

Stand Up for Jesus!

✠ **Raised by God's Word (vv.1-2)**

✠ **Against stubborn pride (vv.3-5)**

In the name of Jesus, our humble, determined Savior, dear people of God:

Have you heard the story about “The Devil’s Garage Sale” and the “Free” table loaded with packages? Every time someone picked one up, the devil would say, “Here! Take another. They’re free!” You had to look close to see every single package was labeled “Discouragement.” The devil gives away discouragement like a garbage truck gives off stink. It won’t make him happy because nothing does. He just wants you to be miserable so God looks bad. You try so hard, but then you feel guilty because you want to be cheerful and hopeful. “Discouragement” just keeps flying off the devil’s “Free” table.

Look back at heroes of faith and church leaders. You are not alone. Remember how Jesus often prayed all night? He fought discouragement to save us. Our text shows Ezekiel, but this week I learned someone else got too discouraged to **Stand Up for Jesus!** Someone I least expected needed to be...

✠ **Raised by God's Word (vv.1-2)**

Think back on Bible Class and the Lutheran Reformation. 1530 was the year of the Augsburg Confession, that famous faith statement by stouthearted Lutheran princes and theologians. They did not want to separate from the Catholic church, but only to correct abuses Catholic theologians acknowledged.

The shock for me was what was going on with Martin Luther in 1530. As a university professor in Wittenberg, Germany, he had preached two, three, even four times a week for years. But the first nine months of 1530, Luther only preached three times, twice because the Elector pleaded with him. You could see it coming in 1529, because Luther’s warnings got more stern that Wittenbergers would lose the Gospel if they did not show their faith by their deeds. Luther promised to stop preaching if they did not shape up. Finally he stopped. Luther refused to preach because he thought the Wittenbergers were turning their Gospel freedom into a license for immorality. Even the great reformer got discouraged.

So did prophets like Ezekiel, in Exile with Jews deported by the Babylonians. God’s judgment through Jeremiah and so many prophets before him finally crashed down on His own chosen people. And poor Ezekiel had to suffer with them far away from home. In chapter one Ezekiel saw the glory of God and fell facedown. Who could blame him if he wanted to stay there? What’s the use anyway?

Don’t you feel that way sometimes going home from church? The contrast can be so extreme. Beautiful hymns and liturgy, the precious Gospel of forgiveness, this wonderful truth that soothes your heart with God’s promises. “What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!” (CW 411) Then you head home, but the kids are still arguing. Maybe your spouse greets you with ridicule. Neighbors you’ve invited fifty times turn away. “What’s the use?” you ask. “I’ll keep to myself. They don’t even care!” How can you **Stand Up for Jesus!** if you feel so discouraged?

Ezekiel wanted to stay down, but God wouldn’t let him. First, God spoke to him. Our gracious God will not leave us on our face disengaged. But before God can lift us up, He has to put us down. Before He can make us alive, He has to kill us. First, He humbles you. Over 90 times God called Ezekiel: “*Son of man.*” Dear friends, we are dust and ashes like the first man Adam. But then God says, “*Stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.*” We can’t lift ourselves from the pits, but the Holy Spirit does. “*As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.*” Into the very fiber of our being comes God’s Holy Spirit to empower us with His gracious presence, to help our ears to hear and our spine to **Stand Up for Jesus!** God did it for Ezekiel and Luther too. God’s spokesmen were **Raised by God's Word.** Luther noticed in passages like this one, that in

spite of all the sins of God's chosen people, the Scriptures "constantly testify to the God who still has not gotten tired of loving the fallen world and calling it back to himself."¹ What did Jesus say when they nailed Him to the cross? "**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**" What does He say to us? "**Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.**" (Matthew 9:2) As long as God keeps loving sinners like us, His Word will keep raising us up. Let the devil keep his damned discouragement, damned as he is. We **Stand Up for Jesus! Raised by God's Word.** God helps us....

‡ Against stubborn pride (vv.3-5)

He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them." It's not the "other guys"; our very nature is "**obstinate and stubborn.**" In Isaiah's prophecy the LORD asks about us: "**Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD?**" (Isaiah 42:19 NIV84)

Apparently, this is something the great reformer, Martin Luther, had to learn by experience. We all know in theory how Jesus said in these Last Days, "**because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.**" (Matthew 24:12f NIV84) Yet we tend to be like the young man headed south on Lexington last Thursday. He knew he should slow down before making that left hand turn. Instead, he stepped on the gas to cut in front of us and t-boned a car. Don't we stubbornly think at times that others should get out of our way? Their pride we see; to ours we're blind. Driving defensively is not theory after an accident. God's Word by experience goes from your head to your heart. After nine months of not preaching, Luther realized God's love for him had not run dry, nor had time run out for his dear Wittenbergers. Gospel forgiveness stands **Against stubborn pride.**

We lived on a dead end, dirt road when I was in grade school. For five years Ackerman was not paved. Coastal rain made riding with my Dad in his VW bug jarring, dodging potholes. But finally the city would send a road grader to level the ridges and fill in the potholes, saving struts and teeth.

Constantly we need God's road grader to come down the street where we live, to level the ridges of our pride and fill in the potholes of our despair. It's encouraging to know God will not let go of His baptized children. God's road grader can solve problems too big for your plastic shovel. Best of all is what happens after God's road grader comes through. Jesus pulls up in a fine new Mercedes, rolls down the window and says, "Throw your bags in the trunk. Climb in. I'll get you out of here."

Read God's encouragement to the exiles in Jeremiah's letter, Chapter 29. Maybe you've enjoyed these famous words on plaques and cards: "**I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.**" (Jeremiah 29:11-13) Through Isaiah: "**Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.**" (Isaiah 55:6f NIV84)

Luther went back to preaching for the rest of his life until three days before he died. We have work to do too. Whether folks listen or fail to listen, **Stand Up for Jesus!** Then may God grant you the awesome joy of those Campus Ministry friends of Jenn Moore. Out of discouragement their witness for Jesus has her sleeping better, enjoying the support of a Christian congregation. "Now at the end of the day," she says, "I go to bed with less fear, and I know a sense of peace I've never had before, which alters my whole day-to-day life." You see, Jesus has a "Free" table for us too. But He gives us His body and blood for life and salvation. **Stand Up for Jesus!** And "the devil's garage sale"? Pass on by! Amen.

¹ Story and quote from "Overcoming Pulpit Discouragement," by Richard Gurgel in *Preach the Word*, Vol. 15, No. 6.