

## Ezekiel 24

When judgment comes in this life it always brings grief to those who share in it, and to many of those who observe it. But is there anything that should be said as we observe it?

And is there, even in the experience of that grief, a witness that can be borne to hope?

Our prosperous but proud society is experiencing a judgment, milder than it might be, in the visitation of this virus – the destruction of wealth, the straining of our social fabric, the sickness and death of some. We feel the grief of that.

And what we see from Ezekiel 24 is that there is something that should always be said when we see judgement in the world around us,

And that in grief those who know the word of the LORD to be true, the word that climaxes in the revelation of the crucified Jesus as Lord, can always witness to hope

**The LORD speaks of the time when there is no more time to those who still have time. Vv. 1-14**

**A date to remember vv. 1-3**

*Ezekiel 24: In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. <sup>3</sup>And utter a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD:*

Ezekiel has been speaking to the Jewish exiles in Babylon for 5 years about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, trying to get them to see that its judgment was just and certain, to see that the LORD was not some national deity obligated to look after them regardless of how they lived, but the God who He says He is – the Creator, the God of the whole world, holy, righteous in being faithful to His covenant with them, to both its blessings and its curses, its judgments on those who break the covenant.

The people had showed no signs of believing him, or that they had believed Jeremiah and his prophesying in Jerusalem.

They had preferred to believe the false prophets who spoke of Jerusalem's safety, and how the LORD would destroy their enemies and bring them back to Jerusalem.

In fact the people were saying of Ezekiel

"The day grows long and every vision come to nothing" Ezk 12:23 and "the vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off." Ezk 12:27

They were saying in effect – we don't think what you are saying is true, and even if it is, it doesn't really concern us – not in our lifetime.

But this very day, the day the LORD emphasises that Ezekiel take special note of, tells them they were wrong, for on the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of the reign of King Zedekiah in Jerusalem King Nebuchednezzar of Babylon commenced the siege of Jerusalem that will end in its destruction.

Ezekiel must write down the date so that when the news reaches the exiles a month or more later – for it came by foot and horse – no phones or telegrams, twitter accounts or satellites – the exiles would know that Ezekiel's vision was God given, revealing both the cause and the certain outcome the LORD will bring to that siege, a God given vision revealing what they until then refused to believe – that the LORD willed the destruction of Jerusalem

And that is what this parable, this puzzling saying, given by God does – reveals the cause and outcome of that siege

### **A parable vv. 3-12**

*Ezekiel 24: Thus says the Lord God:*

*"Set on the pot, set it on;  
pour in water also;  
<sup>4</sup> put in it the pieces of meat,  
all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder;  
fill it with choice bones.  
<sup>5</sup> Take the choicest one of the flock;  
pile the logs under it;  
boil it well;  
seethe also its bones in it.*

Ezekiel in verses 3-5 speaks a cooking song, a quite cheerful song about preparation for a special meal, for meat was only on the menu on special occasions. And we know from chapter 11 that the people of Jerusalem had talked of Jerusalem as a cooking pot that would protect them from the flame of judgment, and that they were the special cuts, the select group who through the experience would become parts of something good, of a feast. [11:3, 7, 11] Initially his hearers might have been encouraged by this song.

But Ezekiel dashes their hope. There will be no festive meal for Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> *“Therefore thus says the Lord God: Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose corrosion is in it, and whose corrosion has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making any choice.”* <sup>7</sup> *For the blood she has shed is in her midst; she put it on the bare rock; she did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with dust.* <sup>8</sup> *To rouse my wrath, to take vengeance, I have set on the bare rock the blood she has shed, that it may not be covered.*

Because of her sin, her bloodshed vv. 6-7, Jerusalem is like a pot which has corruption, spoken of as corrosion, throughout it. Its contents, those choice pieces of meat are corrupt. The pot is to be emptied of its corruption, but corruption sticks to its sides, an adherent scum that spoils anything cooked in it.

This verdict is not baseless. V. 7 – the people in Jerusalem, the powerful especially, treat human life as if it is a common thing, not the gift of God but something they can destroy as it suits their plans. And they do it openly and provocatively. They do not cover the blood they shed.

In the law [Lev. 17:13, Deut. 12:16,24] even the blood of animals was to be covered by earth when it was shed, for it symbolised the life that belonged to God, a life God had given them for sacrifice or food. Their open shedding of human blood, life God specially protected, showed contempt for the LORD as well as contempt for the lives of others.

