

How God Makes Men

Ezekiel: How God Makes Men So They Can Complete Their Mission

Unedited Transcript

Ezekiel 1:25-3:11, 1 Corinthians 4:2

Good morning, men! Thank you. Welcome to 'Man in the Mirror' men's Bible study. We're going to go ahead and start this morning with a couple of shout-outs. We have first of all Men of Purpose of Metro-West Church of the Nazarene in Orlando, FL. 10 men who have been meeting at the church for 3 years on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm using the Video Bible Study. They are led by Fitzroy Henry and we are currently looking for an Area Director for the Metro West region. Guys make a field trip some time and come across town and see us. We'd love to have you do that.

Then second shout-out goes to Streetlite Men's Bible Study of Streetlite Christian Fellowship Church in Baltimore, MD. 12 men who have been meeting at the church on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm for a month using the Video Bible Study. Led by Matthew Laraway and we are currently looking for an Area Director for the Baltimore, MD region. I wonder if you'd join me in giving a very warm 'Man in the Mirror' welcome to these two groups. One two three hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us.

All right so we're going to do a message out of the series 'How God Makes Men' this morning. This message is for a particular person who may or may not be you. If it's not, I'm hoping that it's somebody you would like to be. The message this morning is for the man who has had an experience with God. It's for the man who because he has experienced the sense of the presence of the Almighty in his life, that he aches to do something for God. To be used by God. To be even consumed by God. To bring God glory and to please God.

Not in order to get something from God but just because of his deep sense of awe and reverence for God. Is that you? Would you like that to be you? If that's the case, this is the message this morning for you. Now if that's not you or you don't want to be that, listen in. listen in and who knows what God might do even this morning.

Our Moment

The message title is 'Ezekiel: How God Makes Men so they can Complete their Mission.' First thing up we want to talk about is just the moment in which we live, our moment. We live as you know so well in a very broken generation. The statistics are alarming, overwhelming, baffling, staggering. We can go on and on about the statistics. Things like the fact that 80% of men are so unaware of their emotions that not only can they not express their emotions; they cannot even identify them, 80%.

60% of men are making the minimum monthly payments on their credit card balances. 50% of men in the church actively seek out pornography. Those are the words of the self-reporting. 41% of all births in the United States today are to single unmarried women. They go on and on and on. These statistics have faces.

Talking with a young man here recently who has abandoned his walk with Jesus and his life is just spinning out of control. It's not exactly that it was in so much control to begin with perhaps, but now without the anchor of the moral authority of God to which he was at one time committed. Without that moral, he's just now spinning out of control and he's taking everybody down with him. At least 10 people that's I've been able to count he's taking right down with him. He says, "I'm consumed with self-destructive behaviors. He knows what's happening.

This calls for a moment. Not only is it happening to people outside the Church, outside the Body of Christ, outside the family of believers. It's also happening inside the Church. In fact, I would estimate, and this is just an estimate, but that 90% of all Christian men lead tepid lukewarm often defeated lives. You hate it if you're like that. Probably not many men here because you're here, but the vast majority of even Christian men. Something has happened.

The question is are Christian men leading these lukewarm defeated lives, broken lives because the culture is broken? Or is the culture broken because people are leading these defeated lives? It's a conundrum we'll ever figure out but we're going to see in the text that we look at today that Ezekiel lived in a moment not unlike the moment in which we live today.

Now against this backdrop of our cultural moment, we have a character of God. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son that whosoever would believe in Him would never perish but inherit eternal life. Matthew 9:36, "When Jesus got out of a boat one day, he looked on the crowds." The scriptures say that He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless. Like sheep without a shepherd, God loves His world. God loves the people that has knit together in their mother's wombs every one of them.

We have this conundrum in our moment because we have people who are in rebellion, who are obstinate, who are stubborn. Who are leading defeated lives, lukewarm lives over against the character of God who loves the world. Who's not willing, who does not desire that any would perish but that all would come to repentance. How does God propose to solve this problem?

In the scriptures we see that when believing and non-believing communities get off the rails, when they get off track, they can never get themselves back on track. They need a message from God. When you meet someone who is off track, they can't get back on track. They need a message from God. God has so ordered this world so that Jesus Christ and His Gospel is the hope of the world. Jesus Christ and His Gospel is the hope of the world. That's His message.

Listen, the body, the Church of which Christ is head, you and me, though deeply flawed and far from perfect is and always has been God's primary and most effective means to bring Christ and His Gospel to the world. The way that God solves this problem is through us. God will send a man. When somebody's off track, they can't get back on track, God will send a man. Guess what? Today that man is you. God wants to send you.

