

Eat These Words
Ezekiel 2:9—3:11

July 6, 2025 (Pen. 4-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

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 house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat the 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.

He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel—not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate. But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house."

And he said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says,' whether they listen or fail to listen." (Ezekiel 2:9—3:11 NIV84)

Dear friends in Jesus Christ, our Savior:

"Eat These Words" is today's sermon theme. When you read that in the bulletin you may have thought to yourself, "What in the world? How could someone eat words, unless you're eating some alphabet soup and you form words out of the letters in the soup?" Or maybe it's meant figuratively, like when someone boasts that they'll whip us in a contest, and we retort, "I'm going to make you eat your words."

When the Lord God called Ezekiel to be a prophet, he stretched out his hand to give him a rolled-up parchment with words on it called a scroll, and he told him: "*Son of man, eat this scroll,*" the words that he was giving him. Ezekiel literally was to eat it. But as we will see, Ezekiel was to figuratively eat the Lord's words, get it inside him, to carry out his assignment as a prophet.

Ezekiel received this call along the Kedar River, a canal by the Euphrates River in Babylon. He was one of many exiles from Judah conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The Lord called him to proclaim his Word, illustrated by the scroll he gave him—a message that had written on it "*words of lament and mourning and woe.*" It was a message of God's just punishment on the house of Israel, for centuries of their breaking God's will and commandments.

This call would be a challenging one for Ezekiel. At first it might have sounded easy, for the Lord announced, "*You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language.*" Ezekiel wouldn't have to learn a foreign language. He was being sent to his own people, "*the house of Israel.*" There was the challenge. The Lord said to Ezekiel, "*Surely if I had sent you to [foreigners], they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate.*" Even at that time, when the Lord was sending wave after wave of Babylonian armies chomping on more sections of Judah and Jerusalem, the exiles still refused to repent of their idol-worshipping and their rebellion against the Lord God.

But the words that Ezekiel received, that he "ate", would fortify him for his call. The Lord promised Ezekiel: "*But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your*

forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.” As the prophet would speak the words of God’s judgment on them, and the people refused to listen and change their ways, the Lord would make his prophet just as stubborn and as unyielding as they were, refusing to change the message in spite of the people’s rejection of it. Ezekiel was fortified by God’s Word and promise so that he need not be afraid of the exiles’ rejection and rebellion.

Our Lord calls preachers today to be stubborn and unyielding as well. When we preach the law, and say, “This is what God’s Word says,” some may refuse to repent and threaten to go somewhere else where the pastor is a “nicer” person. The pastor cannot bend to their will and say, “Well, I understand your point of view, I’ll let it go.” The pastor cannot be a wimpy noodle that bends to the times, but a hardened stone that is unyielding in the message and does not compromise the truth. The Lord says to us, “Preacher, eat these words! Get the Word of God into you, to fortify you and strengthen you to preach the Word in its truth and purity, the law in its severity—but also the gospel in all its beauty.”

Notice what happened when Ezekiel ate the scroll. It wasn’t sour as though the prophet had just sucked some lemons. Nor was it bitter like some bad herbs. Ezekiel ate the scroll, and “*it tasted as sweet as honey in [his] mouth.*” That’s how the psalmist described the words of the Lord: “They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb” (Ps. 19:10b). These words from God tell us how awesome, how powerful, how loving and how merciful the Lord our God is. Another psalm invites us, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8a). Eat these words, they’re delicious!

When Ezekiel went out to preach that Word to the exiles in Babylon, it happened just as the Lord had said. The people by and large did reject the message. Yet, the prophet continued to proclaim it, not because he was a masochist and enjoyed getting rejected, but because that Word was inside him and tasted so sweet to him. What’s more, after the news came that Jerusalem had fallen and the temple was destroyed, some of the people began to despair and mourn. Now Ezekiel was able to deliver a sweet message for those saddened believers. Among other things, he spoke the Lord’s promise: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them...I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from their countries, and I will bring them into their own land” (Ezek. 34:11,13). How sweet that message was!

When the Lord tells pastors and Christian school teachers to eat his words, we find them delicious as well. For this word, the Bible, is God’s own Word. These words tell us the whole plan of salvation that culminates in the great Prophet, Jesus, who is God’s own Son. These words bring the sweet message of Christ who says, “I am the Good Shepherd; I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14). Called workers of the gospel need to eat these words regularly so they can properly divide law and gospel, know when a person needs to hear the law, but also be eager to deliver the sweet gospel message of Jesus Christ, the “Son of Man” who is also the Son of God.

“Eat these words.” Our Lord speaks this not only to called workers, but to all Christians, to all of you. Of all the things that you could be doing this Fourth of July weekend, you came here to worship the Lord. Communicants are here to receive communion. And the Word of God is here, presented to us as a banquet for our souls. Don’t just nibble on it and forget what you heard, but eat it heartily for you to benefit from it all this week. Come back for seconds with Bible study later today! Keep eating these words throughout the week with your individual and family devotions and readings of the Word. That Word fortifies our faith, it’s delicious to our souls, because God is good! Bon appetit! Amen.