

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"It's a Mute Point"

3:22-27

A while back Kelly blew my mind with a story about an experience she had while substitute teaching. In her class a young student who didn't respond to her when she spoke with him. Later the other teachers and staff let her know the boy had been diagnosed as a 'selective mute.'

I've been intrigued with that diagnosis for some time. I found out that it's a recognized psychological condition. Here is how it is defined in the literature:

Selective Mutism is a complex childhood anxiety disorder characterized by a child's inability to speak and communicate effectively in select social settings, such as school. These children are able to speak and communicate in settings where they are comfortable, secure and relaxed.

Additional information can be found on the website of the Selective Mutism Center. The psych's speculate that it is caused by a genetic predisposition to anxiety.

I don't know what I think about all that. I know that when I was a kid I practiced 'selective mutism' as a deliberate disobedience and rebellion.

Ezekiel was a selective mute, but it wasn't a genetic predisposition. It wasn't something he practiced on his own, either. It was a God thing.

We're going to see that God caused Ezekiel to be a selective mute.

Ezekiel 3:22 Then the hand of the Lord was upon me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out into the plain, and there I shall talk with you."

Ezekiel had been supernaturally transported to Tel Abib. He'd been sitting there astonished. God broke the silence and gave him an address to a meeting place.

God is omnipresent. The prefix 'omni' derives from a Latin word meaning *all*. Omnipresence, used of God, means He is everywhere present. Psalm 139 gets as close as it can to our being able to fully comprehend God's omnipresence.

Psalms 139:7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

Psalms 139:8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

Psalms 139:9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Psalms 139:10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

Psalms 139:11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me;

Psalms 139:12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

Jesus said of Himself, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

Recognizing that Jesus has a human body as well as a divine nature we understand that in His humanity He is localized in Heaven but in His deity He is omnipresent.

The Holy Spirit, too, is described as omnipresent.

Notwithstanding God's omnipresence, He asked Ezekiel to meet Him out in the plain. It was there that He said "I shall talk with you."

Notwithstanding God's omnipresence, He asks each of us to meet Him in certain locations. The two that come to mind are my devotions and my church.

A simple definition of 'devotions' would be *a specific time and place where I can devote myself to my relationship with Jesus*. It's going to involve the

Bible and prayer. Beyond that there is a lot of latitude. But I have an innate sense, as a Christian, that I need to get alone with God. Even though He is omnipresent, I have to 'go' and meet with Him.

I think of church services that way, too. I think God is saying, "Go to church, and there I shall talk with you."

When I first got saved I had the distinct feeling God was speaking directly to me through the teaching of His Word. I knew His omnipresence, and had the Spirit indwelling me. But I knew He was inviting me to meet Him at church.

Let's stay excited about both devotions and church.

Ezekiel 3:23 So I arose and went out into the plain, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face.

The Lord, Who was clearly at Tel Abib talking with Ezekiel, nevertheless gave His prophet a spectacular experience out in the plain. Ezekiel compared it to his first vision "by the River Chebar."

It was "like" his first vision but different. God wants to give us fresh vision. Normally when we talk about "vision" we mean a new project of ministry. That might be the result but it isn't the main thing. Ezekiel got a vision of "the glory" of God.

We need a fresh vision of the glory of God. Only then can we go forward and either continue our work with renewed anointing or launch out into new Spirit-empowered ministries.

The prophet "fell on his face." He went prostrate before the Lord. He was using his body to represent his surrender and submission to God.

Please note that he was alone. I sometimes wonder how many of the people who are so, for lack of a better term, interruptive of a church service *actually act that way in private?* Maybe they do. I'm just saying that public worship is not the same as private worship.

We'll see in First Corinthians twelve, thirteen, and fourteen that there are very definite guidelines for public worship. They are for the good of all the saints and for the giving of all the glory to God.

Ezekiel 3:24 Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet, and spoke with me and said to me: "Go, shut yourself inside your house.

I'd have to say that Ezekiel was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Now we believe that the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit was not the normal experience of the Old Testament saints. He would come upon them; He would fill them. But He didn't permanently indwell them.

After Jesus rose from the dead He breathed on His disciples and they were indwelt, permanently indwelt, by the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian the Holy Spirit doesn't ever leave you. Your body remains His earthly temple.

Notice that Ezekiel had fallen prostrate and that the Holy Spirit "set [him] on his feet." It was a reversal of being slain by the Spirit! He was set up onto his feet by Him.

