

When Tragedy Hits Home
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Ezekiel 24:15-27

Opening Question: **In what ways have you come to know God better through suffering?**

The BIG IDEA: God is in control even when our world is falling apart. He comforts those who TRUST in Him. He even USES tragedy to draw us and those around us closer to Him.

This is a passage of scripture that is difficult to read and comprehend. Throughout this book, God had commanded Ezekiel not only to SPEAK prophesy, but to ACT OUT prophesy. Ezekiel had become a LIVING OBJECT LESSON to illustrate the word of the Lord to the exiles. In this passage, God uses TRAGEDY in the life of this prophet to foreshadow the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Ezekiel 24:15–27 (HCSB)

The Death of Ezekiel's Wife: A Sign

15 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 16 "Son of man, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you with a fatal blow. But you must not lament or weep or let your tears flow.

17 Groan quietly; do not observe mourning rites for the dead. Put on your turban and strap your sandals on your feet; do not cover your mustache or eat the bread of mourners."

18 I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening. The next morning I did just as I was commanded.

- Verse 16: **What does this verse tell us about Ezekiel's relationship to his wife?**
- **What does that verse say about the nature of her death? What does verse 18 indicate?**
- **Put yourself in Ezekiel's sandals. Imagine, what was the last day of his wife's life like?**

Writing of the loss of his beloved wife, C. S. Lewis in his book, *A Grief Observed* wrote:

"The death of a beloved is an amputation." *A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins 1961), 6

- If his wife was the "delight" of Ezekiel's eyes, this was like a part of HIM was taken away.
- As if that blow was not enough, **how do verses 16 and 17 say God commanded him to respond?**
- Hebrew mourning was outwardly obvious. Those left behind wept and wailed loudly. They even hired mourners to share in their "lament." They didn't dress normally, they sat on a pile of ashes dressed in rags and sprinkled those ashes on their heads. They covered their faces as they wept. They only ate the bread that friends brought them. Yet, God denied Ezekiel any of that RELEASE of his heavy grief. *"Dress normally Ezekiel. No crying, no covering, dress normally, ACT LIKE NOTHING HAS HAPPENED. You can only 'groan quietly.'"*
- Verse 18: **How did Ezekiel respond?**
- Ezekiel was not SUPER HUMAN. He was just a mortal man with emotions and feelings.
- **How in the world was Ezekiel able to do this?**
- Ezekiel's name gives us the answer:

יְחֶזְקֵאל Y^echezqê'l, *yekh-ez-kale'* meaning: *God will strengthen* (*Strong's Concise Dictionary of Greek and Hebrew Words*)

Though it's unlikely God will ever call you or me to such an extreme response to the loss of a loved one, **what is the lesson for us when we face tragedy? What is the other lesson in the last few words of verse 18?**

- This is not just a story of Ezekiel's loss and God's unusual command on how he was to mourn.
- This tragedy in Ezekiel's life was pointing to a tragedy for the whole nation of Judah.
- The exiles took note of Ezekiel's odd response to his wife's death, and asked: "Why?"

19 Then the people asked me, "Won't you tell us what these things you are doing mean for us?"

20 So I answered them: "The word of the Lord came to me: 21 'Say to the house of Israel: This is what the Lord God says: I am about to desecrate My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the desire of your heart.

- Let's pause right there. God says "I am about to desecrate MY sanctuary," the "pride of power" and "delight" of the Israelites. **What was God about to destroy?**
- In the first 14 verses of this chapter, Jerusalem is pictured as a boiling pot of meat.
- The meat was ruined by CORROSION in the pot. The SIN of worshipping other gods.
- God says "Woe to the bloody city." And in verse 11 says the pot would be burned up to be cleansed of the corrosion of their sin. Babylon had laid siege to Jerusalem. The walls were burned the temple destroyed. But there was more tragic news...the end of verse 21 says:
- *"Also, the sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword."*
- Ezekiel wasn't the only one who would lose a loved one. The exiles would lose the sons and daughters left behind when they were taken into captivity. Then God said to them...

22 Then you will do just as I have done: You will not cover your mustache or eat the bread of mourners. 23 Your turbans will remain on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not lament or weep but will waste away because of your sins and will groan to one another.

24 Now Ezekiel will be a sign for you. You will do everything that he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh.

- The loss of their nation. The loss of the Temple. The loss of their families back home.
- This tragedy would be so great, mourning would have seemed insignificant. Their shock and despair would be so heavy, like Ezekiel, they would only be able to groan and waste away.
- But how would they know Ezekiel's prophesy had come to pass?

25 " 'Son of man, know that on the day I take their stronghold from them, their pride and joy, the delight of their eyes and the longing of their hearts, as well as their sons and daughters, 26 on that day a fugitive will come to you and report the news. 27 On that day your mouth will be opened to talk with him; you will speak and no longer be mute. So you will be a sign for them, and they will know that I am Yahweh.' "

- God had muted Ezekiel and only allowed him to speak when he was giving a prophecy.
- Now Jerusalem was destroyed. God's wrath had wiped it out. Ezekiel could speak again.
- And God said, all of this took place so "they would know that I am Yahweh," almighty God.

So What's The Takeaway?

- Let's figure it out together.

- We are all touched by some level of tragedy at some point in our lives. It's not just death. It could be sickness; loss of a job; financial loss; loss of relationships; tragedy comes in many forms. **What is the lesson for us from Ezekiel when we face tragedy in our lives?**
- This lesson is also about OBEDIENCE. **What do we learn from Ezekiel about obedience?**
- There's also a lesson about CONSEQUENCES. **What do we learn about consequences?**
- Though we live in a fallen world filled with human tragedy, we can have HOPE in a relationship with the living God through His son Jesus.
- Jesus spoke about how He comforts us when He read these words of Isaiah 61 while teaching in the synagogue:

Isaiah 61:1-3 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

61 The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me,
because the Lord has anointed Me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to heal[a] the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and freedom to the prisoners;
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of our God's vengeance;
to comfort all who mourn,
3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion;
to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
festive oil instead of mourning,
and splendid clothes instead of despair.[b]
And they will be called righteous trees,
planted by the Lord
to glorify Him.

In Psalm 30:11-12 (English Standard Version) David sang to God:

11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth
and clothed me with gladness,
12 that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

- Though it's hard to comprehend, God can turn the RUINS of our lives into His Glory.
- Hillsong United, the wonderful Australian worship group recorded a song called "Glorious Ruins." Some of the lyrics speak to this account of the tragedy in this chapter.

*When the mountains fall
And the tempest roars You are with me
When creation folds
Still my soul will soar on Your mercy*

*I'll walk through the fire
With my head lifted high
And my spirit revived in Your story
And I'll look to the cross
As my failure is lost*

In the light of Your glorious grace

*Let the ruins come to life
In the beauty of Your Name
Rising up from the ashes
God forever You reign*

*And my soul will find refuge
In the shadow of Your wings
I will love You forever
And forever I'll sing*

*When the world caves in
Still my hope will cling to Your promise
Where my courage ends
Let my heart find strength in Your presence
(Written by: Joel Houston & Matt Crocker - Hillsong Music Australia 2013)*

Psalm 46:1 English Standard Version (ESV)
46 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
(Emphasis mine)