And the LORD will not allow the offense of what they have done to be hidden v. 8 *I have set on the bare rock the blood she has shed, that it may not be covered.*

There will be a reckoning for that blood.

Ezekiel returns to the cooking pot parable in v. 9 to picture that.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord God: Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great. <sup>10</sup> Heap on the logs, kindle the fire, boil the meat well, mix in the spices, and let the bones be burned up. <sup>11</sup> Then set it empty upon the coals, that it may become hot, and its copper may burn, that its uncleanness may be melted in it, its corrosion consumed. <sup>12</sup> She has wearied herself with toil; its abundant corrosion does not go out of it. Into the fire with its corrosion!

The LORD will make the fire hot, try to clean the pot by superheating the pot, consume the corruption. But the sad reality is the pot and its corruption cannot be separated, not even the fire is cleansing; to deal with the corruption the pot will have to be destroyed, melted in the fire.

And in case the situation was not clear to the hearers of the parable the LORD makes his meaning explicit in vv. 13-14

#### **A parable applied vv. 13-14 [Ezk. 12:21-28; 2 Pet. 3:1-13]**

*Ezekiel 24: <sup>13</sup> On account of your unclean lewdness, because I would have cleansed you and you were not cleansed from your uncleanness, you shall not be cleansed anymore till I have satisfied my fury upon you. <sup>14</sup> I am the LORD. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God."*

The LORD has persistently tried to clean up Jerusalem over hundreds of years.

He has sent prophets. He gave them kings like Hezekiah and Josiah who removed idolatry.

I would have cleansed you

But they refused. They kept on returning to their idolatry.

They kept on with their greed and violence and sexual immorality

And now time has run out. He will satisfy His just anger, His fury, upon it.

*<sup>14</sup> I am the LORD. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God."*

The LORD could not be more emphatic

There is no going back

They will receive what their deeds deserve, with all the horror of that.

Remember now that Ezekiel is speaking of Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon. They are no longer in Jerusalem or Judah, though they once lived there and shared in its sinful way of life and wrong thinking about the LORD.

The exiles will observe, to their great grief, the destruction of Jerusalem while they still have time to reckon for themselves with the word of God, that God will give to each what each deserves.

Why is the LORD speaking to them?

He is telling them this so that when it happens they know it is the LORD's doing, and why.

He is telling them so that while they have time they can change their thinking about God, stop thinking that He is a god who can be taken for granted, who is duty bound to protect them no matter how they live

Telling them so they can change their behaviour, and start living according to the law God gave them in the covenant, living with LORD as their King even on the plains of Babylon where Nebuchednezzar the conqueror of Jerusalem claimed to be the true King.

That is the LORD is still speaking to them so they can do what they have so far failed to do, repent – confess they are in the wrong, and God's judgments are right, and turn back to the LORD for mercy.

In giving this vision with its very firm date the LORD is telling people who still have time, time to repent, that there comes a time when there is no more time, so now is the time to act.

**Jesus tells us we need to be ready for the time when there will be no more time**

And that is something we should also say as we observe and experience the grief and shock of judgment, for that is what Jesus teaches – that There comes a time when there will be no more time, so now is the time to act.

That was the point of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins which Jesus taught in Matthew 25 as He taught His followers about His return and the end of the world

The wise, those who took extra oil, were those who used the present, the time they did have, to prepare for a future event they knew was certain but whose exact timing was unknown – the coming of the bridegroom. They knew when the bridegroom came they would have no more time to get ready and only those who had prepared when they had time would be the ones who could welcome the bridegroom

The foolish were those who did not prepare in the present for that certain event of unknown time, and so when the bridegroom came they were caught out and left out. At that time there was no more time.

God's judgments in history should remind us of His final judgment, the day when we will all have to give account for our lives, when God will give to everyone according to their works. They should remind us to make sure we are ready for that certain but unknown day in the only way we can be

By repenting and believing in Jesus now. This is the time to get ready for the time when there is no more time.

But before that day, that will come unannounced like a thief in the night, we might die. None of us knows the time of our death, and disasters tell us that day could come upon us unexpectedly.

