

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Three Men & A Blight”

14:12-23

It's always at the last possible moment, when all hope is lost, that the hero arrives. As he battles the villains, there comes a moment when even the hero seems defeated. *Not to worry!* He reaches down deep into his hero-reserves and strikes the final, fatal blow against evil.

Israel had her share of heroes. After Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land, the Jews backslid. Each time God raised up a hero. They were called judges. Men like Samson and Gideon who were used mightily to overcome Israel's enemies and deliver God's people.

It seems that the Jews of the sixth century held to a hero mentality. Daniel had been carried away into Babylon. By the time of our text he was twenty-five years old. He'd already distinguished himself as a righteous man. Though some of his greatest accomplishments were still ahead of him, he was a bona fide hero.

Perhaps God would use Daniel in Babylon to deliver the Jews in Jerusalem from further destruction.

Not gonna happen! Look at verse fourteen:

Ezekiel 14:14 Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord God.

What a trio that would be. But even if all three were “in” Jerusalem, God would not deliver those who were still sinning.

It was God’s way of telling His people to quit looking around and start looking within. It was His desire they each dare to be a Daniel in the midst of His discipline.

Let’s follow God’s train of thought through the remainder of chapter fourteen.

Ezekiel 14:12 The word of the Lord came again to me, saying:

Some period of time had elapsed from the first half of the chapter. Ezekiel had delivered to the elders of Israel a message that God’s judgment was inevitable. There was nothing they could do to avert it nationally. But they could endure it personally.

Ezekiel 14:13 "Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it.

God was talking to Ezekiel about Israel but the application is to any “land that sins against [Him] by persistent unfaithfulness.”

Over twenty years ago, in 1988, Specialty Research Associates released a report entitled *America: To Pray or Not to Pray* which used over 100 pages of graphs and statistical analysis to prove that crime, venereal disease, premarital sex, illiteracy, suicide, drug use, public corruption, and other social ills began a dramatic increase after the Engel vs. Vitale Supreme Court decision was made in 1962 which banned school prayer.

Regardless whether or not that one decision was the starting point, as a nation I think it could be said of the United States that we sin “against [God] by persistent unfaithfulness.”

If true, then the counsel of these verses is just as much for us as anyone.

The judgments listed in verse thirteen were spelled-out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The Jews had been forewarned.

Ezekiel 14:14 Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord God.

I should mention that critics argue that the Daniel mentioned here is not the Daniel we're thinking about. They say he was too young with too much of his spiritual career ahead of him to be included in such illustrious company.

You NASCAR fans will appreciate this analogy. An interviewer was asking Jimmy Johnson if it was too soon to consider him as one of the greatest drivers ever. In as humble a way as possible, he said "No," pointing to some of the things he's accomplished already that no one else has, or only the elite have.

It's not that unusual to ascribe greatness to a person before they are old. I see nothing to preclude Daniel from being the young Daniel who was Ezekiel's contemporary in exile in Babylon. As for his career - the Lord knew ahead of time what it would be!

Why these three men in particular? The thing that first strikes you is that the names are not in chronological order. The order might have to do with the mathematics of the number of folks delivered in each instance.

- Noah was famous for preparing the ark and thus saving his family - eight in all - amidst the wreckage of the world under God's judgment.
- Daniel, still a young man, had saved his three friends by interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream when none of the other wise men could.
- Job was left without even a son or a daughter but was himself delivered through calamity.

Eight were saved, then four, then one. The math was God's way of emphasizing that the era in which the Jews were living was not a time for a hero who would save the nation. It was a time for personal righteousness amidst trial and suffering.

In verses fifteen through twenty God expands upon the judgments that were coming upon Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 14:15 "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts,

Ezekiel 14:16 even though these three men were in it, as I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate.

Ezekiel 14:17 "Or if I bring a sword on that land, and say, 'Sword, go through the land,' and I cut off man and beast from it,

Ezekiel 14:18 even though these three men were in it, as I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves would be delivered.

Ezekiel 14:19 "Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast,

Ezekiel 14:20 even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness."

Had Noah, Daniel, and Job lived in Jerusalem at this time, they would have been delivered from the impending judgment on the basis of their personal righteousness.

The Lord was letting them know that this was *not* a situation in which they ought to think the hero was coming at the last minute. No, they ought to be attending to their own walk with the Lord.

