

Introduction: It seems to me that one of the most difficult things we experience as human beings is the death of someone we love. I remember in second grade when girl in our class I did not know very well was taken out of our classroom by our principal in the middle of the afternoon. He came back about ten minutes later to tell us her father had died suddenly about lunchtime. I don't remember the details. I was in shock. He said something about what we could say and do around her when she returned to school in a few days. It was something new and scary for all of us. Parents of seven year olds do not die! *** I thought of this when my mother died at age fifty-four when I was thirty-two years old. I had twenty-five more years of life experience than my young classmate, but I still mourned the death of my mother. How did she cope? *** I would say it is impossible to get through mourning the death of a loved one without the help of God, and having a full knowledge of God IN Jesus, His Savior-Son. Jesus said: Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted [by God], (Matthew 5:4). *** More generally, the passage I have put on the front of every regular Sunday Worship Bulletin since I began here in October 2001 is a great help to people mourning: I want to know Christ / and the power of His resurrection / and the fellowship of His sufferings // becoming like Him in his death, and so / somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11). Only when we truly know Christ, the Savior Messiah, and experience a sharing of His suffering and die with Him to sin and self, can we know the certainty of His resurrection life for us, and all who are IN Him by grace through faith. *** The apostle Peter gave this word to all who mourn and suffer with Jesus: But you [who are chosen by God the Father ... for obedience to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2), must] rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:13, RSV). *** With this Gospel and New Testament perspective on suffering and mourning, including the mourning of the death of a loved one, we are ready to examine God's commandment to Ezekiel concerning the sudden death of his beloved wife; and, David's lament concerning his feelings about being abandoned by his loved ones and the treachery of his enemies.)

I. Yahweh tells Ezekiel he will not mourn his wife's death; when she dies he obeys; the people ask him what this means, he says their children will die and they must obey as Ezekiel did to know Adonai. (Ezekiel 24:15-24)

- A. Yahweh tells Ezekiel that he will not mourn the death of 'the desire of his eyes'; when his wife dies in the evening, he did what he was commanded in the morning. (*Verses 15-18*)
1. Then the word of Yahweh was to me: Son of man, behold! I (am) taking from you the 'desire of your eyes' in (one) blow, and you will not mourn and not weep and your tears will not come. (*Verses 15-16*)
Desire taken: The 'desire of his eyes' is Ezekiel's wife. She will be suddenly struck down to death.
Mourning forbidden: God forbids Ezekiel to express his feelings about her death in any way at all!
 2. You must groan (in) silence, you will not make mourning for the dead, you will bind your turban on you, you will put sandals on your feet, you will not cover your lips and you will not eat the bread of men. (*Verse 17*)
Death: His groaning and fasting must not be done in public. He will not change his outward appearance in any way when his wife dies.
 3. Then I spoke to the people in the morning and my wife died in the evening; and, in the morning, I did what I was commanded. (*Verse 18*)
Obedience: Even though his heart must have been broken by his wife's death, Ezekiel fully obeyed the word of Yahweh his God.
- B. When the people ask Ezekiel what this means to them, he tells them Yahweh says their children will die by the sword and they must do as he did, not mourn, so they know Adonai-Yahweh. (*Verses 19-24*)
1. Then the people said to me: Will you not tell us what these things mean that you are doing to us? (*Verse 19*)
People ask: This is the beauty and power of a word from God that He has His prophets act out before His people. They have eyes and ears as well as minds. When they see actions that match the words, it is twice as powerful, once they get the explanation.
 2. Then I said to them: The word of Yahweh was to me: You must say to the house (family) of Israel: Thus says Adonai-Yahweh: Behold! I (am) profaning My sanctuary, the (majestic) pride of your strength, the 'delight of your eyes' and that (for which) your soul has compassion; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind will fall by the sword. (*Verses 20-21*)
Sanctuary: Ezekiel is in the nation of Babylon with the first wave of the captivity (1:1-3). He is eight hundred miles, forty days, from Jerusalem. He now declares Yahweh's word that the Temple in Jerusalem will be profaned and destroyed.
Children: Moreover, their children still living in Judah will be cut down by the sword to death. What happened to the 'delight of Ezekiel's eyes' would happen to the 'delight of their eyes'!
 3. You do what I have done: Your lips you will not cover and the bread of men you will not eat, your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet, you will not lament and weep, and pine away in your iniquities and groan (a) man to his brother. (*Verses 22-23*)
Same reaction: Bottom line: Just as faithful Ezekiel was forbidden to mourn his wife, the people of Israel who had been unfaithful in their iniquities must not mourn the deaths of their children.