I think that has been one of the things that has shaken people about this Covid infection. That you could be well one week, get a sniffle the next, and be dead the week after. That death would come without warning, without waiting while we prepare ourselves for it.

In Luke 13 Jesus spoke of those who died without warning. He spoke of people killed in an earthquake, a natural disaster, and people killed by sudden human violence – Galileans killed by the Romans as they worshipped in the temple. He spoke of these tragedies to warn all who would listen to make sure we are not overtaken by death unprepared.

“Unless you repent” He says to us “you will all likewise, that is in the same way, perish”. Jesus says that unless you repent, even if you die in your own bed, you will die unprepared, not ready to meet your maker and judge.

He is urging each of us individually to be ready in the only way possible, by repenting, turning away from sin and turning back to God by believing the gospel Jesus preached

That is something we should heed ourselves, making sure we are living lives of repentance and faith in Jesus

That is something we should be saying to others

Look at the uncertainty of our lives, that we are not in control

Look at the reality of God's judgments, how easily He humbles us, how easily He can take back the life He has given

We should stop thinking God's patience is indefinite, stop living as if He will not do what HE has said. There will come a time as we see in Ezekiel when God's patience runs out, and His prophesied judgement is executed.

While we still have time we should repent, that is turn back to God and then find His forgiveness and mercy by believing His Son Jesus has died for our sins and risen with authority to forgive all trust and follow Him

Have you used the time you have now to get ready for that time when there will be no more time?

Matt. 25:1-13, Luke 13:1-5

**The LORD gives the exiles in Ezekiel's grief a hard, true word so that in their grief they will receive a good trustworthy word vv. 15-27**

But Ezekiel's audience still did not believe him, they were so wedded to their false believe and false hope that what Ezekiel said was unthinkable.

They were still believing, even after the siege started, that God would deliver Jerusalem, that He had to.

In the LORD's mercy to them He provides further testimony to the exiles of the certainty of His judgment on Jerusalem through the grief of His prophet Ezekiel, who will become for them both a sign of judgment and hope.

**Ezekiel's grief – the shock of loss vv. 15-18 [Job 1:21, 2:10; Psalm 139:16; John 9:1-3]**

*Ezekiel 24: <sup>15</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>16</sup> “Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. <sup>17</sup> Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.” <sup>18</sup> So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded.*

We don't know much of Ezekiel's wife, but he plainly loved her, the delight of his eyes, his consolation in his own hard life and ministry. He is to lose her at a stroke, with no time to prepare.

His is a real and profound grief, but it is one that the Lord says He is not to express outwardly in any of the culturally accepted and expected ways of mourning his loss – not even spontaneously, letting his tears run down. Nor is he to accept the support of others as they bring him food.

Instead he is to put on shoes and his turban, to dress with a fine formality, for turbans were not everyday wear, but festive wear.

Some of you, because of Covid restrictions, know how hard it is to not be able to mourn well, to not be able to mark properly the passing of one you loved, not be able to access the comfort of others. You know, feel, what the rest of us sense, the hardness of this command that compounds Ezekiel's grief.

There is so much suffering, so much dying to himself, in these brief words *at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded.*

Yet Ezekiel, who had protested before at being asked to cook on human dung, does not protest the LORD's action in taking his wife's life.

He is a believer like Job. He does not think his life or her life are their own sovereign possession and that God needs to ask permission or give reasons to take life.

Life he knows is God's gift. He is sovereign in its giving, and its taking

*Job. 1: <sup>21</sup> And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”*



And he does not think his wife was robbed. Like the Psalmist he trusted that she and he live not one day more or less than the Lord has decided, that our days are given by Him, all written in His book before one of them comes to be.

*Psalm 139: <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.*

And Ezekiel has met the LORD, had a glimpse of the likeness of His glory, the glory believers have come to know in Jesus, full of grace and truth.

His is a real trust in a sovereign and good God, the LORD and giver of life, the trust you and I should have when we think of our own death or the death of those we love.

And that real trust issues in a real, though hard, obedience, an obedience the people notice.

### **The hard word vv. 19-24**

*Ezekiel 24: <sup>19</sup> And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting thus?"*

The question shows that they are starting to recognise Ezekiel as a prophet. They know his actions has meaning for them. And the LORD who has been directing Ezekiel gives them an answer. It is a hard word, a word of coming loss and grief to those who already know grief.