No judge would be raised-up, only judgment.

God gave an assessment of these three men of their time on the earth. In Daniel's case, it was his condition up to that point. They were "righteous."

What does that mean? Well, first it means they were declared righteous by God based upon their faith in the promised Savior. The apostle Paul, in the Book of Romans, uses Abraham as his example when he says that he believed and is was accounted to him for righteousness.

Calling these men “righteous” also means that their walk was consistent with their belief. They were not perfect, but they were men of integrity.

All this can’t help but remind you that your time spent on the earth is going to be reviewed one day. The Bible indicates we will individually stand before the Reward Seat of Jesus Christ for a review. Our appearance there makes it clear we have been declared righteous.

The only issue to resolve is whether our walk was consistent with our belief and whether we were men and women of integrity.

To help illustrate righteousness, the Bible describes us in our natural condition as wearing filthy garments that cannot be cleansed. When we get saved, when we accept Christ’s offer of salvation, its like He takes off our filthy garments and exchanges them for a beautiful, new robe.

Isaiah 61:10 says,

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness...

The Lord gives us righteousness when we believe. Then we are to walk in righteousness

In keeping with the garment analogy, it’s like we are able to adorn our robe. After the resurrection and rapture, believers are taken to Heaven and rewarded.

Maybe something that Isaiah additionally said will help. The whole of Isaiah 61:10 reads,

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

You were “granted,” or given, a spiritual robe of righteousness when you received Jesus as your Savior. Afterwards you have the privilege of adorning your robe by your “righteous acts” as His “saint.” You don’t earn or add to your salvation; you simply earn rewards which will adorn your robe.

Hal Lindsey compares this to the Roman garments, the tunic and the toga.

- The tunic was an inner garment worn under the toga. The righteousness of Jesus that is given to you when you receive Christ is like a tunic.
- The righteous works that flow from your new nature comprise your toga.

When we see believers emerge from Heaven at the Second Coming of Jesus, they have adorned their robes.

Revelation 19:8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

The apostle Paul described it thusly:

1 Corinthians 3:12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The “gold, silver, [and] precious stones” Paul described sound a great deal like the “ornaments” and “jewels” Isaiah said a bride adorns herself with.

I desire rewards in order to be as beautiful as possible for Jesus!

Think of a wedding. It’s really wonderful when the bride emerges in her gown with her hair & face all in order, with just the right adornment.

Though from a worldly standpoint we are not materialistic, every bride ought to want to look fantastic for her groom.

Rewards *do* matter. They represent my pure love for Jesus as His bride. I want everyone in Heaven and on the earth to see how much I owe to my Lord.

Ezekiel 14:21 For thus says the Lord God: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem - the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence - to cut off man and beast from it?"

These "four severe judgments" are reiterated. They should have come as no surprise to any Jew familiar with the Old Testament. The fact God often waits does not in any way nullify His Word.

Ezekiel 14:22 Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, both sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, all that I have brought upon it.

Ezekiel 14:23 And they will comfort you, when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it," says the Lord God.

Normally a "remnant" refers to a small group of righteous individuals who are spared. Not so in this case. This is a remnant of the ungodly who escape Jerusalem and end up in Babylon. The exiles already in Babylon will observe the "ways" and the "doings" of the remnant firsthand and see their reprehensible behavior. The exiles will be "comforted" in the understanding that God acted properly in judging the Jews back in Jerusalem. He had sufficient "cause" to bring the four severe judgments upon them.

Let's look upon the three men mentioned.

- Noah and his his family. Could circumstances be any worse than they were just prior to the flood? Yet Noah kept his family together, taught them about the Lord. They were (pardon the pun) on board with him and the Lord. How did they survive the pressures? Among the things we

know about the Noah's is that they served the Lord together while others were pursuing the things of the world.

- Daniel and his friends. Their situation was pretty bleak. Young men, still in their teens, taken captive and exiled. But they purposed in their hearts to trust the Lord and they believed God would help them. It's an encouragement for us, in America, to be part of a fellowship of believers who are willing to say "No" to the things of the world and remain separated unto God.
- Job. His name is forever associated with trial and suffering - even though he did nothing to deserve it. Though alone, without family or encouraging friends, God brought him through it as gold refined in the fire. Job stands for all those whose situation is less than ideal, whose family and friends have already been undermined by the world. You're never alone.

