

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 3:22 - 4:17

Topic

Ezekiel's forward-looking ministry begins with him rendered dumb & cooking bread using feces for fuel

Title

"Dung & Dumber"

In 1970 MGM Records released a long playing album titled, *The Best of Marcel Marceau*.¹

Let that sink in for a minute. If you are old enough to have watched 1960s & 1970s variety shows, like *The Ed Sullivan Show*, you are familiar with his performances.

The disc is nineteen minutes of silence and a minute of applause on each side. Why the silence? Marcel Marceau is regarded to be the greatest ever... **MIME.**

Mime is the theatrical technique of suggesting action, character, or emotion without words, using gesture, expression, and movement. It is often incorporated with other forms of expression under the banner of Physical Theater. We mostly think of mimes as comical, but they can be serious. Mimes often perform routines with props.

Ezekiel 'spoke' for the LORD *mostly without speaking* while performing physical theater.

¹ His last name, Marceau, was purposely misspelled, although no one knows why

In the NT, the word for “mime” is also translated *mimic* or *imitate*. It is a point of contact with Ezekiel in this sense: The apostle Paul encouraged believers to, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ” (First Corinthians 11:1). Imitate... mimic... mime.

I’ll organize my comments around two questions: **#1 Who Is Your Imitation Of Jesus Portraying?** and **#2 What Is Your Imitation Of Jesus Predicting?**

#1 - Who Is Your Imitation Of Jesus Portraying? (3:22-24a)

I didn’t realize how many historical figures Dennis Quaid has portrayed on screen.

Astronaut Gordon Cooper... Entertainer Jerry Lee Lewis... Tombstone’s Doc Holliday... President Bill Clinton... NFL Coach Dick Vermeil... Syracuse University football Head Coach Ben Schwartzwalder... Admiral William Halsey... Pastor James Hill... Sam Houston...and baseball’s Jim Morris. He’s on the big screen right now as President Ronald Regan.

In his everyday life, **he portrays Jesus**. He confesses to having a personal relationship with the Lord. When I’ve seen or heard him, he uses his platform to point others to Jesus. It’s what Christians do.

We left Ezekiel exiled with his fellow Jews in a camp called Tel Abib in the country of Babylon. God had physically transported him there in what I like to call a ‘horizontal rapture.’ For seven days he sat among his fellow captives and said nothing. Awkward.

Ezk 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.”

The book opened with the LORD coming to Ezekiel in a whirlwind on His throne-chariot, carried by four Cherubim. Ezekiel saw God’s glory. He saw a physical manifestation of the LORD’s presence.

The LORD asks Ezekiel to meet Him out in the “plain” so He can “talk” to him.

Our omnipresent God asks believers to meet Him in certain physical locations. The two that immediately come to mind are your *closet* and your *church*.

🔑 Jesus said, “But you, when you pray, go into your room [closet], and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who

sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6). It is a specific time and place where I spend time with Jesus.

📖 Jesus let us know that He is present in our services when He compared the church to a "lampstand." The apostle John saw Jesus "among the lampstands."

You *can* worship God anywhere. Nevertheless, He gives you physical addresses where He wants to meet & talk.

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.

It was "like" his first vision... until it wasn't. God wants to give us fresh vision. Normally when we talk about "vision" we mean a new project of ministry, with a tangible goal to reach at its end. That isn't vision.

Ezekiel was given his ministry, but his vision was of "the glory" of God.

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

Ezekiel 3:24 Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet...

This is the second time God the Holy Spirit "entered" Ezekiel. What does that imply? *He must have exited!*

The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit was *not* the normal experience of the OT saints. He would come upon them; He would fill them. He *will* enter them, permanently, in the future, at the end of the 7yr Time of Jacob's Trouble, when "all Israel will be saved."

Meanwhile the Church enjoys the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of the New Covenant.

Ezekiel was "set on [his] feet" in order to be sent to begin his ministry. This was his commencement ceremony.

We are used to needing lots of formal training in our careers and endeavors. That's great - *especially if you are my surgeon*. That is not the way it works serving God. In the Book of Acts, Peter & John are dragged before the rulers. Two fishermen versus

dozens (at least) of the nation's most learned, most revered, spiritual leaders. After hearing Peter, we read, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (4:13 KJV).

They were looking at, and listening to, disciples, but they saw & they heard Jesus.

Truth be told, because of our emphasis on higher knowledge and academics, I think we would rather spend time studying, reading books and commentaries, then being with the Lord. At least it's something we should guard against.

If you are saved, you are miming Jesus. In another metaphor, the apostle Paul described believers as "living letters," "known and read by all men" (Second Corinthians 3:2).

What 'version' of Jesus are you portraying?

Red Letter Jesus... American Jesus... King James Only Jesus... 5-Point Jesus... Prosperity Jesus... Masculine Jesus... Liberal Jesus... Post-Modern Jesus. Don't forget Westboro Baptist Jesus.

How do you portray Jesus, accurately, according to the Bible? We take our lead from the apostle John. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). When God is glorified in an atmosphere of grace & truth - that's My Jesus!

#2 - What Is Your Imitation Of Jesus Predicting? (3:24b-4:17)

Remember Agabus?

He is a NT prophet who liked to dramatically punctuate his verbal predictions. "Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles' (Acts 21:10-11).

