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Ezekiel 44:15 "Inspiration Not Perspiration"
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All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Ezekiel Chapter 44 verse 15. Ezekiel 44 verse 15.

I've noticed as we have studied a little bit through the prophets that I have a tendency to go back and go every week before we start over the setting, the history if you will. There's a reason for that: I think if I repeat it enough, you'll learn it. I have to do this all my life, so it's stuck in my brain, it's got to get out somewhere. But if you're just hearing it once in a while on Sunday mornings, it may not be so readily apparent. I'm going to do that again today, five minutes, then we can get to our lesson.

The southern kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 606, 597 then 586 once and for all, as the Lord after several hundred years waited upon His people to stop worshipping at the idols of the gods of the land around them. Their idolatry, which had crept into among God's people and then led obviously to just disobedience in the way they were living, the Lord warned them for a long time that if that continued, this is what would happen, finally said this will happen, and then it did happen. But God loved His people, He would also tell them this captivity would be for 70 years, but it would be for 70 years.

Ezekiel was a priest and a young man of 25 years old when in that second round of attacks, 597, he was taken away from his home and his family, and dragged 700 miles away with many others and placed in a resettlement community along the Euphrates River to become farmers, just working every day. At 30 years old, five years later, the Lord spoke to him one day and said He wanted to use him to be His voice to the people in captivity.

At this time, you have Jeremiah living amongst the people in Jerusalem to say, "Hey, the attacks are coming and we're going to be taken away. Don't fight it, you're going to die." You have Ezekiel amongst the captives saying, "Hey, you got to live for the Lord here. Don't cause trouble. You're going

to be here a while. Just be faithful and God will take care of you, and you'll get to go back home in 70 years." Then the Lord had Daniel, who had been taken in the first attack. He's now serving Nebuchadnezzar in the state office, if you will. The Lord has people to represent Him in every place.

But Ezekiel is the one that we're looking at now. Ezekiel was given by the Lord this word from the Lord to the people, about how they got there because of their sin, about how the Lord was going to take care of them if they would be faithful. For 24 chapters in this book, if you've been reading the book of Ezekiel, God speaks solely to his captive people. In fact, that's all that you can read: The Lord speaking to His people about why they're there, how they are going to get out, what the Lord is intending to do.

But at the end of Chapter 24, the Lord then says, "I'm not going to give you anymore words for My people until word comes from you Jerusalem 700 miles away that the captivity is coming your way. The siege is over." For the next many chapters, from Chapter 25 through 32, God begins to speak to Ezekiel not for the Jews, but for the surrounding nations, 16 of them in all, to warn them about laying your hands on God's people, how you deal with God's people, how the Lord was the Lord.

In Chapter 33 the Lord then came back to Ezekiel and He said, "Look, Ezekiel, you're going to be my watchman. I'm preparing you for the arrival of a messenger from Jerusalem that will tell you that the siege is over." He showed up three years later actually, rather than just the 18 months that it took to overthrow the city itself. It took him almost a year to travel through all of that mess.

But then things change. From Chapter 33 through Chapter 40 in this book there is no longer messages of captivity is coming, because it came. Now the promises are good. Be faithful, be dependent. God will get you through this. they're very encouraging chapters, if you will. Glorious chapters.

Then in Chapter 40 it takes another complete turn, most of what is written from Chapter 40 to the end of the book has to do with Jesus' second coming, the rule of the Lord in Jerusalem when the Lord returns. They are very prophetic. But things about prophecy that are important is prophecy is the greatest proof of the Bible being God's word, because fulfilled prophecy is, like, phenomenal, they're very detailed, there's many of them, you quickly get a feel that this is the

Lord's word for sure. What's difficult about prophecy is that sometimes prophecy is a mixture of something that's going to happen in the short term that kind of casts a shadow way down the road for the long-term. When you're studying these prophecy books in particular, the best thing to do is look in the history, see what has already been done and what is yet to be done.

Well, that's where we're at in Chapter 44. These are words from the Lord to the future generation that will live when Jesus returns during the 1,000-year reign of Christ, through the millennial reign.

