

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“After Shave Loathsome”

5:1-17

Tom Hanks had to lose 55 pounds for his role in *Cast Away*. Christian Bale lost one-third of his body weight, 63 pounds, for a film role. Collin Farrell lost 40 pounds for an upcoming film.

Perhaps they took their cue from Ezekiel. We're not told how much weight he lost, but consider the facts.

Everyday for 430 days he acted out the upcoming siege of Jerusalem. With a frying pan in his hand, lying down outside his house preaching to a model of the city of Jerusalem, he barely drank anything and he ate starvation rations cooked over a fire fueled by cow dung.

He must have been gaunt, a mere shadow of himself, after the days of the drama were done.

When they were done he added a climactic finale. It seems the final act was only performed once because it involved shaving himself bald.

Let's put ourselves in the audience for this grand scene as the curtain (as it were) comes up on this final act.

Ezekiel 5:1 "And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair.
Ezekiel 5:2 You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them.
Ezekiel 5:3 You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment.

Ezekiel 5:4 Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel.

It's interesting to note that Ezekiel did the same things, performed the same acts, for more than a year.

- From the point of view of Ezekiel as God's minister it reminds us that God values faithfulness. It's not easy at all to stay in one place and do basically the same thing. A lot of Christians grow weary in their well-doing because it can seem monotonous.
- From the point of view of those coming to be ministered to it reminds us that you never know when God is going to meet you in a new, special way.

"When the days of the siege are finished" (verse 2) refers to the days of his dramatic representation of the siege, not the actual siege. It was time for the last act.

I wonder how many people were in the audience outside Ezekiel's house that last day? I'm tempted to think not many. However, some shows have quite a long run. *Phantom of the Opera* has been running continuously on Broadway since 1988.

Ezekiel was, after all, God's prophet. We know from verses later in the book that the elders of Israel would come to him seeking a word. So he may have had a sizable group outside his house.

Then, too, word may have gotten out that the performance would end after 430 days.

Ezekiel went through acts one, two, and three. From somewhere he produced a sword. With it he proceeded to shave his hair and beard.

Guys, think about that. It's quite a project to shave-off all your hair and a full beard even with scissors and proper razors. But using a sword?

Shaving-off your hair and beard was symbolic of things like sorrow and judgment. For Ezekiel, who was a priest, it was a reproach. Concerning the priests you read in Leviticus 21:5,

Leviticus 21:5 'They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

Earlier Ezekiel had complained when God asked him to cook his rations using human waste. He did not want to defile himself under the Law of Moses by handling human waste in that manner. Here he went along with God's request.

Why? This shaving didn't defile him. It only disqualified him from functioning as a priest - at least under the Law. Since the Temple would fall, and since Ezekiel would never actually serve as a priest, the shaving was a way for him to put an exclamation point on his personal heartache.

The sins of his fellow Israelites had ruined Ezekiel's life. Yet he continued to minister to them. And he did it in ways that were extreme. His is an important example of the kind of heart we must maintain through our own heartache.

The sword would represent the authority and power of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The hairs of Ezekiel represented individual Israelites:

- 1/3 would "burn with fire in the midst of the city." These would be the casualties during the 18-month siege itself. Elsewhere we read that they resorted to cannibalism because conditions deteriorated so dramatically.
- 1/3 would be struck with the "sword." These are those killed when the Babylonian forces broke through.
- 1/3 would "scatter in the wind." They would be dispersed all over the globe. A "sword," that is persecution, would follow after them.

A remnant, however, would be saved. These were represented by the few hairs put in the hem of Ezekiel's garment. Even these, however, according to verse four, would suffer.

What is the "fire" that goes out from them "into all the house of Israel?" It's believed by scholars to be a reference to events that occurred after the siege. Gedaliah was set up to govern Jerusalem. He was a good governor until assassinated. It brought upon the Jews further fury from Babylon.

I would again point out that the righteous were consigned to suffer with the unrighteous.

When God's prophets found themselves suffering because of the unrighteous they looked beyond them to the Lord and rejoiced in Him. They understood that they were a part of something larger and grander than fairness in this life.

The drama was done. Ezekiel was transitioning into a new phase of ministry. It began with a talk explaining the symbolism of Ezekiel's four act drama.