Ezekiel's physical theater was a one-man, five act drama with daily performances. Wouldn't it be cool to perform it? It would be easy to learn the dialog!

Act One

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Everyday Ezekiel's family & friends "put ropes on [him] and [bound him] with them, so that [he could] not go out" of his house.

The exiled Israelites were captives in Babylon. They were be "bound," as it were, in their own houses, under house arrest.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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 the Lord would allow Ezekiel to speak. It was always prophecy - only God's Word, not his. It made for easy sermon prep.

Note the longsuffering of God, indicating His desire that some would "hear."

Act Two

Ezk 4:1 "You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem.

Ezk 4:2 Lay siege against it, build a siege wall against it, and heap up a mound against it; set camps against it also, and place battering rams against it all around.

Ezk 4:3 Moreover take for yourself an iron plate, and set it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This *will be* a sign to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel was loosed. Your eyes would be drawn to a prop. A "clay tablet" could be used to draw on then baked to make it durable.

Ezekiel drew Jerusalem. Ezekiel then "lay siege against it." He constructed a siege ramp and mounds and camps and battering rams. The camps were probably complete with little Babylonian army men. Today he might have used Lego's.

But surely Jerusalem would stand! Surely God would not let His glory depart! That is what the false prophets were proclaiming in Jerusalem (with the notable exception of Jeremiah).

The “iron plate” was a cook pan. In a moment he’s going to bake some bread. Hence he was the first - wait for it - **Iron Chef**.

The plate symbolized the strength of Babylon. There was no hope they could avoid his third invasion.

Act Three

In this section we see some stage direction.

Ezk 4:4 “Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. *According* to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity.

Ezk 4:5 For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

Ezk 4:6 And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.

The daily performances went on for 430 days.

Ezk 4:7 “Therefore you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem; your arm *shall be* uncovered, and you shall prophesy against it.

Ezk 4:8 And surely I will restrain you so that you cannot turn from one side to another till you have ended the days of your siege.

Ezekiel would come out for Act Three and face the siege model. He would lie down on the appropriate side. He rolled-up his sleeve, the way Rich Mullins sang, *When God rolls up his sleeves, He’s not just putting on the Ritz*.

Whether his tongue was loosed and he was able to prophesy every day, or only occasionally, it kept the performance fresh for the audience in his yard.

Each day he lay on his side represented a year in the life of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah. As far as when each period began, what triggered each, we are nowhere told.

There are prophecies whose fulfillment is not completely understood. They will be when the time is right.

Ezk 4:9 "Also take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread of them for yourself. During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it.

Ezk 4:10 And your food which you eat *shall be* by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it.

Ezk 4:11 You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink.

A city besieged is a city starving. A time would come when the Jews in Jerusalem would have only 200g of bread and 16oz of water to be spread out over the course of each day. Ezekiel would lose a great deal of weight. It reminds me of actors who lost or gained weight for a role.

The bread, well, it wasn't exactly healthy. These are not nutritious ingredients. This is a no-star recipe.

It ain't lembas.

Ezk 4:12 And you shall eat it as barley cakes; and bake it using fuel of human waste in their sight."

Ezk 4:13 Then the LORD said, "So shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, where I will drive them."

The next time you are tempted to grab that expensive loaf of Ezekiel bread, think of the context of chapter four. This is a siege recipe.

You'll never be able to eat it again.

Ezk 4:14 So I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Indeed I have never defiled myself from my youth till now; I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth."

Ezk 4:15 Then He said to me, "See, I am giving you cow dung instead of human waste, and you shall prepare your bread over it."

Ezekiel wanted to avoid the NC-17 rating. The LORD obliged.

You might recall the episode in the Book of Acts in which the Lord asks Peter to eat animals that were unclean and forbidden by the Law of Moses. In his case, the Lord was going to use him to bring the Gospel to “unclean” Gentiles. The defilement was the lesson.

In Ezekiel’s case, whether it was human or cow excrement wasn’t critical. Starvation was the point.

It’s always interesting to me when the Lord allows negotiation, and when he doesn’t. Moses, Hezekiah, Gideon, and most famously Abraham all entered into negotiations with God. Sometimes the LORD would relent. It wasn’t always with a positive result, however, as Hezekiah learned.

Think of verses sixteen & seventeen as a narrator’s summary. If you didn’t ‘get’ what Ezekiel was portraying - Jerusalem was going to be besieged.

Ezk 4:16 Moreover He said to me, “Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread,

Ezk 4:17 that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and waste away because of their iniquity.

They would “dread” running out of these scarce supplies. Why? Because what followed would be... cannibalism.

Marcel Marceau was a Polish Jew. He and his brother joined the French resistance during WWII. They saved Jewish children from the Nazis.

He said that the first time he ever mimed was in order to keep Jewish children quiet while he helped them escape to Switzerland.

Ezekiel predicted the plight of Jerusalem. As we continue, his prophecies will stretch to the Millennial Kingdom.

I don’t know about you, but thanks to Ezekiel and Isaiah and Daniel and their OT & NT prophet counterparts, I’m predicting what **we** see unfolding before our very eyes: Resurrection & Rapture... The Great Tribulation... the 2nd Coming... The Millennial Kingdom... Eternity.

People are increasingly interested in the future. You can predict it for them!