

“Those Stubborn Who?”—Ezekiel 2:1-5

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Those Stubborn Who?”, is Ezekiel 2:3-5 → *Yahweh said to me, “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. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Throughout my lifetime I’ve heard people refer to groups of people as stubborn, as if the characteristic of being stubborn was a genetic result of nationality. “Those stubborn Germans . . . Norwegians . . . Irish . . . etc.” In other discussions I would hear people talk about “those stubborn Lutherans . . . Catholics . . . Baptists . . . etc.”, as if being stubborn had something to do with some kind of religious DNA.

Throw into the mix political leaders and parties who are labeled stubborn as well as husbands and wives who talk about those stubborn men or women, and I'm at a loss to find anyone who isn't stubborn!

The dictionary defines a stubborn person as one who is “unreasonably or perversely unyielding” (i.e. negatively) and as one who is “justifiably unyielding” (i.e. positively) (Merriam-Webster, I. © 1996. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.). So I guess, depending upon the context, being a stubborn German, Norwegian, Lutheran, man, woman and so forth could be either a good or bad characteristic. However, when it comes to your relationship with the LORD, stubbornness can have an effect on your eternal context. Will you spend eternity in heaven or hell?

In our text, Yahweh describes the Israelites as *stubborn*. However, He gives a context to their stubbornness with these descriptions: *nations of rebels* (i.e. the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah), *a rebellious house*, and *impudent* (i.e. “marked by contemptuous or cocky boldness or disregard of others” (ibid.)). This is quite a description of those who had the distinction of being “God's people.” The reason for such descriptions? They had *rebelled* and *transgressed against* the LORD by going beyond what He had prescribed in His laws and indulged in sinful behavior.

Our text records Ezekiel being called by Yahweh to go on His behalf and speak to His people. However, such a call could seem rather strange to Ezekiel in light of these descriptions. Think about it: Yahweh is sending him to speak the words which He will put in Ezekiel's mouth to His people. But if they are a *rebellious house . . . stubborn and impudent*, why bother? I mean, you can't help people unless they recognize they need help and are willing to accept it . . . right? And stubborn people are so set in their ways that they don't listen to reason . . . right? What would you think if you had been in Ezekiel's sandals?

However, it shows the extent of God's love for and mercy toward His people. Just because people reject God's will for their eternal salvation in Christ Jesus doesn't mean that He gives up holding forth the opportunity for them to repent. Paul wrote in Romans 10:21 about the Israelites' rejection of God's desire for them to repent of their sins and trust in the atoning work of Christ. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, God says: *All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people*. What he said about them could be said about anyone who refuses to confess their sins, believe in Christ and live in obedience to His Word.

In verse 3 of our text, the LORD states the fact that they were following the ways of *their fathers* who also *transgressed against* Him.

It would be tempting to “pin the blame” on their parents for their own idolatrous sin, as happens so quickly when the world strives to determine a cause for one’s sinful behavior. After all, if I can find the reason for my rebellious, stubborn, impudent behavior, it can give me a sense of control over it since I can give an excuse for it. Busted in idolatry again, thinking I’m in control with my excuses.

The people of God tried this when Ezekiel confronted them with their sin. Eventually they threw a proverb up in God’s face in Ezekiel 18:2 saying, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge*. In other words, “the sour taste of our father’s disobedience has been left in our mouths so we can’t help but be disobedient.” His answer? *Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine: the soul who sins shall die.* (cf. Ezekiel 18:4) You are each accountable for your own sins before the LORD no matter what reason you determine as their cause.

The very existence of prophets sent to confront God’s stubborn people of their sins and *hold out His hands* to them in the Gospel is an act of His love. He could have simply given up on them and left them to their own devices, actually choosing eternal suffering in hell. But that is not His desire. Later He expressed His desire in Ezekiel 33:11. He told Ezekiel to *say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the*

wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

You see, Yahweh is stubborn too . . . in the sense that He is unyielding, not giving up on His people but continually holding out hope to them in His Word. Thus, Ezekiel or any of the prophets' task was simply to *say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD'* (verse 4). It was not Ezekiel's responsibility to produce repentance and obedience to God's Word. That is God's work in your heart as the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith (cf. Meaning of the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed). *And whether they hear or refuse to hear God's Word with faith and obedience, still they will know that a prophet has been among them* (verse 5). They could never plead ignorance because they had been told.

God is so stubborn—that is, faithful to His promise to deliver all mankind from its slavery to sin and the devil—that He took on human flesh in the person of Jesus, suffered the eternal punishment which all of us sinners deserve and made the necessary payment to free us from our sinful, selfish, rebellious, impudent hearts. Jesus stubbornly kept this plan of your salvation in clear focus, allowing nothing and no one to stand in the way of its fulfillment (e.g. Matthew 16:21-23). Why? Because, as so many remind themselves at mealtime, *He is good* and

His steadfast love (i.e. His mercy) endures forever (cf. Psalm 118).

No matter how rebellious you are or have been toward the LORD . . . no matter how impudent you've been, living contemptuously with an arrogant boldness or disregard of the LORD and others . . . no matter how stubborn you've been or are in your sin . . . God forgives all of it by repentance and faith in the Person & Work of Jesus (i.e. Confession & Absolution).

Remember the apostle Paul? He was the guy who thought he was doing God a favor by killing those stubborn, rebellious sinners who repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. He felt he was justifiably unyielding in his mission from God to kill Christians and stamp out Christianity.

The LORD brought Paul to repentance of his stubborn, rebellious heart and gave him faith in Jesus, Who called Ananias to speak God's Word to Paul 36 AD. Listen to Paul's perspective of God's steadfast love and mercy for us stubborn sinners twenty-nine years later as he wrote in 1 Timothy 1 → *I thank Him Who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is*

trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life. (cf. verses 12-16)

You have the privilege to believe in Christ Jesus for eternal life as well, for you also have God's Word proclaimed to you in written and spoken form regularly. This is precisely the reason we respond "Thanks be to God" following the reading of His Word in our worship. We are thankful that His prophets have been among us, along with all those others who have spoken the Word of God to us. As you hear His Word **in faith** you too can break forth in praise along with Paul in 1 Timothy 1:17 → *To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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