One of the things that the Lord said here in verse 15 as he talks to them, by the way, just to make this even longer. I don't want to leave it out. These chapters talk a lot about a temple that's going to be built when the Lord returns. A memorial temple. There'll be sacrifices, there'll be priests, there'll be holidays. The Jews will get specific lands. It will be a lot like the Old Testament, except Jesus is here. All of those things that the Old Testament says there's Jesus, He's coming, it will now be an honor to him to say, there's Jesus, he came. When you read these chapters you might say, "Well, is the temple still around?" It is. They're going to rebuild it; it's going to be useful. We're going to get to see all that God intended, but with the Lord there to explain himself.

Here's verse 15. Here's one of the words of the Lord to the priest. It says, "'But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to minister to Me; they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood,' saith the Lord. They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge. And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court,'" or within the house. "'They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that would cause sweat.'"

Well, that's the word I wanted to look at today. Don't wear anything that causes you to sweat. Those who are faithful to the Lord will in that day be given the opportunity to serve the Lord by closeness with Him, it is envisioned here in the priests' service.

If you go back to the Old Testament, everything certainly that you find in the tabernacle the sacrifice and all, they all have a purpose; right? The spiritual lessons that come out from them about the Lord and about our salvation, about He's the great high priest, He's the lamb that is slain, He has no sin. There's lots to learn. And certainly, one of the things that you find with the priests, and your kind of the priests today in the sense of serving the Lord, was that they were not allowed to come into the temple area unless they were dressed a certain way. You can read about this same thing that was mentioned here in Exodus Chapter 28. You will find it again in Leviticus Chapter 6. In fact, if you go way to the end of your Bibles now to Chapter 15 in Revelation, the angels that bring the last seven plagues forward are dressed like this as well.

There is this interesting pattern in repetitiveness about it, I think it is here to teach us that if we are going to serve the Lord, we have to do so out of inspiration and not with perspiration. In other words, the Lord wants you to be sure that your service to Him is no sweat to you. That is something that will come out of your life and out of a relationship that you have with Him.

Perspiration speaks of expending energy in your flesh. If you work hard, it's expected, it's needed, it's healthy for you. You'll start to sweat. In fact, after sin entered the world through the fall of Adam and Eve, the curse upon the man was that by the sweat of his brow, he would gather together his bread or earn his bread throughout his life until he died, Genesis Chapter 3 verse 19.

There are times when we might very well sweat in our service to the Lord. Our building project was supposed to last eight months, then COVID showed up, and the city decided to work two hours a week rather than 40. Our work crew, somebody got COVID and they were all gone for two weeks at a time, and no sooner were they back than some other guy got it and they were gone again. Here we are on the third year. God bless your patience. Thankfully we had this place to meet in for a while. It's almost finished. We'll be there in the next couple of weeks for sure. But, needless to say, there's been a lot of sweat going on around here.

We this week pulled out of storage those big cement picnic tables and chairs that you might see kind of half put together out there that have yet to be washed and all. Those things

weigh like I don't know 16,000 pounds apiece. You could barely pick them up with four guys. Trying to carry them. We were just perspiring. It's just hard. We're moving all of the bookstore stuff that we weren't able to put in that room so that they can go and be on display again. In fact, I think our bookstore is probably going to closed next week, and be closed for two or three weeks while we get everything done. But needless to say, there has been a lot of sweating going on. We had a men's dinner in here a couple weeks ago, or last week I guess, and all of these chairs had to be removed, and then tables set up, and then taken back down. It's just a big hassle. But it is exciting when you get to serve the Lord, but you sweat.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was facing the most daunting task that anyone could ever face. It wasn't the physical death that He would die, though I would imagine that would frighten all of us, but it was something more importantly. He was about to take the sins of the world upon His shoulders, the immediate consequence of that was separation from the Father. You can read his agony in Psalm 22. It's written in the first person. The Lord's greatest challenge was that He'd been in relationship with the Father forever, and this was now going to interrupt that so that you wouldn't have to be cut off from the Father, you could get close to Him. For hours He prayed in the garden. You can go read it. "Father, if there's any other way that We could save man. Let this cup pass from Me, if we don't have to do it this way." Each time the Lord didn't respond except to send angels to minister to Him. Jesus said, "Nevertheless, Father, not My will, but Yours."