The big idea and now you're thinking, "Oh me? You've got to be kidding. I've tried that. It doesn't work for me. In fact, I've embarrassed myself on multiple occasions. In fact, I've probably done more damage than good. No I can't do that." "Yes you can." Here's the big idea: **God will never give you a mission without also giving you everything you need to be faithful.** We're going to look at the life of Ezekiel and we're going to see in the life of Ezekiel as we could see in the life of Moses.

Or in the life of Joshua, or in the life of Isaiah, or in the life of Paul, or in the life of Jeremiah. Or any number of great men of the Bible if they were men just like us. God never gave any of them ... How about Gideon? God never gave any of them a mission without also giving them everything they need to be faithful. I want you to believe this idea this morning not because it's up here in the screen but because it's right here in God's words. Let's take a look at the story of Ezekiel.

The Story of Ezekiel

In chapter one Ezekiel has a vision of God. "I saw visions of God." He saw the four living creatures. Then in verse 25, "Then there came a voice from above the expanse over the heads of these living creatures as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire. High above on the throne was a figure like that of a man."

"I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like glowing metal as if full of fire. And from there down he looked like fire, and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

This is my favorite description of probably the pre-incarnate Christ. I love this description because it's filled with awe. I love when I pray in the mornings to begin by saying to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit I worship you in the beauty of your holiness. In the majesty of your creation. In the generosity of your salvation. You alone are worthy to receive glory, honor, praise, power, strength, majesty, dominion, reverence, awe, wisdom, wealth, blessing, thanksgiving. For you are the God who was, who is, and is to come.

I have had an experience with God. You have had an experience with God. Or if you have not had an experience with God, how do you do that? Right here in The Word, some people will have a situational experience with God. I've had a couple, I've had several actually. You probably have too but most of men even then have been triggered by reading The Word of God. Read this passage. Ask God to speak to your heart. What happened when Ezekiel had this vision of God? Look what it says next.

"When I saw it, I fell face down. I fell on my face." You know some of us think that when we get ... finally get to be with God, "I have some questions for God. All these things that have been bothering me. I'm going to pepper him with questions." No you're not. No you're not. When you see God, bam! You're going to hit the deck buddy. You're going to hit the deck just like every single ... All these other guys have mentioned the burning bush and Gideon, you name it. Bam! Isaiah, bam! Hit the deck, hit the deck.

Then in chapter two, "He said to me, "Son of man stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As he spoke the spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. He said, "Son of man, I am sending you." Son of man, God says to you, "I am sending you. I'm sending you."

He always sends a man. He inevitably sends a man. We have this world in rebellion. We even have this body in rebellion and obstinate and stubborn. We have this God over here on the other side with His ... who loves what He has made and wants to redeem it and sustain it. He's bridging these two ideas by sending the man. By sending the man.

"I'm sending you to the Israelites to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me. These are the people of God now. These are the believers okay, or whatever you want to call it. They and their fathers have been a revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Do you know who would really like that? I do. Me. Rebellious, in revolt, obstinate, and stubborn. Is the world in such chaos ... Let me back that.

Are we believers who are rebellious, obstinate, in revolt and stubborn. Are we that way because the world is such a mess? Or might it be that the world is such a mess because we're so obstinate, stubborn, and rebellious. In the text it seems to say ... It does not seem to say, it does say that the reason that these Israelites are in exile in Babylon ... Ezekiel is in Babylon. He came there nine years after Daniel came there. Was there for 27 years speaking for God to these exiles who were there. Who were having their broken generation, their exile. Not that led to their rebellion but because of the rebellion.

"Say to them, this is what the Sovereign Lord says," verse five, "And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them." If you will speak people will know that a prophet has been among them. They may not believe you, they may not change their minds, but they will know, they will know that they have been in the presence of a man who has been in the presence. A man who has had an experience with God. Somebody who has something that's real, that's authentic.

Billy Graham was one of the most respected men who ever lived. He was always one of the most respected men in America. People would say, "I don't agree with Billy Graham. I don't believe what Billy Graham believes, but I believe that he believes." That's what we're talking about. That's what it means to be this kind of a man.

"And you son of man," verse six, "do not be afraid of them or their words." Don't be afraid of people, you don't have to be afraid of people. Verse seven, "You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen." Then God gave, in this vision ... This is a vision. God gave Ezekiel a scroll. The Word of God and said, "Eat it," and he did and it was sweet. Then in verse three of chapter three that he said to me ... By the way ... God gave him the scroll.

