A Method in God’s Madness

Ezekiel 4:1--5:1-17

God sometimes does strange things; He has called Ezekiel to be a watchman for the house of Israel; He tells him to “speak My words” (3:4); then He says, “I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute…” (3:26).

Paul reminds us that God chooses the weak to confound the strong and the foolish things to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

God wants us to see that it is His power, not ours that does the work (see Zechariah 4:6).

As we get into our text we find Ezekiel prophesying without saying a word; it’s preaching in pantomime.

The Sermons in Silence (4:1-17)

God was instructing Ezekiel to:

*Be drawing on a clay tablet (4:1-2)*... He was to take a 12x14 inch piece of tile draw on it the city of Jerusalem; erect siege walls around it; he was to depict the enemy outside the walls with battering rams ready to attack.

The people were saying that God would never destroy the city; it was His holy city.

*Be distancing an iron plate between yourself and the clay brick (4:3)*; this represented three things:
1. The separation of the people from God...Ezekiel becomes the visible representation of God as the iron plate which who will bring destruction on the city is between him and the city.

2. The slaughter that will come to Jerusalem... God’s patience has run out; what an awful thought! Ezekiel's face is toward them as if to say, “I have had enough! I am facing you. I am going to deal with you!”

3. The sovereignty of God in action... We must not miss what the children of Israel were missing; God is in control; His sovereignty is behind all the actions of humanity (Amos 3:6; Daniel 2:20-22).

*Be discomforted by laying on your sides for 430 days (4:4-8)...* There are four observations to make:

1. Bearing the sins of Israel...He was to bear the sins of Israel by lying on his left side for 390 days; his head was toward Jerusalem so he was facing north; 390 day-years would represent 390 years of Israel’s sin from the time Israel became a divided kingdom (971 BC) to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC (that is 385 years, so the 390 day-years period is rounded off).

2. Bearing the sins of Judah...He was to bear the sins of Judah by lying on his right side for 40 days; when you add the 40 day-years to the 390 day-years you get 430 day-years which was the length of time of Israel's captivity (Exodus 12:40).

3. Based on the sacrificial system of the law... In bearing the sins of Israel and Judah he was carrying out the sacrificial system of the law... He was “to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel” (4:4); all the sins of Israel and Judah were laid on the prophet; one might think he is a type of Christ; but no; he is acting this out under the law; he is acting this out before the judgment came to Jerusalem; he is representing the animals which had the sins of the people transferred on them before they were sacrificed by the priests; such sacrifices did not remove sin; it only temporarily covered them up; the purpose of the sacrificial system was to show the people the awfulness of sin and to point the people to the coming Messiah, the Lamb of God, whom would take away the sins of the world (Hebrews 10:4-5); this act of Ezekiel is not a picture of redemption, but a striking picture of
the need of a Redeemer; without redemption and a Redeemer there is only judgment.

4. Blessings come through the sanctified ministry of Christ... We should be grateful that we live on this side of the cross and that by faith through God's grace we are totally forgiven and sanctified through the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:10).

Be Dieting with bread and water (4:9-17); make note of three things:

1. The cooking of bread with dung fuel... God puts Ezekiel on a starvation diet; 8 ounces of bread per day with ⅔ a quart of water; the bread was to be cooked with dung; dung is a symbol for sin; in Zechariah's vision Joshua appeared before the Angel of the LORD wearing a “filthy” garment; the word for “filthy” was “poop” (Zechariah 3:1-3); Isaiah spoke of our righteousnesses before God as “like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6); same word.

2. The concern of Ezekiel... Eating bread cooked over human waste would make Ezekiel ceremonially unclean; human waste was unclean and was to be buried outside the settlement (Deuteronomy 23:12-14); this signaled that this kind of famine was coming to the Jews once in captivity (4:14-17).

3. The concession of God... God heard Ezekiel's protest and told him he could use cow dung; the siege on Jerusalem would result in food and water rationing (see Deuteronomy 8:3; Leviticus 11:44).

The Shaving of the Head and Beard (5:1-17)

Be planning on a haircut and shave (5:1a)... Baldness was rare; Elisha was ridiculed for being bald (2 Kings 2:23); shaving for appearance by a priest was prohibited under Levitical law (Leviticus 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1); Hanun, king of Ammon, mistreated David’s servants by shaving off half their beards (2 Samuel 10); the baldness of a prophet symbolized shame and mourning (Isaiah 22:12).
Be piling the hair into three piles (5:1b-4)... The hair was divided into three piles: the first pile was to burn (5:2) meaning the city would be burned and some would die by pestilence and famine (5:12); the second pile was to be struck with a sword referring to how some would die (5:12); the third pile was scattered to the wind (5:2) referring to their captivity; a few strands he was to tuck into his garment (5:3); he was to throw some into the fire (5:4) meaning some would flee the city after its fall, but a sword would be drawn after them for a fire will spread from Jerusalem to the house of Israel (5:4); some will be carried off to exile while others will escape and be scattered among other countries.

Be pronouncing judgment against Jerusalem (5:5-17). This message of judgment was not unique; he didn’t say anything different than what Moses said to the Israelites if they violated God’s covenant (see Leviticus 26); Ezekiel accuses the captives of being more wicked than all the heathen nations around them (5:7).

What can we learn from Ezekiel’s haircut and shave?

There is privilege (5:5)... The people of Jerusalem were privileged as she was the center of the nations; He revealed himself to them through His glory, His miracles, His prophets; Jesus said: “To whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48); as believers we have been truly blessed (see Ephesians 1:3-14); realizing who we are and what we have there is much required of us; the biggest obstacle for the unbeliever is the hypocrisy of the believer.

There is punishment (5:8–17)... God is going to humiliate Israel right in front of her pagan enemies; there will be cannibalism (v10); no pity from God (v 11); Israel will be a reproach among the nations (v 14); there will be famine, frightening beasts, plagues and bloodshed (vv 16-17) judgment was coming first to the house of God.

There is promise (5:13)... No one is going to question, “Why did this happen?” They will know why the judgment came; the same is true of us; when God’s discipline comes we will know why (Hebrews 12:2-11).
Ezekiel was told to prophesy in the most unusual ways--- by silence, by drama, by preaching; yet, we must never get away from preaching the Word (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Ezekiel dramatized that God would abandon Jerusalem because of her sins; God temporarily abandoned Jesus, the sinless One, on the cross; the difference between the two: Ezekiel’s message was “Judgment is coming;” Christ’s message was “Judgment has passed;” we who believe are forgiven and will escape His wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

What we need today are not new methods or new gimmicks to reach people for Christ, just men and women filled with the Holy Spirit who are living out the faith (see 2 Corinthians 4:10); St. Francis of Assisi said: “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” If we all did that, the secularists would have nothing to throw at us as hypocrisy would be a failed excuse. Amen!