

Preach It Brother! Pastor Jim Sprenkle – Pentecost 6 – July 4, 2021

- I. **Ezekiel 2:4-5** – As God says to Ezekiel, ⁴ “I send you to [the rebellious people of Israel], and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ ⁵ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.”
- II. **America the beautiful – The land of promise and prosperity...**
 - a. Certainly this country has been blessed beyond measure.
 - i. The standard of living and the freedoms we enjoy are so much greater than most parts of the world
 - ii. Yes, many people might disagree with that statement, and a growing number are finding fault with our history – but the fact remains that in spite of its flaws, America is a great nation.
 - iii. As Christians, the unique way that our government was created gives us freedoms that many countries don’t allow – and we can worship freely without persecution or hindrance from authorities.
 - b. It’s difficult to separate the Church and our country when Independence Day falls on a Sunday.
 - i. However, it is important to recognize that we live in two kingdoms...
 1. The kingdom of the left is the world and all its systems of government and authorities....
 2. And the kingdom of the right – is the Church and God’s authority that is given by His Word – and especially His grace.
 - ii. It’s easy to mix these things up because we live in the world and have the government involved in almost everything we do –
 1. take for example our new addition and how challenging it was to get a Certificate of Occupancy!
 2. So even the Church has to work with the government to some extent – at least when it comes to worldly matters
 - iii. However, the Church is not governed by the systems and authorities of this world – the Kingdom of the Right is governed by God and His Word... and most importantly, grace.
 1. If and when the authorities outside the Church attempt to hinder or infringe on God’s Word, we cannot obey.
 2. As Peter and the Apostles were told by the authorities in Jerusalem to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, they replied, “We must obey God rather than men,” Acts 5:29.
 - c. And here is the trouble for us today.
 - i. We value our freedoms so much – we call our nation great (and rightly so) – and we value our right to worship freely... but do we obey God?
 - ii. Do we use our freedoms for God rather than personal gain...?

iii. Or, do we use our freedoms to rebel and turn away from God?

III. **Ezekiel is a prophet called and sent by God Himself.**

- a. Our reading today follows a strange and amazing vision of God and His glory... as Ezekiel is given a revelation of the spiritual realm.
- b. Ezekiel hits the ground face down knowing that he cannot see God and live, but God stands him up and refers to him by the name, “son of man”.
 - i. “Son of man” in this setting means that Ezekiel is just a human being – nothing special compared to almighty God.
 - ii. And then the LORD God fills him with the Holy Spirit and tells him to go to the rebellious people of Israel and preach to them.
 - iii. God even says that regardless if they listen or not, they will know a prophet has been among them...
- c. Israel was also a nation blessed by God.
 - i. Obviously, they were not America in how they got started, but certainly they experienced the favor of God for many years
 - ii. That is, until their leaders and the people began to rebel
 - 1. Over time, the wonderful prosperity they had was destroyed...
 - 2. After King Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into northern and southern kingdoms – with Jerusalem and the temple in the southern kingdom
 - 3. The north was invaded and conquered by Assyria, while the southern kingdom stayed independent for more than a century after the north fell
 - 4. Yet, the Babylonians were too much for even the supremely confident southern kingdom, and they were also conquered and many exiled to Babylonia.
- d. Ezekiel was called to preach to these beaten up exiles... the ones who had lost their freedoms and the very land given to them by God.
- e. What happened? Why had they lost their freedom under God?
 - i. The answer is “rebellion” – which is a very strong word in the Hebrew language – it might be stated that the “nation of rebels who have rebelled” (vs 3) are people who have looked at God and said, “to heck with you!! This relationship is over!!”
 - ii. They rejected God by their thoughts, their words, and their deeds.

IV. **We also use our freedoms to rebel against God.**

- a. As much as we’ve been blessed by the kingdom of the left – or the temporal blessings we receive by good government and our nation’s prosperity – we tend to forget the source
- b. In fact, we spend much of our time worshiping God’s creation rather than God Himself.
 - i. Remember Isaiah 44 where it says the man cuts down a tree and makes an idol out of it to bow down and worship?

- ii. This is the insanity we also fall for – trusting in the created blessings over our Creator!
- iii. We trust in the government to deliver us... or somehow our nation and its founding fathers are held in higher esteem than God!
 - 1. For example, do we have the same pride for God, the Scriptures and the Christian faith as we do for our nation?
 - 2. Do we feel the same sense of gratitude toward the martyrs of the faith (those who died for believing in Jesus) as we do for all those who died in wars to preserve our nation and its freedoms?
 - 3. Do we trust in politicians to give us what only God can provide?
- iv. What is all this saying to God? “to heck with You! I don’t need You!”
- c. In this crucible, this environment, God calls on and sends pastors to preach
 - i. The funny thing is that we hear pastors preach a solid sermon decrying the mess that our society is in... the people who have abandoned our Lord’s will... and the way that others are rebelling against God and we say, “Yes! Preach it brother!”
 - ii. Yet, all the while, we are the ones in exile – the ones who are rebelling by our thoughts, words and deeds... the ones who need to hear the Law so we turn away from our idols and toward our God.

V. **And this is exactly where God wants us... turning home to Him...**

- a. As sin and rebellion are in each one of us... many times it takes a voice to confirm our wandering and call us home.
- b. The blessing for all of us who have faith in God alone is that we are not ruled by only the Law and condemnation – but by God’s grace and forgiveness won for us on the cross by our Savior Jesus Christ.
 - i. That’s the point of God sending Ezekiel... and Isaiah... and all the prophets and even pastors today... to call people home to Jesus.
 - ii. God chases us down – seeks us out and restores us
 - iii. Even after all the Israelites did to reject God and His ways, our gracious God sought them out time and time again.
 - iv. As God’s children in our baptisms, we are no different – God is constantly seeking us out to restore us.
- c. Each of us can confidently come home to Jesus, confess our sins and receive the forgiveness and grace you will never find in the world.
 - i. We might receive plenty of blessings from our world and this great nation of America, but we will never receive the blessings of forgiveness and life eternal.
- d. So we celebrate our independence as a country on this day, but much more than that, we celebrate our dependence on a good and gracious God. Amen.