That is something I'd like to see in a worship service. Lay down and let the Holy Spirit set you up without any physical effort on your part.

God told Ezekiel, "Go, shut yourself inside your house." All I can say is, So it begins. You'll see what I mean starting right now.

Ezekiel 3:25 And you, O son of man, surely they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them.

This does *not* mean that Ezekiel's detractors or enemies were going to tie him up. No, this was an instruction to him to have his own family and friends "put ropes on [him] and bind [him] with them, so that [he could] not go out" of his house.

So begins Ezekiel's drama ministry in which he acts out God's messages. He was "bound" to symbolize that he was the Lord's prisoner in his own house. The Israelites would be captives, prisoners, in Babylon for an extended period of time. They would be "bound," as it were, in their own

houses. They would be allowed to settle into communities and live among one another but they were captives nonetheless.

I get the sense that everyday for quite some time Ezekiel got up and got dressed for his work as a prophet by being bound!

His being bound also established something quite interesting. Though he was called upon to warn the people, they would have to come to him. They would have to seek him out at his house.

Mobility is a great thing. All of us are headed, however, for immobility if we live long enough. We just won't be able to do the things we'd like. We may even become homebound.

When that occurs we can still be used by the Lord! Whether it's through prayer or in some other capacity we can go on ministering.

When individuals or groups did come to Ezekiel they may or may not get a message from him. Look at verses twenty-six and twenty-seven.

Ezekiel 3:26 I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be one to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel 3:27 But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

Occasionally God would have a word He wanted to speak to those who visited Ezekiel. On those occasions Ezekiel could speak but he could only speak the words, the exact words, the Lord gave him.

Ezekiel literally fulfilled what we are exhorted to do in the New Testament. In First Peter 4:11 we read, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God..." Although I would hate being mute I would like it if I only always said what I should; if I always only said what God wanted me to say.

Though mostly mute we will see that Ezekiel uttered many messages between here and chapter thirty-three. His intermittent muteness would

end when word would come to him that Jerusalem had finally fallen to Nebuchadnezzar. Reading ahead we see the following:

Ezekiel 24:25 'And you, son of man - will it not be in the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that on which they set their minds, their sons and their daughters:

Ezekiel 24:26 on that day one who escapes will come to you to let you hear it with your ears;

Ezekiel 24:27 on that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped; you shall speak and no longer be mute. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they shall know that I am the Lord.' "

And in chapter thirty-three we read,

Ezekiel 33:21 And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been captured!"

Ezekiel 33:22 Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before the man came who had escaped. And He had opened my mouth; so when he came to me in the morning, my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

We can estimate that Ezekiel's time of immobility and intermittent muteness lasted approximately seven and one-half years. We'll see in several passages that during those years the elders of Israel would frequently come to inquire of the Lord through him (8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:30-33).

Ezekiel was a stay-at-home prophet. You had to come to him. When you did, he may or may not have a message for you from God.

It was an unusual strategy for unusual times. God had been speaking through His prophets. He was speaking through Jeremiah, who was still in Jerusalem. The people didn't believe God's prophets. They rejected their message. They were listening instead to false prophets who were assuring them that God would never allow His glory to depart the Temple.

God was taking things to the next level. If they were going to ignore both the written and spoken Word, then God would make it difficult for them to receive the Word at all.

There are times a believer might feel that he or she is not hearing from God. It can be a test of faith in which God is asking us to trust Him. It can also be that God has already spoken to you in or through His Word and you won't receive it.

I know there have been times when I've been counseling others that I keep saying to them the exact same thing over-and-over, week-after-week. There's nothing new to say because there is no movement towards applying God's Word.

It might be better if a Christian counselor sat and said nothing! Can you envision a session like that. It would be amazing! I wonder if the counselee would get it or not?

I ran across the following quote:

In some ways, it's those of us who are most familiar with the Spirit's promises who are in the greatest danger. Someone has said that familiarity may not breed contempt, but it takes the edge off of awe. Something like this is true about the rich texts and glory-filled promises that drop the jaws or widen the eyes of newcomers but provoke no more than a raised eyebrow in the old-timers who have ceased to dream.

I don't want to become *Krusty the Christian*. Even if I'm hearing the same truth for the hundredth or thousandth time I want to be in awe that God speaks to me.

My omnipresent God still invites me to arise and go somewhere and meet with Him where He's promised to speak with me.

Let's keep more of those appointments, both in devotions and at church.

And let's make the most of them. Let's be in awe because our God IS an awesome God.