But we read there something very interesting, that He began to sweat great drops of blood. Doctors will tell you that's possible. If your body's under tremendous pressure, that can happen. The reverse kind of pressure then is built into your capillaries. However, that pressure upon Jesus was solely that He was going to have to take our sins and be separated from the Father. That was the most frightening and daunting task. Now, He was willing, "Father, nevertheless, not My will, but Yours." But I think the body in which He was in was hard-pressed to handle the pressure that He was facing, You find Him sweating great drops of blood.

In the Old Testament, when the Lord led the children of Israel through the wilderness, it was God's presence by a cloud in a fire over the Holy of Holies that assured them of His presence, but sometimes the Lord would move. He'd rise up

and move and then everyone would know, "Hey, it's time to move." Then these guys would have to start unpacking and disassembling, I can just imagine Egypt's Sinai Peninsula doing that, without sweating a great deal.

There are times when sweating to serve the Lord is certainly appropriate, but then you have this passage. And here you find the priests' spiritual service, close to the Lord, having access to Him, and the Lord says, "When you go out to serve Me, I don't want you sweating. I don't even want you to wear clothes that would have you sweating. I want you to realize that this is a work that isn't on you, but it is a work that is done through you."

When that woman at the well there in John 4 said to Jesus, "How do we worship the Lord?" Jesus said, "If you're going to worship God, you're going to have to worship Him in spirit and in truth."

One of the things that you can certainly learn from your Bible is that the Lord does not want you to feel that when you're serving Him, that it is a big burden to you. And I hear that from people sometimes, "Oh, what a burden it is to serve the Lord. How hard, how difficult in my life." Maybe you've heard someone talk about the great sacrifices they have made in serving the Lord, or what they had to give up to serve Him. I should just say to you clearly, I don't get that. After all that God has done for me, I'm happy to serve the Lord. Whatever He wants.

And if you go through the New Testament and begin to look at the characters in the Bible, there is not one character that you'll find complaining about the cost of serving the Lord; even folks who had to pay tremendously with their lives, far greater than we would ever pay, but you won't find the complaints. Maybe the closest reference to that at all is Paul, who was the Pharisee, the former Pharisee, who had for years endeavored to please the Lord through the keeping of the law through his flesh, and he finally just said to the Philippians, "Look, everything I thought was a gain to me I count as loss that I might know the Lord. I count it as rubbish." He learned better, I guess.

But it seems to me it is a silly picture to watch believers make a case for how hard it is for them to serve God. And then you have this priest, and the Lord said, "Hey, wear cool clothing. I don't want any sweating when it comes to worshipping and serving Me."

Imagine a homeless guy who sits along the street and you decide to give him a lottery ticket, and it turns out to be a \$10 million winner. He's going to get up and go buy his beach house, and the fancy car, maybe a new set of clothes. But when the television people come to view him about his new fortune and his new way of life, I guarantee you here's what he's not going to say: "Oh, I miss my life out in the street, that special mattress that I used under the overpass where I slept with my one eye open every night. And you know what else I miss? My shopping cart, filled with everything I possess." No, he's going to tell you about how glorious his new life is. Shouldn't that be us? Isn't that what God has done for us?

You are never required by the Lord to give up anything worthwhile to serve Him. In fact, when you came to the Lord, He took a lot of junk out of your life, but He didn't take anything of value.

In the days of Jeremiah, who was ministering at the same time Ezekiel was, except 700 miles away in Jerusalem, there was a lot of false prophets that were running around in that day saying to the people, "the burden of the Lord is this," then they were trying to lay upon the people these heavy-duty kind of responsibilities. The Lord became very angry, and He said to Jeremiah, "You tell them never to use that name or that word 'the burden of the Lord' again, because I'm not laying any heavy burden upon My people at all."

There are some folks who by the time I get done talking to them, They want me to know how hard it has been for them to serve the Lord, the tremendous pressure they're under, how busy their lives are. "Oh, and then I got to go to church, and then I got to read my Bible, and I."

