

"Is there no end to my suffering? (4)

I heard there was a great loss a couple of years ago in the entertainment world. A man named, **Larry La Prise** who was from Detroit in America died aged **83**. Now you may not know who **Larry La Prise** was but I'm sure you'll remember one the songs that he wrote. He wrote the song, "**Hokey Cockey**". But during the funeral preparations his family found it especially difficult. They had trouble keeping him in the coffin. So what they ended up doing was "**Putting his left leg in and his left leg out**" and well you know the rest.

The man we are going to study today was a man who also found it difficult when someone he loved passed on. It was around the **597 B.C.** and he was about **25 years old** when he and his family were taken captive to Babylon. And after he had been in Babylon for around **5 years**, it was then that God called him into His service. He was a prophet from a priestly family and his name is **Ezekiel**.

Turn you Bibles to the **Book of Ezekiel**. Now were not going to study the **Book of Ezekiel** rather we are going to do is study the man Ezekiel himself, because he too was a man with many talents. Now we know that he is the author of the **Book of Ezekiel** and we know he was one of God's prophets. And part of his task as a prophet was to prophesy to the captives who dwelt by the **River Chebar at Tel Abib**.

Ezekiel 1:1-3 "In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month--it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin-- the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was upon him."

And so the first thing we learn is that Ezekiel identifies himself as a priest, the son of Buzi. He was also a married man but not just married to anyone, he was married to the love of his life. **Ezekiel 24:16** tells us that his wife was "**the delight of his eyes.**" He had a relationship with his wife which was real, she was the woman that he loved with all his heart, mind and soul, and she was the apple of his eye.

I heard a story about an old couple who were pushing their trolley down the aisle of a supermarket when they spotted another elderly couple walking hand in hand. The husband said to his wife, "Now, that looks like a happily married couple." And the husband replied, "Don't be too sure, dear, they're probably saying the same thing about us."

Ezekiel's marriage to his wife was a happy one, the type of marriage that you knew that both parties were just besotted with each other. It's not just a relationship which would be beautiful to look at but a relationship that many people would want of their own. Now the reason I'm emphasising his relationship with his wife is because that relationship was going to come to an end very soon.

Now when I was younger I used to rebel against my parents all the time because I used to think that I knew better than them. And my parents used to say to me, "**Wait until you've got kids of your own and you'll know all about it.**" And I used to say, "**Yeh right, whatever.**" Oh how those words haunt me.

And anyone of you who have been blessed with children will know exactly what I'm talking about. You can only teach your kids so much because they are not always ready to learn. But one thing we can all teach our kids is that when it comes to obedience you can only have **2 outcomes**. A reward or a punishment.

Let me give you a quick run down of the **Book of Ezekiel**. **Ezekiel 1-3** tells us about Ezekiel's call as a prophet and how God commissions him as a "**Watchman for the house of Israel.**" In **Chapters 4-24**, we find Ezekiel beginning to preach and demonstrate God's truth, as he predicted the approaching siege and destruction of Jerusalem. In **chapters 25-32** we find that this whole devastation would be God's doing as a judgement for His people's idolatry. And so Ezekiel challenges them to turn from their evil ways but he also says that God is going to judge all the nations around them too for their sinful behaviour. But it's not all doom and gloom, because in **chapters 33-48** Ezekiel is going to tell God's people that God is faithful and His people will be blessed in the future.

Now that's a quick run down of **Ezekiel's Book**. But if there is one thing you cannot miss when you read through the **Book of Ezekiel**, it is Ezekiel's faithful obedience to God. You can't miss it. Ezekiel was a man who obeyed God in every aspect of his life and although he was a priest, he also served as a "**Jewish street preacher**" in Babylon for **22 years**.

And loved ones that is a talent which only a few possess. When Paul is talking about slave's relationships with their masters in [Ephesians 6](#), he says in [verse 6-8](#), "Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve **wholeheartedly**, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."

I want to suggest to you that you cannot obey God unless you're willing to serve Him wholeheartedly. And Ezekiel was a man just like that. He was a street preacher who stood among the people and told them about God's judgement and salvation and he told God's people that they are on dangerous ground with their lifestyles and they need to repent of their ways and start obeying God again.

And if you think that some of my preaching is in your face then you're lucky that Ezekiel isn't preaching to us today because [I wonder what God would have to say to His church here at Summer Lane?](#) Because Ezekiel practiced and lived what he preached. [How would you feel if God said that, "Next week every time we say a prayer, all of us need to go down on our knees to pray"?](#) [How would you feel if God said, "We should all go into the middle of Birmingham city centre and tell people they need to repent"?](#)

You see when God called Ezekiel into His service; he had to obey God's every command. Many of which I'm not sure the church would do today if they were asked to do it. But we're pretty good at telling people they need to be baptised to be right with God. We're pretty good at telling people they need to stop sinning.

[But how good are we at stopping the sin in our own lives? How many of us are wholeheartedly serving and obeying God?](#) Let me show you some of the things that Ezekiel was asked to do for His God. God told Ezekiel to illustrate His message with dramatic object lessons. In other words, he wasn't just to speak; he was to give some visual aid to the message he was giving. Now I'm not going to share with you everything that God told him to do but I think you'll get the point when I'm finished.

