

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"A Watched Pot Over Boils"

24:1-27

In Cleveland, Ohio, Dr. Yazeed Essa was found guilty aggravated murder in the death of his wife, Rosemarie. He apparently laced his wife's calcium supplements with cyanide then encouraged her to take one as she headed out the door to spend time with a friend, Feb. 24, 2005.

Rosemarie Essa faded in and out of consciousness on her journey, crossing the median and clipping another car, prosecutors said. Her SUV idled slowly forward until a witness to the accident chased down the vehicle, hopped into the passenger seat and pulled the emergency brake. She was pronounced dead within the hour at Hillcrest Hospital.

The defendant's demeanor after his wife's death was a major consideration of the jury in convicting him. Listen to this excerpt from an article on the trial.

Dr. David Dolinak, the deputy coroner who performed Rosemarie Essa's autopsy, told jurors that the defendant had appeared calm, composed and matter-of-fact in his dealings with the coroner's office. It was not the typical behavior of a grieving husband, stunned by the sudden death of his young and healthy wife, he said.

Gino Cassaro, who at the time was a staff nurse at Hillcrest Hospital and the clinical manager for the emergency room, also testified that Essa's behavior moments after his wife was pronounced dead was peculiar and memorable.

While Rosemarie Essa's two brothers sobbed at her bedside, clinging to their dead sister's body, Yazeed Essa stood silently at the foot of the gurney, Cassaro told jurors.

Cassaro recalled that Essa's arms were crossed and he watched the outpouring of grief without reaction. Then he approached one of his brothers-in-law, Cassaro said, tapped him on the shoulder, and said, "Let's go."

I wonder what they would have thought about Ezekiel's demeanor. The prophet's wife is going to die suddenly. Ezekiel will go to work the next day. More than that, he won't practice any of the normal behaviors of a grieving spouse in the Jewish culture.

Ah, but this is Ezekiel we're talking about and of course there was more going on. Let's see why he acted the way he did.

Ezekiel 24:1 Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 24:2 "Son of man, write down the name of the day, this very day - the king of Babylon started his siege against Jerusalem this very day.

Chapters twenty through twenty-three occur during the seventh year of King Jehoichin's captivity. Chapter twenty-four is two years later, in the ninth year after the deportation of Jews to Babylon in 597BC. It's somewhere near January of 588BC.

It was a historic day. It was the day that God began to fulfill His discipline against Jerusalem, the day her demise and destruction were set into motion.

It was also a historic day for Ezekiel. Up to now his audience of exiles held out hope that God would spare Jerusalem. Thus they did not believe and heed Ezekiel's prophecies to the contrary.

The Word we share with people is true without giving them any proof. Don't get me wrong; **there is proof aplenty**. Creation is proof; so is fulfilled prophecy; so is the testimony of a transformed life. The irrefutable resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is proof.

You know what I mean. You share with someone and because a miracle doesn't happen right in front of them they act like you have no proof.

- Proof is coming, coming pretty quickly in the form of the Great Tribulation.
- Proof is coming imminently in the form of the resurrection and rapture of the church.

Mean time, remain confident in the infallible, the inspired, the inerrant, the authoritative Word.

Ezekiel 24:3 And utter a parable to the rebellious house, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Put on a pot, set it on, And also pour water into it.

Ezekiel 24:4 Gather pieces of meat in it, Every good piece, The thigh and the shoulder. Fill it with choice cuts;

Ezekiel 24:5 Take the choice of the flock. Also pile fuel bones under it, Make it boil well, And let the cuts simmer in it."

More prop-prophesying for Ezekiel. This time he puts on a boil! Probably in front of his house, he goes through what would be the normal activities of preparing a one-pot supper.

His cooking skills, however, let you know that there was an illustration at hand.

Ezekiel 24:6 'Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the bloody city, To the pot whose scum is in it, And whose scum is not gone from it! Bring it out piece by piece, On which no lot has fallen.

Ezekiel 24:7 For her blood is in her midst; She set it on top of a rock; She did not pour it on the ground, To cover it with dust.

Ezekiel 24:8 That it may raise up fury and take vengeance, I have set her blood on top of a rock, That it may not be covered."

He used a "pot whose scum [was] in it." The word translated "scum" is *rust*. It was a rusty old pot that you'd never cook with.

The pot represented the city of Jerusalem. The cuts of meat were the residents. It was a representation of the effects of the siege against them that had begun.

The discussion of "blood" has to do with the Levitical laws. Any exposed blood on the ground had to be covered with dirt as soon as possible. It was

one of those regulations the Jews observed that set them apart from the Gentiles.

The leaders and laity in Jerusalem had degenerated into a violent society. Lots of innocent blood was shed. Whether or not they actually left it uncovered isn't the point. Spiritually speaking, they refused to acknowledge their lawlessness.