*<sup>20</sup> Then I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>21</sup> 'Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. <sup>22</sup> And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. <sup>23</sup> Your turbans shall be on your heads and your shoes on your feet; you shall not mourn or weep, but you shall rot away in your iniquities and groan to one another. <sup>24</sup> Thus shall Ezekiel be to you a sign; according to all that he has done you shall do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.'*

The LORD says they, like the prophet, will lose what they most treasure, the focus of their hope – the temple, in the judgment that will also carry away their children. Shattered forever will be their false theology that the presence of the LORD in his temple guaranteed their safety and security, that the LORD was a kind of tame national deity satisfied with formal acknowledgement while they did whatever they pleased.

And when they learn of that loss they will mourn as Ezekiel has done. There is debate about why they will mourn like Ezekiel – one says it is because they will be paralysed by grief, another that this grief will so overwhelm the whole community the usual mourning rites will be unable to be sustained.

Rather we should see their inability to mourn openly as a mark of the completeness of their defeat and their helplessness. They will mourn as a conquered people living amongst and under their conquerors, the Babylonians. They are being watched for their loyalty, and are expected to rejoice in their King Nebuchednezzar's triumph over those who have rebelled against him.

But at the same time the LORD declaring beforehand that He is the one who profanes His own sanctuary transforms what is a sign of Nebuchenezzar's rule and triumph into a sign that it is the LORD who reigns, the LORD whose will is done in these unthinkable events. Where they might have thought the destruction of His sanctuary was a sign of the Lord's defeat and lost all hope, in fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy by mourning on that day as Ezekiel has already mourned they can recognise that the LORD rules and Nebechednezzar is merely a servant, carrying out His will.

If they will remember the LORD's word, even in their grief, even as they lament their sin, they know where they can find hope – the LORD whose word is true.

*<sup>24</sup> Thus shall Ezekiel be to you a sign; according to all that he has done you shall do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.'*

### **Ezekiel a sign**

Ezekiel himself will be a sign to them of both grief and the truth of God

His own mourning points to the hard mourning to come, but beyond that to the truth of the word God speaks.

And so they will know that the LORD who speaks is the God He says He is.

The God who keeps His covenant – righteous in bringing upon a rebellious people the judgments He said He would when they broke the covenant

The God who rules, whose word is true because He is the only God, almighty to do all that HE has said

And the God to whom they can turn in repentance to find life

And the LORD tells Ezekiel his ministry will not end with the fulfilment of his prophecies in the destruction of Jerusalem

### **Ezekiel's mouth opened vv. 25-27 [Ezk. 33:10-11]**

*Ezekiel 24:<sup>25</sup> "As for you, son of man, surely on the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their soul's desire, and also their sons and daughters,<sup>26</sup> on that day a fugitive will come to you to report to you the news.<sup>27</sup> On that day your mouth will be opened to the fugitive, and you shall speak and be no longer mute. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."*

When that great turning point is reached, when the LORD has spent His fury on Jerusalem, Ezekiel's mouth, closed from a week after the LORD first appeared to Him, will be opened, and HE will speak and again become a sign to the people of Israel.

*Ezekiel 3:<sup>26</sup> And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house.<sup>27</sup> But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.*

### **Ezekiel a sign**

But this time a sign of what?

A sign again pointing to the truth of God. What the LORD has said eighteen months beforehand He will have performed. So in speaking on that day Ezekiel is a sign of the trustworthiness of the Word of the LORD.

And he is also a sign that the LORD has further words to say through His prophet, that judgment is not the last word.

In being a sign of the truthfulness of God's word, Ezekiel as He speaks that further word in turn will become a sign of hope for a devastated people

A people in that day saying *"Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?"* Ezekiel 33:10

In opening His mouth to declare the visions the LORD gives him of gathering and renewed life, of peace in the LORD's presence, Ezekiel in his speaking itself will be a sign to a discouraged and despairing people of the faithfulness of God to His word, of a sure hope

In Ezekiel 24 we see The LORD gives the exiles in Ezekiel's grief a hard, true word so that when that hard word was fulfilled in their grief they will receive a good trustworthy word, a word of new life and hope.

In his obedience in grief Ezekiel became a sign of the trustworthiness of God, the God who speaks a hard and true word of judgment, but who will not let that be His last word to a sinful people.