No service to the Lord should be a sweat to you. You don't have to preach until you sweat. You don't have to strive until you sweat. You are clearly told that Jesus' burden is easy and light.

Then what happens? We find ourselves not very grateful for what God has given to us, not motivated by love to accomplish His will. Then we start striving. "I got to go to church. I got to get my Bible out. I got to go there. I'd probably show up, it's Christmas, I better go to church."

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians in II Corinthians

Chapter 9, he said in verse 7 to them, "Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or out of necessity; God loves a cheerful giver." In the context, Paul was seeking to get the Corinthians to support the idea of sending financial help to Jerusalem, of trying to help out those that were the poor and suffering, and they were Jewish in origin. That would be a way to kind of mend fences, because they were a little leery of these gentile believers. It is certainly, though, apropos to say that the Lord, in looking at a cheerful giver, also looks for a cheerful one who serves. You're not burdened. You're not striving. It's not a hassle. Man, it's putting me out. The Lord loves a cheerful servant.

Have you ever talked to or maybe had someone come over to your house and help you with something and you're so grateful, but afterwards you heard them complain to others about how inconvenienced they were? "Yeah, I was there for hours. They didn't even feed me lunch. I was exhausted. I don't even think they said thank you." And if you hear that long enough, you really want to say to this person, "Please don't ever come over and help me again. I don't need that kind of help."

I sometimes wonder what the Lord must feel when we start complaining about what He has asked us to do for Him, considering everything He's done for us. But the Bible is pretty clear that the attitude with which I do something is far more important than the thing that I do. In other words, God's most interested in my heart. He loves a cheerful giver. Do you really think God depends upon you and your money to survive? I guarantee He does not. It's His church. He doesn't need you. He doesn't need me. If you really believe God needs you, oh, man, you got a lot of problems, because now I'm serving a god who depends on you, which means I have to depend on you. I don't want to depend on you, you don't want to depend upon me, but we can all depend upon Him.

He loves a cheerful giver. A servant of the Lord must not sweat in his service to the Lord, borne out by the priests and their clothing.

Down in verse 21, same chapter, there is one other caveat: A priest shouldn't drink wine when he enters into the inner court. Or if you will, his service to the Lord should never be driven by a false stimulus or an outside stimulus.

If you go back to Leviticus Chapter 9 and 10, you will find the children of Israel, after having been in the wilderness

for quite some time, building a tabernacle; a movable temple, if you will. It was a picture of the original. The priests would be put in place, their calling made sure, the offerings established. God had taught them everything that would serve them in the Old Testament sense to draw near to the Lord while they were covering their sin through the blood that would be shed by these animals. The thing is, when everything was prepared, they hadn't sacrificed a thing, and the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron, "Get everybody together." These millions of people came, gathering in all four corners for a distance around, and they waited. The Lord, in order to show His approval for this whole method by which the people would come to Him, sent fire down from heaven and down from His presence into that altar that had been built, the flame just was fired up by the Lord. You'll read about the people just falling on their faces in awe. God saying, "This is what I approve of. This is what I'm going to stand behind. This is what I'm going to honor." In all of the rejoicing and in all that's going on as the people were worshipping and watching, all of a sudden, these two knuckleheads come running into the crowd. They were Aaron's sons. They had censers in their hand. They had incense in the censers. They started to yell, "The fire of the Lord!" But the Lord hadn't lit that fire, they had. The Lord called it profane fire, or he called it strange fire, I believe. Strange fire. And in that moment the people who were all concentrating on God's approval and His majesty and who He was, they all went, "Who are these two guys?" And the attention was taken off the Lord onto these two men. And God didn't appreciate it, and fire jumped out of this altar and killed them both instantly. Must have ended a pretty good morning in a bad way. You can just imagine the crowd.

