

3. Action sermons

October 31, 2013

I like visual aids. They make me remember what I see longer than just hearing about them from someone. I don't think that I am the only one who likes visual aids. That is why I use many visual aids in my teachings.

Being the Master Communicator, our God used visual aids through His prophet Ezekiel to tell His people the Israelites about their dreadful future that was self-inflicted with their disobedience.

Chapters 4 through 24 combine a series of oral messages and symbolic acts designed to warn the people of Judah that judgment was coming and to explain the reason for this imminent discipline.

In chapter 4 Ezekiel dramatized the coming siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent dispersion of the people in exile in chapter 5. He concluded the drama by declaring that this impending judgment would destroy the Jewish people's pagan idolatry.

In chapter 6 and 7, the Lord speaks to them that their exile could not be stopped through human efforts. They fully had to learn what the Lord prepared for them.

A. THE VISUAL AIDS FOR THE JUDGMENT PROPHECY

1) The siege of Jerusalem

Ezekiel 4:1-3 "You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem. 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. 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.

Regarding the beauty of the ancient Jerusalem, the Babylonian Talmud says, "Of the ten measures of beauty that came down to the world, Jerusalem took nine", and it also says, "Whoever has not seen Jerusalem in its splendor has never seen a lovely city". When Jewish families around the world celebrate Passover, they conclude the meal with this phrase, "Next year in Jerusalem!" The Jewish people identify themselves with the existence of Jerusalem.

The Jewish exiles wouldn't be happy with the messages Ezekiel would bring them from the Lord, because he was going to announce the destruction of Jerusalem and the ravaging of the Promised Land. It was bad enough that the Jews were exiles in a pagan country, but to be told that they would have no city to return to was more than they could bear. No wonder they preferred the encouraging messages of the false prophets.

2) The judgment of Judah

Ezekiel 4:4-8 "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. 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. 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 . 7 Therefore you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem; your arm shall be uncovered, and you shall prophesy against it. 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.

At specified times each day, Ezekiel was commanded to lie on the ground, facing the clay model he constructed of the siege of Jerusalem. He was to be bound, but his arm was to be bared, and he had to eat the meager food described in v9-17.

He was to lie on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days. This symbolic act told the Jewish exiles why the Lord was allowing their holy city to be ravaged and ruined: the nation had sinned and their sins had caught up with them. He was doing all these without a word as mimes. People were getting his messages.

Some biblical scholars tried to explain away the meaning of these 430 days in total. Your guess is as good as theirs. I don't think that any one of them knows clearly. But one thing is clear though: God had been long-suffering toward the sinful Jewish people, warning them and chastening them, but they would not remain true to Him.

Eventually, there came a time when their sins caught up with them and God's patience had come to an end. God would rather see His land devastated, the city of Jerusalem ruined, His temple destroyed, and His people killed and exiled, than to have them give such a false witness to the Gentile nations.

Judgment begins with the people of God, not with the godless pagans. This should make born-again believers today walk in the fear of the Lord.

1 Peter 4:17-19 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel of God? 18 Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

3) The famine in the city

Ezekiel 4:9-13 "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. 10 And your food which you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. 11 You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink . 12 And you shall eat it as barley cakes; and bake it using fuel of human waste in their sight." 13 Then the Lord said, "So shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, where I will drive them."

The ingredients of Ezekiel's bread is not very appetizing . It is supposed to show the scarcity of food during the siege of Jerusalem.

This applies to us as well. When we continuously reject the loving guidance of our God from our lives, our soul will go through spiritual famine instead of being nourished by the Lord's rich blessings.

B. THE DESTINY OF THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH

4) A sword against Jerusalem

Ezekiel 5:1-4 "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. 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. 3 You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment. 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.

If an Israel priest shaved his head, he was defiled and no longer holy to the Lord according to Leviticus 21. Ezekiel defiled and humiliated himself as a symbol of the humiliation of the people of Judah who were defiled and no longer holy to the Lord. Nothing was left to do except to mourn their death as a nation.

Ezekiel used shaving his hair and beard with a sharp sword for his fourth “action sermon.” Instead of using a barber’s razor, he was told to use a sharp sword which represented the invasion by foreign military force to Jerusalem.

Throughout the rest of chapter 5 and all the way to chapter 7, the Lord explains what He just said in these 4 verses.

The prophet was commanded to weigh the hair carefully and divide it into three parts. One part he burned on the “clay Jerusalem” model to symbolize the people who died of famine or pestilence in Jerusalem. A second part was hacked to bits with the sword, symbolizing those slain by the Babylonian soldiers. The third part was thrown to the winds, picturing the Jews scattered among the Gentiles and the exiles taken to Babylon.

However, before Ezekiel threw the hair to the winds, he took a small portion of it and bound it in the hem of his garment, a symbol of God’s special care for a remnant of the people who would be spared to return to the land. They were the people like Ezra and Nehemiah.

C. PRIVILEGE THAT INVOLVES RESPONSIBILITY

Ezekiel 5:5-6 “Thus says the Lord God: ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her. 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.’

Israel was a privileged people and still is. But their privilege involves responsibility and accountability.

Luke 12:48b For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

I believe that America is in the exact same course of the ancient Israel. Though from the beginning, America was blessed with abundance of spiritual riches as well as materials, the majority of her people only cared for the materials and discarded the gift Giver. Americans do not consider a biblical principle – “To whom much is given, from him much will be required.”

As terrible as these judgments were, perhaps the greatest tragedy was that Israel would cease to bring glory to the Lord and would become a shameful reproach among the nations. God’s anger against sin is a holy anger, not a temper tantrum, because He is a holy God.

Jesus Christ warned the church of Ephesus in the Book of Revelation that they would lose their lampstand if they refused to repent and obey His instructions by returning to their first love for Him.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

What a tragedy it is when any church openly disobeys God's Word and begins to act like the unsaved people of the world by embracing the worldly doctrines! Once a church has lost its witness for the Lord, is there anything left?

Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

D. THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

In chapter 6 and 7, we find the oral sermons of what Ezekiel already did in his action sermons.

Ezekiel 6:10 And they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them."

God always accompanied His pronouncements of judgment with the proclamation of a way to escape. A remnant of the exiles would respond to God's discipline and repent of their past idolatry and spiritual fornication that had grieved and hurt Him. They would come to know that He truly is the Lord their God. The whole purpose of God's judgment was to cause His people to return to Him.

In every generation God's judgment and discipline is misunderstood by most people. When mankind willfully refuses to turn to Him, God mercifully uses discipline and judgment to cause the people to recognize that He is the only true God, always faithful to what He has said in His Word.

Contrary to the general opinion regarding the Lord, He is not a sadistic deity who'd love to punish people for no reason like many of eastern religions' idols.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

E. THE TIME IS NEAR

Ezekiel 7:12a The time has come, The day draws near.

Through His prophet Ezekiel, the Lord told the Israelites that they had reached the end of His patience and it was the time for God's wrath to be poured out onto Israel. What better description could there be of our world, especially America today? In every facet of our society, evil is multiplying its presence at the speed we can not even realize.

The worse part of this is that the people who are used by the devil are flaunting their wickedness and sins and the rest of the society is cheering for them. They are ignoring the fact that no one would be able to continue to live in one's iniquity, because all wickedness would be judged by the all-righteous and all-holy God. The time has come, and the day draws very near.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) God always accompanied His pronouncements of judgment with the proclamation of a way to escape.

2) The person who ignores the Word of God in life will not be ignored by the God of the Word in eternity.