

Serving God Wherever You End Up

Franklin Church Of Christ
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AM Assembly

Introduction:

In January of 1993, my junior year at Wichita State University, I went to pay my tuition on a Tuesday morning. For five semesters, I had paid in-state tuition because my dad had been in the Air Force. Ready to write my check for approximately \$800, I was stunned when the cashier printed a bill for closer to \$3000. I quickly informed her of her mistake. To which she replied the military dependency rule had been mishandled and did not actually apply to me. My family scrambled to find an affordable place for me to go to school in Arkansas. On Thursday, I began attending the University of Central Arkansas. I was forced to move away from my best friends. I had to leave behind the many opportunities opening up for me in preaching. I had to leave a great job. I had to quit a school which I really liked. I moved to a place where I knew only a few people. I had to scramble to find a job which barely paid the bills. I had no opportunities to preach. I hated it. I spent the whole semester wishing I were back in Wichita. Have you ever been in this situation? How can we put the past behind us and start serving God positively wherever we end up? Allow me to share with you Ezekiel's story. If we ever think we have it bad, ending up somewhere we think is useless, we have nothing on Ezekiel. Examine his story in **Ezekiel 1-3** to learn how to get past our past and serve God wherever we are right now.

Discussion:

- I. Ezekiel's background (**Ezekiel 1:1-3**).
 - A. Ezekiel was a 30-year-old priest, born in the 17th year of Josiah's reign, just one year before Josiah reforms. Until Ezekiel was 14, he witnessed that reformation. Eagerly, he looked forward to his 30th birthday when he would enter temple service (**Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 39**).
 - B. However, at 14, he saw the demise of his people under Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. At 17, he saw Nebuchadnezzar take many of the choice people from his land, carrying them to Babylon. He was still waiting to serve God in the temple. However, at 25, he was also carried away.
 - C. Five years later, when he should have started his temple service, Ezekiel sat by a river thousands of miles from the temple. Imagine how Ezekiel felt: upset, depressed, disappointed, and perhaps even angered that he was unable to serve God where he thought he should.
 - D. However, there in that foreign land, far from home, and far from the temple, Ezekiel would accomplish more for God's purpose than he ever would at the temple. Let's learn from him.
- II. We must recognize God is with us no matter where we end up.
 - A. **Ezekiel 1** is a difficult chapter for modern students. However, to the Jews of Ezekiel's time, it was not. If we learn the background to the images in this chapter, the meaning falls into place.
 - B. The point of this image is summed up in **Ezekiel 1:28**. It is all about God's glory. Don't get bogged down trying to find some historically prophetic meaning from this picture. There is none.
 - C. What does this have to do with God's ever-presence? To Ezekiel—everything! The key is understanding the four beings (**Ezekiel 1:5-21**). They are strange to us, but not to Ezekiel. He knew these beings were cherubim (**Ezekiel 10:20-22**). Cherubim had special significance to him, clarifying the vision. The first mention of cherubim is in **Genesis 3:24**, when God placed the cherubim as guard over the tree of life. Thus, the cherubim signified power and strength. Cherubim are next mentioned in the construction of the tabernacle. God told Moses He would speak to the children of Israel from between the cherubim of the mercy seat in the holy of holies (**Exodus 25:22**). It did not take long for the Jews to regard the cherubim as the throne of God. **I Samuel 4:4; II Samuel 6:2; II Kings 19:15; I Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 99:1; and Isaiah 37:16** all refer to the Lord who is enthroned on the cherubim. David refers to the cherubim as the chariot of God in **II Samuel 22:11** and **Psalm 18:10**. When Ezekiel saw the four creatures, he knew what he was seeing. He was seeing God's throne. How powerful God must be if these creatures are His chair. No wonder Ezekiel's response was worship.
 - D. This image was tremendously significant to Ezekiel. He had spent years preparing to serve God in His Jerusalem "throne room." But in Babylon, in captivity, Ezekiel saw God's actual throne. Ezekiel was not forsaken by God, as he may have thought. God was with him, even in captivity.
 - E. When bad times hit and we are tempted to believe God has forsaken us, we need to remember Ezekiel's vision of God's throne and God's promise in **Hebrews 13:5**.