[Ezekiel 4:6-9](#) "After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year. Turn your face toward the siege of Jerusalem and with bared arm prophesy against her. I will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your siege. "Take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them in a storage jar and use them to make bread for yourself. You are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side."

God asked him to lie on his side for [390 days](#) during which he could eat only [one eight-ounce](#) meal a day which was to be cooked over manure. [And why did God ask him to do this?](#) [Ezekiel 4:13](#) "The Lord said, "In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them." God is trying to get His children's attention but He still hasn't got their attention and so He asks Ezekiel to do something else.

[Ezekiel 5:1-4](#) "Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. But take a few strands of hair and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. Again, take a few of these and throw them into the fire and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel."

God asks him to shave his head and beard off. [And why?](#) [Ezekiel 5:5+6](#) "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the centre of the nations, with countries all around her. Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees."

Now I don't know about you but if I was around then I would be wondering what on earth was going on. But let me tell you what is going on, God wants His children's attention but they are not listening. That's why Ezekiel was sent in the first place according to [Ezekiel 2:4+5](#). God wanted their attention because His people were just so obstinate and stubborn and rebellious. [Think about it!](#) A whole nation of rebellious people, involved in all sorts of ungodly activities. And remember this was God's own people who were like this. They wouldn't listen to God, they had turned their backs on God's Laws and commandments, they started to worship other idols and put other god's before God. It was a mess, a nationwide sin problem.

But out of the midst of all that sinfulness came a prophet sent by God called **Ezekiel**. And when you think about it things haven't changed that much today, **have they?** We're still surrounded with an ungodly nation who has turned their backs on God and His commandments. And in many ways like Ezekiel, we too as the Lord's church stand alone amidst this cities sinfulness. But Ezekiel was obedient in everyway. He faithfully preached the truth as it was, he didn't go out of his way to make people feel good about themselves, he told it as it was. "**If you don't stop this ungodly behaviour, you're in trouble.**"

Now let me ask you, **do we preach to make people feel good about themselves?** I pray that we never do. **Do we preach the truth as it is?** I pray that we never stop. **Do we serve God wholeheartedly?** Well only you can answer that question, because I don't know if you do or not. But I will say this, Ezekiel stood up for the truth because he wasn't alone.

And loved ones even though we have millions of people living in sin in Birmingham we need to remember that were not alone. God is with us as much as He was with Ezekiel in Babylon. He wasn't afraid of the men around him and we shouldn't be afraid of the people around us. **Hebrews 13:5b+6** "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." **So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"** Ezekiel was obedient because he knew that his God was with him.

Do you want to demonstrate like Ezekiel did that you love God? Then simple obey His commandments like Ezekiel did. Jesus says, in **John 14:21** "**Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.**"

Now let me share with you another talent which Ezekiel possessed. **Remember the relationship I told you he had with his wife?** I said it would be coming to an end but it's the type of ending that most of us would choose not to happen to our spouses. Ezekiel trusted God to know better, what a talent that is. To be able to trust God even with the dearest things in your life.

When people say the date 9/11 your thoughts automatically go the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. When people say the date November 5th, your thoughts go back to Guy Falwkes who tried to blow up the houses of parliament.

If you were to say to Ezekiel, the **10th day of the 10th month of the 9th year**, he would probably break down and cry. **Ezekiel 24:1+2** "**In the ninth year, in the tenth month on the tenth day, the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, record this date, this very date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day."**"

Now this wasn't just going to be a sad day for Ezekiel because Jerusalem was going to come under siege from the king of Babylon. It was also going to be the day that his wife would die. One of the saddest points in Ezekiel's life was the death of his wife.

Now don't misunderstand me here everyone dies eventually and it is sad but not everybody dies in the way Ezekiel's wife dies. And that's because it's one thing knowing that were all going die someday but it's another thing when you know the **exact date** of your death. Ezekiel preached to the people what was going to happen and then the time came.

And so God said to him in **Ezekiel 24:15-18** "**Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners.**" So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died.

The prophet was told that on the very day he received his revelation, his wife would die as the armies of Babylon laid siege against the holy city of Jerusalem. What a sad day that must have been for Ezekiel and maybe we don't fully understand why God would do such a thing, but Ezekiel understood. He understood because following on in **Ezekiel 24:18b** says that, "**The next morning Ezekiel did as he had been commanded.**" Perhaps no other event in the lives of the Old Testament prophets is as touching as this. But God finally got His people's attention after this event. In fact His people were so troubled that they came to Ezekiel and asked him what his words meant.

Ezekiel 24:19-24 "**Then the people asked me, "Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us?" So I said to them, "The word of the Lord came to me: Say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary--the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your**

affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword. And you will do as I have done. You will not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners. You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves. Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord."