God was going to treat them the way they treated the poor, the widow, and the orphan - by bringing violence against them. It would be like spilling blood on a rock, so it would not be absorbed, and left uncovered.

Ezekiel 24:9 'Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the bloody city! I too will make the pyre great.

Ezekiel 24:10 Heap on the wood, Kindle the fire; Cook the meat well, Mix in the spices, And let the cuts be burned up.

Ezekiel 24:11 "Then set the pot empty on the coals, That it may become hot and its bronze may burn, That its filthiness may be melted in it, That its scum may be consumed.

Ezekiel 24:12 She has grown weary with lies, And her great scum has not gone from her. Let her scum be in the fire!

Ezekiel 24:13 In your filthiness is lewdness. Because I have cleansed you, and you were not cleansed, You will not be cleansed of your filthiness anymore, Till I have caused My fury to rest upon you.

Ezekiel 24:14 I, the Lord, have spoken it; It shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not hold back, Nor will I spare, Nor will I relent; According to your ways And according to your deeds They will judge you," Says the Lord God.' "

As the cooking demonstration continued, Ezekiel stoked the fire so that the pot itself would burn-up. It represented a total, a complete, a final destruction.

Ezekiel has been asked to do some strange things as God's prophet. He was a voluntary mute, for example, only speaking when God told him to. What he is next asked to do is in a whole other sphere of obedience.

Ezekiel 24:15 Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 24:16 "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down.

Ezekiel 24:17 Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow."

Ezekiel 24:18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded.

Just so we are clear about this, here is what happened. Ezekiel's wife died suddenly. He was not to mourn for her in any of the customary ways. And he was to go back to work prophesying the next morning.

Ezekiel 24:19 And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things signify to us, that you behave so?"

I will say this. The Jewish exiles were more considerate than most people who observe this kind of behavior. They didn't assume that Ezekiel had murdered his wife, based on his calm demeanor.

No, they knew it was to "signify" something.

Ezekiel 24:20 Then I answered them, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Ezekiel 24:21 'Speak to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, your arrogant boast, the desire of your eyes, the delight of your soul; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword.

Ezekiel 24:22 And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips nor eat man's bread of sorrow.

Ezekiel 24:23 Your turbans shall be on your heads and your sandals on your feet; you shall neither mourn nor weep, but you shall pine away in your iniquities and mourn with one another.

Ezekiel 24:24 Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done you shall do; and when this comes, you shall know that I am the Lord God.' "

According to one source I read, the customary mourning for the dead was not appropriate if the individual was killed for having committed a capital offense. Ezekiel was thus representing to the Jews in exile that their relatives and countrymen in Jerusalem were being judged for their offenses and should not be mourned as if what would happen to them was a tragedy.

The Jews were depending on God's love for His city and especially its Sanctuary to hold back judgement. They had a false trust in the external manifestations of God's covenant with them.

As long as we are on the earth in our current bodies of flesh we will have a tendency to exaggerate the importance of things that are external. We will judge ministries by their size rather than by their depth. God does bless sometimes with size, with numbers. But He also blesses when things are small, when numbers are slight.

We should listen to what is being said, examining it for the signs of grace, mercy, and truth. We should consider the example being set. Is it godly? Or is it worldly?

Notice verse twenty-four where God said, "and when this comes, you shall know that I am the Lord God."

Everything God was doing, everything He was allowing, was a discipline so His people would turn to Him. Yes, it was severe, but He had tried everything else for many, many years. They only ignored Him and plunged deeper into their sin.

When we are analyzing life, let's think more about the motive of God than His methods. His methods can seem severe. But His motive is always love.

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.' "

"Your mouth will be opened." God was going to end Ezekiel's voluntary muteness. It would be a "sign" to them that God had not abandoned them. No, He was saving them the only way He could given their rebellion.

Asking Ezekiel to not mourn for his beloved wife in the customary manor was severe. I mean, really; just let it set in for a moment.

It was part of the territory that came with the call to be a prophet. Great privilege was accompanied by great responsibility.

On Sunday morning I alluded to the fact that, since you are a believer, your life is no longer your own. You belong to the Lord. There is thus the potential every day for the Lord to call upon you to act or react in a way that is far from customary.

For the most part it will be things like returning blessing for cursing. It will be forgiving those who have wronged you. It will be loving your wife or showing respect to your husband.

In other words, in the normal Christian life God is already asking you to live in a way that shows responsibility to your privileges!

Sometimes it can hit close to home. Jesus once said,

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians not to sorrow over the death of believers as if they had no hope.

Peter and James told us to not think trials are anything strange.

Fact is, discipleship *is* acting and reacting very differently than we would apart from Jesus Christ.

And, like Ezekiel, we are called to give a visual representation of what it means to know Christ. In our case we're called living letters to be read by all men.

Makes us appreciate Ezekiel all the more, doesn't it? He wasn't so very different than we are.

