Butting Heads
The Art of Being Stubborn
Ezekiel 2:9--3:1-15

Head butting can be literally painful, but the term is used metaphorically to refer to someone who is very stubborn and obstinate.

Strange as it may seem, God hardened the head of Ezekiel so he can effectively head butt the stubborn people to whom God has called him to prophesy; “Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead…” (Ezekiel 3:9a).

Ezekiel was one of 10,000 captives taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC; his home was Tel Abib on the banks of the Chebar River; he was called to prophesy to the captives during the 5th year of his captivity and 6 years before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Be Ready to Eat the Scroll (2:9--3:3)

The summons to speak to a rebellious nation (2:1-8)...Ezekiel was flat on his face from beholding the glory of God; now he is commanded to stand on his feet; it was the Spirit of God who set him on his feet (2:1-2); perhaps he was too limp otherwise; Ezekiel means: “God strengthens;” God said. “I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation... (2:3).

The surprise from the Lord (2:9-10)...Out of nowhere comes this hand holding a scroll with writing on both sides; it contained bad news; there was trouble ahead if the people persisted in sinning against God; a “woe” judgment was about to fall upon them.

Our Lord had a “woe” ministry to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23); seven times He rebukes them with the word “woe;” Jesus unleashed against their hypocrisy; they could point out everybody else’s flaws, but could not see their own filth; they majored in the externals of religion, but never saw the rottenness
in their hearts (vv 25-28); their hypocrisy was shutting off the kingdom of heaven to others (v 23); giving people a wrong sense of values (vv 16-22); defiling those who came in contact with them (v 27).

When Jesus pronounced “woes” against their hypocrisy, He did not mince words; He called them “hypocrites” (vv14-15,23,25,29); “blind guides” (vv 16,24); “fools and blind” (vv 17,19); “whitewashed tombs that appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (v. 27); “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”(v 28).

Is it an wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem; these “woes” were born out of anguish for people who claimed to know God, yet their hearts were far from Him; Jesus was not afraid to offend those to whom He preached; He was a head-butter; Ezekiel was called to be a head-butter to the Jews in exile.

*The sweetness of the scroll (3:1-3)*... The scroll was to be eaten in its entirety, not to be nibbled on; we too are to eat God’s Word entirely and digest it thoroughly; we are not to be picky eaters; Paul declared the whole counsel of God ( Acts 20:27); he told the Ephesian elders, not one doctrine was left unsaid, not one command was ignored; we too must proclaim the whole Word of God.

There is value in digesting God’s Word; it contains the authority of God (2 Timothy 3:16), the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:7), the salvation from God (Romans 10:9-17), the commandments of God (Psalm 11:;65-72), the morality of God (Exodus 20:1-17), the eternal purposes of God (John 5:29); it useful for equipping the man of God for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16).

When Ezekiel ate the scroll it was “in my mouth like honey in sweetness (3:3b); God’s Word is sweet and satisfying to the soul (See Jeremiah 15:17; Job 23:12; Psalm 119:11; Matthew 4:4).

Be Reporting for Duty (3:4-11)

*The summons for the house of Israel (3:4-6)*... His message to his own people in a foreign land was: “Thus saith the LORD;” that is what every prophet and every preacher is to do; “Preach the Word!”(2 Timothy 4:2); the pulpit is the most sacred piece of furniture in the church.
The stubbornness of the people (3:7)... God knew the people would not listen, but Ezekiel was to speak anyway (2:5).

The people of the captives had a strange mindset; there were already two deportations, Ezekiel was warning of a third that would leave Jerusalem in rubble, yet they refused to believe it.

This is true of those who call themselves “Christian;” there are certain aspects of God’s Word to which they refuse to listen; when you talk about God’s love you hear the “Amens;” when you talk about God’s judgments, they don’t believe it will happen to them.

The strengthening of Ezekiel’s head for head butting (3:8-11)...

1. God was saying be adamant (3:8-10)... Ezekiel was a sensitive man whom God had to toughen up for the task; those who speak the truth must be as stubborn as those who speak a lie; shamefully, this is a day for head-butting in the church; most Bible Colleges and Seminaries don’t prepare preachers for head-butting and thus they get eaten up; I have known a lot of pastors who have found themselves up against congregants and leadership whose head was harder than theirs.

2. God was saying be aggressive (3:11)... The issue for the Church is to confront a secular worldview and do so whether people will listen or not; God’s message at times is hard to hear as it counters the culture of the day.

Our responsibility is not to convert people; that is God’s work; our responsibility is to tell them that Jesus saves; that God is the sovereign Judge to whom everyone must give an account; that there is a heaven and a hell; our job is to be a moral agent for the community by proclaiming the moral laws of God--- all of them, whether society wants to hear or not.

No one is too old to butt heads; what I have learned is: the older we are, the more set in our ways, the more stubborn we become; God is asking us to be stubborn for Him.
Be Receptive to the Work of the Holy Spirit (3:12-15)

_Ezekiel’s arrival by the Spirit to Tel Abib (3:12,13,15)..._ What does it mean for us to be lifted up by the Spirit? Let me suggest 6 things that spell out the acronym PREACH:

He Places *us where He needs us…* Ezekiel in Babylon (Ezekiel 3:12,14); Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39); Paul to Macedonia (Acts 6:6-10).

He Recalls *the truth of God for us…* (John 14:26).

He Equips *us for ministry…* (1 Peter 4:9-19; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

He Equips *us for ministry…* (Acts 1:8).

He Convicts and Converts *the hearer…* (John 16:8; 15:26)

He Helps *us with what to say…* (Matthew 10:16,19).

_Ezekiel’s anger at the situation (3:14)..._ He is angry at his own people for they are a stubborn bunch; sometimes the hardest people to reach for Christ are members of our own family.

_Ezekiel’s astonishment at people (3:15)..._ Ezekiel sat astonished watching the behavior of the people of Tel Abib for seven days; he was stunned by how they were acting; it was as though to them God was not watching; before he begins his ministry he sizes up the audience to whom he is to perform and to speak; this is a wise thing for any pastor to do before accepting a new calling to a church; you better first find out what you are getting into before you accept the call.

What about you? Are you Spirit filled? Are you digesting God’s Word? Are you willing to do some head butting? Will you go where God sends you and say what God says? Whether others listen or not is not your concern; the Spirit convicts the heart, we are simply to be the vessel for God’s use and for His glory. Amen!