Now what was the point of Ezekiel's wife death? Well, how Ezekiel felt about the death of his wife was to show God's people how much grief God had felt at the sin of Jerusalem. And when Ezekiel was commanded not to grieve his wife's death, he was to brace himself for this tragedy just like God had prepared Himself for the death of His beloved city. God gave Ezekiel the strength to accept all the things which were going to happen and which He asked Him to do. That's what the name Ezekiel means, "**God will strengthen.**"

Now you may think that this is a bit harsh on God's behalf.

But the harshness of God's command to His prophet emphasizes the Lord's grief over the fate and sufferings of His rebellious people. Believers in God have been called upon to suffer many indignities through the ages, but in the suffering of Ezekiel, we learn something of the suffering of God Himself. Ezekiel shows us just how ugly and how serious our sin is. Our rebellion brings grief and hurt to God, against whom our sin is directed.

You know it scares me when I hear Christians talking about the blood of Christ as if it some detergent cleaner on tap. "**Well if I sin, Jesus blood will cover it up anyway.**" If that's your attitude towards sin, then you need to seriously think again. Your sin is what caused God to have to send His one and only Son to earth in the first place. **Ephesians 2:13 "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."**

That same blood brought us closer to God because there needed to a blood sacrifice. **Hebrews 9:14 "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"**

If it wasn't for the blood of Christ we couldn't serve God in the first place because we would constantly have a guilty conscience. **1 Peter 1:18+19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."**

The only reason we can call ourselves Christians and have some meaning to our lives is because of the blood of Christ. Make no mistakes about it loved ones, God hates sin and every time you sin it causes God to grieve. "**Yes**" Jesus paid our debts and "**Yes**" His blood cleanses us from our sin but as **Romans 6:1+2** asks everyone of us. "**What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"**

You've all probably heard the story about the school bus which was on its way home one night but the bus driver realised that the brakes didn't work. And he didn't know what to do because the bus was full of children, so he realised that the situation was going to be fatal, he knew that he was going to die and probably kill all of the children when the bus finally crashes.

But as he was driving along the road he noticed a farmer's field up ahead but there was a young boy at the gate, sadly the driver had no choice, he drove into the young boy but managed to save himself and the rest of the children. And so a few minutes later when the parents of the children were looking for the bus driver to thank him for saving their children they found him at the front of the bus with his arms around the young boy he had just killed. Then one of the parents asked, "**Who was the young boy?**" Someone replied, "**His Son**".

You see loved ones that's why God acted so dramatically in dealing with our human condition by sending His Son to die in our place and set us free from the bondage of sin. God's people needed to know what sin meant to God. They needed to know that God doesn't tolerate sin, especially among His own people. You see not only did Ezekiel loose something close and personal to him, so did God's people. God through Ezekiel was hitting His people where it hurts, Jerusalem.

"Ah Jerusalem, God's land, God's city, the location of God's temple." I can hear His people crying out in the streets now saying, "**Where can we worship God now? The temple is gone, there will be no where to sacrifice to Him.**"

They failed to see that God is not restricted by walls, He is everywhere at all times and He sees everything. I wonder how we would feel if God took our building away from us. **Do you think that God's people said back then, "Ah well, there's no temple nearby anymore, we'll just go down the road to Bethel and worship with the local religious groups there."**

That was the very reason why God punished them in the first place, because of their idolatry, going back to idolatry would have meant that God would have to get their attention all over again. But God will not continue to get His people's attention if His people continue to refuse to listen to Him.

In Exodus 23 where God gave Moses the **10 commandments**. The **1st** of the **10 commandments** was this, "**You shall have no other gods before me.** The **2nd** of the **10 commandments** is this, "**You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.**" The **3rd** of the **10 commandments** was this, "**You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.**"

And all credit goes to the Jews after this event in Ezekiel because when they finally returned from Babylonian captivity they never committed idolatry again. Obedience to God means following God wherever He wants you to go and doing whatever He asks you to do. That was Ezekiel, not only did he possess the talent of obedience, he also had the talent of knowing that God knows better, even it cost him the sacrifice of something sacred in his life.

He put his trust in God but God's people put their trust in a place, a building, a temple when they needed to put their trust in God. God said to Ezekiel before he started his mission in **Ezekiel 3:8+9** "**I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house.**"

Ezekiel never compromised the word of God for anyone, no matter what they threw at him and believe me when you read right through the **Book of Ezekiel** you will see exactly what he had to go through. **And there would have been many times when he cried out to God, "When is my suffering going to stop? Is there no end to my suffering?"**

And God would say to him exactly what He says to us today. **1 Peter 3:13-17** "**For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**" Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "**Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.**" But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. **It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**"

Let me encourage you to use your talent of trust and let God take care of everything in your life, even the things which are precious to you. Let me encourage you to stand up and speak for the truth and don't compromise that truth because the God of Ezekiel is also the God who is with you always, to the very end of time.

Ezekiel loved His God and he showed His love by doing exactly what God asked him to do. If you're not a Christian this morning then let me encourage you to read the Bible and do exactly what He asks everyone to do. To turn from your own ways to God's, declare Jesus as Lord and show your love for Him by being baptised for the forgiveness of your sins. And then the God of Ezekiel, the God of the Summer Lane church of Christ here, will become your God too.