- III. We must recognize God's plans for us are greater than our own.
- A. Ezekiel planned to serve God in the temple. God's plans for Ezekiel were greater. God planned to use Ezekiel as a prophet to the captive Jews (**Ezekiel 2:1-7**). While we may think there is no way to be of use to God where we have ended up, God has better plans for us.
 - B. Please, do not misunderstand. These chapters do not teach us God has a particular plan for our life revealed in some way other than the scriptures. We do not have to spend our days in anxiety, wondering if we have made the choice in keeping with God's will for our individual lives. Rather, we must make our choices according to God's word. Once we have made these choices, we can be sure God will use us to meet His desired end, no matter where we end up.
 - C. In **Romans 8:28**, Paul claims God causes all things to work together for good, for those who love Him. He does not claim God causes all things. Thus, we are not to look at where we end up as though God necessarily purposefully caused a bad situation as part of His big master plan. Rather, we note whether God caused it or not, God will use it for good for those who love Him.
- IV. We must be willing to serve God wherever we end up.
- A. God was not forcing Ezekiel to be His messenger. Ezekiel was given a choice of whether or not he would serve God or rebel like the other Jews (**Ezekiel 2:8-3:3**). He made the right choice.
 - B. Our service is not some predestined plan of God. We have not ended up where we are because God has forced us here and we will do whatever God makes us. We must choose to serve God. While we will not see the hand of God offering a scroll to eat, we do make choices everyday about whether or not we will serve God where we are.
 - C. Like Jonah, we can choose not to be used by God. But like Jonah, we will face consequences for our choice (**Jonah 1-2**). Also, like Esther we must recognize God will be able to work out His plan whether we choose to be a part of it or not. But perhaps we are here for this purpose (**Esther 4:13-14**). What choice are we going to make?
- V. We must be willing to serve God His way wherever we end up.
- A. God told Ezekiel to tell the people, "Thus says the Lord God" (**Ezekiel 2:4**). In **Ezekiel 3:4**, God told Ezekiel to speak to the people with "My words." If Ezekiel spoke with different words, telling them, "Thus says Ezekiel," he would not have served God at all.
 - B. Serving God His way ended up being quite a hardship for Ezekiel. Ezekiel was told to act out all sorts of strange events. He had to lie on one side for 390 days and then turn over and lie on the other for 40. God even took Ezekiel's wife and would not let Ezekiel mourn over her. Many more hardships could be listed. But Ezekiel chose to serve God His way.
 - C. Our service to God will not consist of the same hardships as Ezekiel's, but it will have hardship. We could often avoid this hardship if we would just back off from, "Thus says the Lord God" or cut a few corners. But, if we don't serve God His way, we are not serving Him at all. The future consequences of that choice will be more than any we would face if we served God His way.

Conclusion:

Allow me to finish the story I started at the beginning of this lesson. If that one tuition problem had not happened, I would not have left Wichita, KS. I would not have looked for a "preacher training" program. I would never have moved to Florence, AL. I wouldn't have met Marita Bobbitt and would never have had Tessa, Ethan, Ryan and Trina. I would not have worked with Harold Comer. He would never have recommended me to work with the Dowlen Road Church. I would never have moved to Beaumont and worked with Max Dawson. I would not have met Phil Cavender. When the Franklin Church in Franklin, TN was looking for a preacher, Phil Cavender would not have offered my name. I would not have moved here. While God would certainly have used me in other ways, I am glad it worked out this way because of the opportunities I have had, the work it has allowed me to do and most of all the relationships it has allowed me to develop. The week that lady said I owed WSU nearly \$3000 I cried several times. But today, I thank God for it. The proverbialist tells us we do not know what a day may bring (**Proverbs 27:1**). We do not know where we will end up. Rest assured, we can have a fulfilling life of serving God if we will simply remember these things. God will use us in ways we would never think, if we will surrender to His will, serving Him His way, no matter where we end up.