You don't choose the message. You don't choose the message, the message chooses you. You see how that works? You don't get to make up your message. You don't get to make up your calling; God gives you your calling. He gives you the message. Eat it, enjoy it. It is sweet, it is sweet. Chapter three verse three, "Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you." I am the one giving it to you. I am gave it to him. "So I ate it and it tasted 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." To the Church today it will be.

"Not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language. Choose words you cannot understand. Surely if I'd 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." If somebody doesn't listen to you, God uses the weak things of this world to confound the wise.

If you go out and you are faithful, if you are faithful to speak for God. If people refuse to listen, it's not you that they're refusing to listen to. It's not you that they're not willing to listen to because God says right here, "They're not willing to listen to you because they're not willing to listen to me." It's not about you. It never was about you, it's about Jesus. It's about His Gospel. Who would like to say that, who would like to say that I, Bill Smith and my gospel is the hope of the world. What I have to say to you is your hope. That's crazy, that's crazy.

Okay, verse eight, "But I will make you, I will make you," God says, "as unyielding and hardened as they are." You think they're stubborn, you think they're obstinate going off the track. I will make you just as obstinate and just as stubborn to help them understand how much I love them and want them to come back onto the right track.

By the way, when I went ... When I left business, this is one of the ... These next four verses, these four verses are the ones that among four or five different passages that I most identify with. That I wrote down a bunch of scriptures that I wanted to build my life around them. Eighth through eleventh are those verses. "But I will make you are unyielding and as hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like a heart of stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid or terrified by them for they are a rebellious house."

"And he said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully, listen carefully to my message and take heart all the words I speak to you." Take heart; take the heart all of the words that I speak to you. All of the scriptures, God is speaking to you, God is speaking to me. He wants us to take it all of these words. Then, "Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, "This is what they Sovereign Lord says whether they listen or not. Whether they listen or fail to listen."

Men that's it, that's the big idea. God's not going to give you a mission without also giving you everything else that you need to be faithful. That's the big idea. That's the big idea.

Now this is God's work, this is not your work. Jeremiah 1:12 God says, "I am watching over my word," all these words, this message again, "I am watching over my word to fulfill it. I am the one who's doing that, it's not you. I am watching over my word to perform it." You're not out converting people; you're not out growing people, exhorting people, loving people, encouraging people. Accept is an agent of God. Okay now we're done here.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter four, verse two. 1 Corinthians chapter four, verse two. Gosh! I forgot to turn my little timer on. I guess that means I can go as long as I want. Well it also has a clock on it too so there's a little bit of a backup just some ... 1 Corinthians chapter four, verse two. God is trusting you with the hope of the world. He's entrusting you with Christ and His Gospel.

Here's what it says in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Now it is required that to whomever has been given a trust, they must be found successful." It doesn't say that if you have been given a trust you must be found successful, right? No, it doesn't say that. It says, "You must be found faithful. Faithful."

I know you care, but what can you do?

Next up. I know you care but what can you do? I know you care. I know you care about the deterioration that we see around us, the brokenness. There are so many good things happening too but there are so many bad things. It's hard sometimes to see all of the wonderful things. I travel, I speak. People

sometimes like on an airplane they'll say, "What do you do?" I say, "Well I work with men as a vocation. Try and help them find meaning and purpose."

Then depending then where we go from there into spiritual part of it, but they say, "Oh, that must really be hard." I say, "Stop right there. You've got the wrong guy; I have the best job in the world." Every day we see men coming to Jesus, growing in their faith, serving the Lord. It's an astonishing thing to see how much good is going on. What we're doing is we're just watching God take people that we've trained and we're training and we ourselves and you. Sending this out into the mission field and plucking like fire [blades 26:29], plucking people out of the fire. It's amazing. There is a fire, there is a fire going on out there.

Jesus Christ and His Gospel is the hope of the world, the Church, the body of which Christ is head. Though deeply flawed and far from perfect is, we are and always have been God's primary and most effective means of bringing this Gospel and this Jesus to the world. How do we do that? By making disciples. Go and make disciples. Making disciples is God's designated way to release the power of His Gospel on every problem that we've talked about here this morning. Every other problem that we have not talked about this morning.

It doesn't make any difference how a person, or how a community, or how a culture has gotten into the current situation. There is no other solution. The only solution is to disciple them out. If we want to get the world right, we have to get the Church right. We're the Church. If we want to get the Church right we really need to get our families right. Become a disciple; grow as a disciple in disciple-making starting at home.