### **The Word the LORD speaks in Jesus' grief [Is. 53:3]**

And the LORD who made Ezekiel a sign in His grievous obedience of His rule and the trustworthiness of His word of both judgement and hope has also made him a sign for us, a sign pointing to another servant of the LORD who in His grievous obedience speaks a trustworthy word of judgement and hope

In the grief and sorrow He endured in going to the cross, the Lord Jesus, that man of sorrows, speaks to us a hard word of judgment, a good word of hope, and a sure and certain word.

He speaks a hard word to us – the cross tells us that sin is serious and God will judge it, and give it what it deserves, death. In fact the cross makes judgment on a world that so hates its maker that it seeks to kill Him certain, guarantees that there will come a time for rebels when there is no more time.

And on the cross, in the midst of the grief of Jesus enduring in our place the judgment of death, of draining the cup of God's wrath, the Lord Jesus also speaks a good word to us. It is the gospel word that there HE is dying for our sins, the gospel that tells us all who repent and believe the gospel that He died for our sins and rose again will be forgiven, need not fear that day of judgment

And on the cross, and in His rising, the LORD Jesus becomes a sign to us of the reign, the rule, of God and the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Word of God, of the Word He speaks

He said He would die and rise again, and HE did.

The LORD said He would not let His holy one see decay, and He raised Him from the dead

And in His raising showed that what looked like the triumph of the enemies of God and His people is the triumph of God and His King, Jesus

In the grief of the cross the man of sorrows speaks to us a hard word, a good word, and a sure word, a word that tells us that either the judgement for our sin is either borne by Jesus in our place, or we will bear it ourselves, and calls us to repent and trust the living Jesus to forgive us and give us eternal life.

And if we listen to that word, if we believe that word

We will not only know comfort in our own grief, the grief of death and suffering we experience, comfort as we know the hope of eternal life the one who has conquered death gives us, and as we know the love of a God who would freely give His Son to give us life while we were still sinners

we will also be able ourselves to become signs of hope, to bear witness to a hope that can be known even in grief.

### **Bearing witness in grief and suffering [1 Thess. 4:13-14; 1 Pet. 3:13-17]**

The New Testament calls followers of Jesus to bear this witness to hope both in the grief of death, and in the grief of suffering.

Speaking to the Thessalonian believers Paul says

*1 Thessalonians 4:*<sup>13</sup> *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*

*<sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.*

Death is the judgement on our race's sin, and in the grief of death, as we experience that judgment, we are to mourn differently. We mourn as those who have a sure hope, and as we do We bear witness to the truthfulness and power of the living God, the God who raised the Lord Jesus, the God who says He will raise all those who trust Jesus, who are in Jesus by faith.

*1 Peter 3: <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

And in Peter the LORD tells us that in the grief of suffering, whether that is suffering in the various trials [1 Peter 1:6-7] Peter speaks of in chapter 1 or the suffering of persecution, suffering for doing good, suffering in the judgment that begins with the household of God [1 Peter 4:17], we are called to have a visible hope, a hope that prompts questions.

Believers can then speak of how this hope has been given to us in our grief because the living God has suffered the loss of what was most precious to Him, giving His beloved Son up to death for our sin, and then raising Him from death to speak a word beyond judgment, a good and true word that says evil will not triumph and death will not be the end for all who repent and believe the gospel.

When judgment comes it always brings grief to those who share in it, and to those who observe it. But is there anything that should be said as we observe it?

Yes – the word we must speak is that now is the time to get ready for the time when there is no more time, the time when God says of His judgment to a world that perseveres in its sin, that refuses to be cleansed of its rebellion

*<sup>14</sup> I am the LORD. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God."*

We should tell people that now is the time to get ready for that day by turning from sin and crying out to the living Lord Jesus for mercy – clearly and urgently.

And is there, even in the experience of that grief, a witness that can be borne to hope?

Yes, believers in Jesus must bear witness to the hope He has given us through His grievous and triumphant suffering

The hope of forgiveness

The hope of justice

The hope of resurrection life

The hope of the sure promise of the Almighty Lord whose word never fails

For until the final day, that time when there is no time, this is the hope all who repent and believe can come and share

Hope that says the word God is still speaking to sinners is not 'die',

But I have no delight in the death of sinners

Turn and live.