirit; He has given us His Word and He has called us and charged us to proclaim the truth and share the invitation of Acts 16:31 with all people, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved". "Thus says the Lord GOD" (v.4). AMEN.