But the Lord came to Moses and he said, "Tell Aaron these words: 'By those who come near me I must be regarded as holy; and before all of the people I must be glorified.'" Pretty good words to remember. You and God have a relationship as a child with a father, but He's holy God, and don't forget that. And when you go tell others about Him, be sure that He gets the glory, not you. These men had run in, they had tried to draw attention to themselves. They were, according to verse 9 and 10 of Chapter 10 of Leviticus, probably drunk. They'd been warned about it. They were seeking to, like I said, enter into where God was working. There was a false stimulus in their life. They were sweating. It was a work of the flesh. They were trying to do something on their own.

Jesus, counteracting that whole idea, said in the Sermon on

the Mount to His saints, be careful that you don't do your righteous deeds to be seen of men, because if they see what you do, and you make sure that they do, then you have your reward. Rather, why don't you go in as a secret agent. Go in your prayer closet. Seek the Father in secret. He'll reward you openly. You don't have to do this for the approval or admiration or the applause of others, because our service to the Lord should be with joy and with love.

I've been careful over the last 45 years as a pastor to try to not ever motivate anyone to serve the Lord with a false motivation. For example, we will say to you, "There's an opportunity to serve in the nursery," or in the thrift store, the bookstore. What you will never hear from me or hopefully those that work with me is the word "need." We don't need you to work in the bookstore. We don't need you to go to the thrift store. We don't need you to work in the classroom. But if you're willing, if the Lord is moving you, that's how God builds His church. I would rather close a classroom that had no teachers than to try to keep it open with those who weren't called to be there, because unless the Lord build the house, we're laboring in vain.

Maybe you've been at a church that used to offer prizes if you brought the most people to church. I went to a church one time, they were raffling off bicycles. They had a "fill a pew" night. Just fill your pew. That's sweating, man. Quit sweating.

God does not want you to feel any pressure as you worship Him, and I certainly don't want you to feel any pressure to serve Him. Let me just be real clear to you, God doesn't need you. God doesn't need me. He'll use us. His eyes are going through the whole earth, II Chronicles 16 verse 9, looking for hearts turned to Him, that are perfect to Him. Those are the folks He'll use. He'll use you, but don't think He needs you. He doesn't need your money, doesn't need your support, doesn't need your encouragement. He's just looking for willing hearts to use. That's the way God works. If you can serve with a joyful heart, with a cheerful giver, with a willingness to just be available, hey, no sweat. But quit complaining or grumbling about serving God. Just here's my advice to you: If you're grumbling, quit. I'll just save you a lot of time. Just quit doing that. Just come and sit until you can do something with joy, because that, God approves of.

I've been teaching for 45 years at least four or five times

a week, for many years a whole lot more, and I think I learned early on what I don't want is the applause of the people, or hey, good job, because the next week you won't like it, bad job. I just got to please the Lord. I've got to do it to honor Him. My reward is with Him, so is yours. If you're complaining, just quit.

Look, you can sit right where you're sitting, a year from now if the Lord tarries, you can look around and say, "I've done nothing," I want you to know that with you doing nothing, everything's still going to get done. The bills are still going to get paid the kids are still going to get taught, missionaries are still going to be out there and we're still going to financially support them. We're going to be able to do the outreaches like we've always done. The radio in 500 markets is still going to continue, because God's in it and He's provided for it, and it isn't because of you or me. It's His church. It's His people. But you get to play a part if you want. There are 100 places that you can serve if you want. You get to, if you want to. You don't want to, fine with me. Not doing it for me. Work it out with Him. But I would like nothing more than to serve the Lord.

This is actually a pretty thankless job, being a pastor. People sit back and they judge you, they criticize, they compare, they write letters. Oh, most of them are good. I don't remember the good ones; I only remember the bad ones. But hey, if you're serving the Lord, what else can you do, except do it with joy?

I love the picture of the priest, don't come sweating in here. No sweat, no guilt, no false stimulus. God doesn't need us, but God would like to use us. You can serve here if you want, but you will never have to. No one will ever say to you, you have to. You don't have to. You don't have to. God loves a cheerful giver. He loves those led of the Spirit. He doesn't want you to break a sweat in the inner court. He doesn't want you to be struggling while you seek to draw near. He'll use you if you want. Or you can just sit by and watch. His work will not be hindered by the decision you make. But your life might be, you have God's word on it right here in the book. Amen?

Two words: No sweat.