Ezekiel 5:5 "Thus says the Lord God: 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her.

Ezekiel 5:6 She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes.'

Ezekiel 5:7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you'-

Ezekiel 5:8 therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.

Ezekiel 5:9 And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations.

Ezekiel 5:10 Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds.

Ezekiel 5:11 'Therefore, as I live,' says the Lord God, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity.

Ezekiel 5:12 One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

One thing to note is that a lot of times in the Bible God immediately defines what He has just presented in the form of symbols. The signs in the Bible are not meant to confuse or confound but to communicate.

Had Israel really done more "wickedness" than the pagan nations around her?

Yes, in the sense that the Jews knew better than to act as pagans. They had greater revelation and with it came greater responsibility. Their sin was not out of ignorance but deliberate.

Same with us. Sin among Christians is worse than it is in the world. We are quick to decry various sins among nonbelievers. That might be OK, even necessary. But we must be even quicker to deal with sin in our own hearts and in our midst as an assembly. We don't get a pass because we're already saved.

Here you have the interpretation of the cutting of the hair into thirds. You also get a little more detail - like "fathers shall eat [cannibalize] their sons" and vice-versa.

Why so severe? Well, God had already tried to reason with His people for centuries through the prophets. They had willfully, deliberately, arrogantly refused to repent. What other alternatives were there to bring them back to their spiritual senses?

In Second Chronicles 36:15-17 you read,

2 Chronicles 36:15 And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.

2 Chronicles 36:16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

2 Chronicles 36:17 Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand.

While their Temple stood they had blown-off proper worship. They had become idolators. So the Lord would take away the Temple. Perhaps if they were unable to worship it would create a longing within them for the things of the Lord.

In one sense God was simply giving them over to themselves. Having rejected Him they were in a downward spiral to destruction anyway. At least by His direct intervention He could show them His jealousy and with it His love.

For our purposes, key in on verse eleven. They had defiled God's sanctuary with their detestable things and abominable practices. Whether it is my physical body, or whether it is the church as the body of Christ, we must guard against anything detestable or abominable.

Those two words, detestable and abominable, sound so bad that we can't really relate to them. But in the context of Israel they refer to idolatry and idol worship.

That puts a slightly different spin on them. For example: The New Testament tells us that covetousness is idolatry. Whenever I covet something or someone I am expressing dissatisfaction in my relationship with God. I am saying to God that without some person or some thing I cannot be satisfied. So that person or that thing is now my idol.

Our chapter ends with God telling Israel He was going to use them to minister to others - but not in the way they'd like!

Ezekiel 5:13 'Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them.

Ezekiel 5:14 Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that are all around you, in the sight of all who pass by.

Ezekiel 5:15 'So it shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that are all around you, when I execute judgments among you in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Ezekiel 5:16 When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and cut off your supply of bread.

Ezekiel 5:17 So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the Lord, have spoken.' "

Israel was chosen by God to represent His glory among the nations of the world. As the Gentiles looked to Israel they were supposed to see what it meant to know the living God and experience His grace and mercy.

Israel rejected God but they would go on being His witness. Only now the things the Gentiles would see through them would be the Lord's zeal to discipline His wayward people.

Let me give you an anecdote. When I was a kid and Israel was attacked by her neighbors and defeated them my dad, who was by no means a believer, said, "You can't mess with the Jews. They are God's people."

It may be somewhat unscholarly but I think that statement is a good summary of what we see in these closing verses.

Israel continued to be, and continues to this day to be, a witness of God and His desire and design for the nations of the world.

We are witnesses all the time - not just when we 'witness.' Let's be witnesses to God's glory rather than His fury!

We are in tough times in America and in the world. They are tough economic times, for sure; but also tough morally and spiritually.

Like Ezekiel we leave our homes everyday. We act-out a drama in our words and activities. We witness for the Lord.

You can practice your lines and get ready to hit your mark by spending time with the Lord. Get rid of all detestable, abominable things. You don't have to be gaunt and live on starvation rations, but it wouldn't hurt to minimize contact with the things of this world that are passing away.

We believe the return of Jesus to resurrect and rapture the church is imminent.

As the Looney Tunes used to say, *"On with the show, this is it!"*