Ezekiel must not mourn his wife nor Israel their slain children

4. Ezekiel is a sign to you, according to all he did (acted) you will do, so that when this comes, you know that I (am) Adonai-Yahweh. (*Verse 24*)
Ezekiel a sign: Ezekiel's obedient actions to God in response to the death of the wife he loved signifies to Israel what their covenant God expects from them when He allows them to be disciplined by allowing their children to be slain by the sword of Babylon.

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Application: We must realize and accept that obedience to hard and painful commands from the three-in-one God through Jesus can be used by Him so people in rebellion against God may come to know Him.

II. Yahweh tells Ezekiel that when he hears of the destruction of Jerusalem and her children, the exiles will know Yahweh by what He did; David mourns in darkness, deserted and in danger, but waits for Yahweh's answer in silent hope.
(*Ezekiel 24:25-27 & Psalm 38:6-15*)

- A. Yahweh tells Ezekiel that when Jerusalem and her children are destroyed, a messenger will tell him and his words will be a sign so the exiles know Yahweh. (*Ezekiel 24:25-27*)
1. And you, son of man: Is it not on the day I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the 'delight of their eyes', that on which their soul is fixed: their sons and daughters; on that day a survivor who escapes will come to you and cause you to hear with your ears? (*Verses 25-26*)
Messenger: With a rhetorical question, Yahweh tells Ezekiel a survivor who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem will come to him at the Kedar River with a message of what happened.
 2. On that day your mouth will be opened to the survivor and you will speak, you will no more be bound from speaking; you are a sign to them and they know that I (am) Yahweh. (*Verse 27*)
Speak about actions: When the full word about what happened to the remnant in Judah reaches the first wave of exiles, all Ezekiel did and said will be confirmed. Will the exiles repent?

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Application: As witnesses of Jesus, we must learn that our actions can be used by God as signs that are more powerful than just our words. May all we do and say be pleasing to God IN Jesus.

- B. David mourns and is crushed, weak and in darkness, deserted by those close to him, in danger from enemies, but he waits in silent hope for Yahweh's answer. (*Psalm 38:6-15*)
1. I am bowed down and greatly brought low / all day I go in dark (gloom, mourning). (*Verse 6*)
Mourning: Using different words than Ezekiel, David describes his dark, mournful depression. This is because each follower of Yahweh-God in Adonai-Jesus carries a unique cross.
 2. My lower back is filled with burning / there (is) not soundness in my flesh //
I am numb and utterly crushed / I roar from the groaning of my heart. (*Verses 7-8*)
Groaning heart: David's lower back is shot through as if on fire!
The groaning of his heart makes him roar like a wounded, angry lion!
 3. My Adonai, all my (lusting) desire is before You / and my sighing is not hidden from You. (*Verse 9*)
Desire: David's desire is different from Ezekiel's, as a faithful prophet is different from a lusty king.
 4. My heart throbs, my strength has failed me / and the light of my eyes also, they (are) not with me. (*Verse 10*)
No light: His inner light and strength have gone from him, and David's heart feels like it will explode out of his chest!
 5. My friends and neighbors from my plague will stand (away) / and those near me (kindred) stand far off. (*Verse 11*)
Family: Everyone who has ever been close to David: friends, neighbors and family, have now deserted him and gone far away,
 6. Then they set snares, those seeking my life / and those seeking my evil (hurt) are speaking of calamity (for me) / and on treachery, all day long, they meditate. (*Verse 12*)
Enemies: In the absence of supporters, David's enemies actively seek to destroy him, meditating on plots to do increasing harm to him
 7. And I, as one deaf, will not hear / and as one speechless, I will not open my mouth //
and I have been as a man who (is) not hearing / and not in his mouth (are) rebukes. (*Verses 13-14*)
Deaf and speechless: David is so distraught he can no longer hear (from men, God?); and, he cannot answer his enemies or plead with his family and friends. All seems bleak!
 8. For to You, Yahweh, I have waited in hope / You will answer (me), Yahweh, my God! (*Verse 15*)
Hope for answer: This is the hope for all who humbly cry to God in patient hope He will forgive them IN His Son, the Savior, no matter what they have done and what they deserve by way of punishment:
IF they surrender in sorrow, God will answer with forgiveness AND work His righteousness in them.

Application: Let us all learn from David, especially in the coming year, that persistent prayerful faith in sorrow, pain and mourning will be rewarded – eventually!

Wait for Yahweh to answer in mourning

Conclusion: Yahweh tells Ezekiel he will not mourn his wife's death. When she suddenly dies Ezekiel obeys. The people ask Ezekiel what this means and he says their children will die and they must obey God as Ezekiel did to know Adonai-Yahweh. Yahweh tells Ezekiel that when he hears of the destruction of Jerusalem and her children, the exiles will know Yahweh by what He did as a sign. David mourns in darkness, deserted and in danger, but waits for Yahweh's answer in silent hope.

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