

I'm sorry, what was that?

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During this quarantine, there have been several things made obvious. One of these is the ability for people to ignore, or choose to not believe, those who are in authority over them. Especially once something has been said often enough, we start to tune it out. One example of this is in the story of the boy who cried wolf. At first when the young man cries out his warning, the town comes alive to protect the sheep even though there is no wolf. He repeats this exercise, and gradually the townsfolk get tired of his antics and ignore him. Then at last the wolf comes, and though the boy cries as greatly as he can, no one pays attention. The warning has come too often, and is never seen as true. The wolf then feasts upon the flesh of the sheep that the boy intended to protect.

This is true of lies, but also of the truth. As Christians, we are the light of the world (**Matthew 5:14**), and the light that we are to shine is Jesus Christ. We should deal in the light and the truth, because it is by the truth that we, and the world, are set free (**John 8:31-32**). The greatest truth is the Lord Jesus Christ and it is our duty to proclaim him to the world. In this, we can see an echo of the calls of many of the prophets of old. They looked forward to the coming of the Lord, but did not see it; now we look forward to the return of the Lord.

Throughout the ages, God has called many messengers to speak to those who are near and to those who are far off. Still today, the Lord calls us to spread his message. There are days and times when we feel unfit for this calling. We do not know enough, we are not eloquent enough. In this we are not alone. Isaiah knew that he was an unfit messenger. Jeremiah protested that he was too young. It is a normal thing for those whom God chooses to feel as though they are not worthy of this calling.

None of us deserve the grace that has been given to us, but our God is a merciful and compassionate God. Each of us are called to proclaim the Lord until his return, but there are also those who are called to be more. Some have extra responsibilities, like elders and evangelists who oversee the church and work of spreading the gospel. To these in particular we can see the role of a watchman, as Ezekiel was called (**Ezekiel 33:7**). This is not an easy burden to bear, which is why James warns those who become teachers that they will be judged more harshly (**James 3:1**).

Those who proclaim the word of the Lord experience the same difficulty that Ezekiel did. The people would not listen, as the townsfolk would not listen to the boy who cried wolf. But these faithful ministers are not crying wolf to deceive, like the serpent did to Eve, nor are they trying to take advantage of those they oversee. All too often, their message falls on deaf ears. The words God spoke to Isaiah still ring true today: *"Keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing, but do not perceive"* (**Isaiah 6:9**). In more modern parlance, "I'm sorry, what was that?"

All too often, we fall prey to the same issues as the ancient peoples. Ezekiel was warned that the people of God to whom he was sent were hard-headed and hard-hearted (**Ezekiel 3:7**). Many people today still fit into that category, both believers and non-believers. As Christians, we should strive to not be like those people long ago, but rather be like the Bereans, who were willing to search the scriptures to see if what Paul preached were true (**Acts 17:11**). It is good to be hard-headed in some situations. The Lord promised to make Ezekiel harder of head than the Israelites he was ministering to!

When the Lord warned Ezekiel about the people, He also said that Ezekiel was not responsible for how the people received his message. Ezekiel is told that it is his job to warn and to give them the word of the Lord. By delivering the message he was given, he would save his own soul (**Ezekiel 33:9**). Like Ezekiel, it is not our own words, or our own efforts that soften the hearts of those who listen, rather it is the Lord who does the work. Paul reminds us of this in **1 Corinthians 3:6-7**. Paul planted the word and Apollos watered, but it is from the Lord that the increase comes. We, like Paul and Apollos, are merely God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works (**Ephesians 2:10**).

Even knowing that it is God who takes care of his word, it can be disheartening to have people not listen. It is just about the worst thing for teachers to see no effect from their teaching. Parents may be saddened by their children not paying attention to their instructions. It is a terrible thing to be ignored, especially when you continue to work for the best of those involved. This is why God did not condemn Elijah when Elijah was ready to give up and die, and why the Lord reminded Ezekiel multiple times that he was only responsible for speaking God's word.

It is important that we trust the Lord to ensure that his word will accomplish his purpose (**Isaiah 55:11**). Our job is merely to warn people of the effects of sin and teach them about the mercy of God. In this way we always be gracious in our speech (**Colossians 4:6**), because on the judgment day we will be responsible for every careless word we have spoken (**Matthew 12:36**). And do not be discouraged because the word of the Lord seems to have no effect when it is spoken, but remember that you are in good company, for in the same manner they treated the apostles and the prophets who came before. The Lord knows those who are his (**1 Timothy 2:19**), and he will take care of them.

May each of us be filled with the Spirit of Lord, the spirit of courage, hope, and truth. May the Lord of peace, give you rest as you continue in him.