We want to get the world right, let's the Church right. If we want to get the Church right, let's get families right. If we want to get families right, let's get marriages right. That's family systems theory 101 page one first sentence. Oversimplification but basically if you get the marriage working right, then the rest of ... with the kids that works out.

Can you picture any of getting the world right without getting the Church right. Or the Church right without getting the family right. Or the family right without getting the marriage right. Or the marriage right without getting the women right. We've got to get these women fixed.

Now we're laughing because we know even though every now and then a woman does rip a family apart. Even then what? It's usually after years of emotional neglect. It really is about the men. When you strip all of the ... everything away behind virtually every problem, you will find a man who fails. Not a man who wanted to fail but a man who failed. No matter how he failed or why, the only way out of that predicament is to disciple him out. Do you see this? Do you see this that the fate of the world really depends on whether or not we will make disciples of men? Everything else is downstream from that.

How do we do that? Two ways. First of all do it intentionally. Do it intentionally; intentional discipleship. Go find a few guys or stick with the guys at your table and bring in some guys that need to grow. I'll tell you what, forget that idea. You've been at this table now for a long time. You stay at your table but you go start a group. Go get a handful of guys. You can do anything you want to do it. Just go get a few guys and start meeting, and start building into their lives. Hear their stories.

Start by just saying, "Let's learn each other's stories. Learn the stories so you will know where the sting of the lack of the Gospel is attacking their lives. Then begin to pray and the Lord will show you what kind

of materials you can talk about. The material is not the important thing. The important thing is doing life together with some men who are stuck. Who are off track who need to get back on track. There's intentional discipleship and then they're as-you-go. There's as-you-go.

I got an email yesterday from a friend in the ministry. He was reading 'How God Makes Men'. He and his wife they're from up north. They're down I guess yesterday got on a boat in Fort Lauderdale to go on a cruise. They came in a day early so they were sitting around the pool. The hotel was filled with gay couples who were getting ready to go on a carnival cruise. He was sitting there by the pool reading his book 'How God Makes Men'. After about 30 minutes went by, one of the men that was sitting next to him said, "Well how does ... What does that book have to say about how God makes men like me?"

Jim says that basically he wanted to challenge him about his views about homosexuality which views he did not even know. It did open a door for a spirit-driven conversation that lasted for 45 minutes. He was on the attack for those 45 minutes, quarreled some questions. Then he just laughed it all off and he announced ... made this announcement.

He said, "Jim, it doesn't really matter because I'm going to hell anyway." He said, "Oh," and that his name ... "That makes me feel awful. I don't want you to go to hell and God doesn't want you to go to hell either." Then he cut him off and laughed. Then he said, "Jim you're a good man but don't worry about me. Things work out, give me a hug." They hugged and then he watched Jim and his friend walking away ... the other guy and his friend walking away.

Jim said in the email that, "I just felt so horrible. I felt like I had failed God. Like I had failed this man, because I was fumbling around and I was awkward." He said, "I'm the Director of Discipleship at my church and I was fumbling around. I didn't know what to say and how to say it. He was unimpressed because he walked off anyway."

Then he was reading about the Ministry of Giving a Nudge, which is what God calls us to do. God calls us to be what? Successful. God calls us to be what? Faithful. God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular outcome. God calls us to be faithful not to produce a particular outcome. That's the big idea today. He's wanting us to be faithful. He's wanting us to be faithful.

When God brings somebody into your path who's stuck or off the rails, discipleship means just simply finding out why they're stuck and how, and then helping them get unstuck to the extent that they're interested. If you can't help somebody all the way, you take them as far as you can and you trust that God has other men that He has also called who are out there to bring this message. God will intercept that person. You don't have to worry. You don't have to close every deal so to speak.

You just be faithful to do what you can do. In fact, I would even say if you feel like you need to be successful, you probably are going to turn a lot of people off. That's not your job, it's not my job. Big idea today, God will never give you a mission without also giving you everything you need to be successful. He will give you the words that you need. Let's pray

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, my dearest Father, Lord. This man Ezekiel, Lord we can still identify with this man who you called, this man who you equipped with your message. This man you sent to a stubborn, obstinate, rebellious people. You gave the instruction not to be ... to change people but to just simply bring the

message whether they listen or fail to listen. Lord we pray that we would find a comfort in these words. That we would be motivated to be faithful as a result.

Lord give us even through this text, a deeper experience with you so that we too want to have this kind of impact in ministry. We pray this in your name Jesus, the Hope of the world. Amen.