

SEE THROUGH CHRISTIANS

EZEKIEL 24:15-24

I've been told the most popular time of the year for a wedding is the last weekend in June - *this weekend*.

And since Calvary Chapel had a big wedding - JP and Stephanie Garrison got hitched - I thought this morning I could speak on marriage... *i.e. Ezekiel's marriage...*

And like everything else in Ezekiel's life it took a strange twist. The Prophet Ezekiel had a bizarre calling.

Let's begin reading in Ezekiel 24:15, "Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow." So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded.

And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things signify to us, that you behave so?" Then I answered them, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Speak to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, your arrogant boast, the desire of your eyes, the delight of your soul; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips nor eat man's bread of sorrow. Your turbans shall be on your heads and your sandals on your feet; you shall neither mourn nor weep, but you shall

pine away in your iniquities and mourn with one another. Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done you shall do; and when this comes, you shall know that I am the Lord God.”

It seems according to today's styles *see-through* items have become quite the rage. There's all kinds of cool *see-through stuff... Brace yourself for a few examples...*

There are see-through hats and see-through shoes... even see-through Converse All-Star sneakers

There's a see-through purse... a see-through tent... a see-through car... even a see-through canoe... *which would be a lot of fun to paddle around in clear water...*

There's also a see-through kitchen, with a see-through toaster... a see-through dryer... a see-through speaker..

Both see-through keyboards and skateboards...

See-through pool tables and swimming pools...

There're also see-through bathrooms and bathtubs...

But the one transparent item I just don't get... is the see-through toilet!... who wants to see through a toilet? You should flush that image out of your mind!

But what if I told you this morning we were going to talk about *see-through Christians* and *see-through marriages*... For I believe that every Christian - as well as every Christian marriage - should be *see-through*...

When someone looks at your life or marriage, their eyes shouldn't just stop with you, or with you and your spouse, they

should get a glimpse of what's behind and beyond... *what makes you and your marriage tick!*

This is how the Apostle Paul looked at Christian marriage. He saw *through* the relationship of a husband and wife - to the relationship of Christ and His Church.

This is what he writes in Ephesians, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her... For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church...” Paul envisioned marriage as a depiction of the relationship between Christ and the Church. When he looked at a husband and wife he saw through *them* to something beyond.

As a matter of fact, this was true of Ezekiel's whole life and ministry. In multiple ways at multiple times, he was called on to live out something beyond *the prima facie* meaning of his actions. “Prima facie” is a legal term. It means “at first face,” or “at first look,” or “at first glance.”

The Prophet was always pointing to an understanding that was bigger - and higher - and beyond - just the surface appearance of what was going on in his life.

Notice what God says to the people about His prophet in verse 24, “*Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done you shall do; and when this comes, you shall know*

that I am the Lord God.” Ezekiel lived not only his marriage - *but his life* - as a sign post for God.

This is why Ezekiel gets nicknamed “*the stuntman of the Bible.*” He was always acting out living parables.

God would command Ezekiel to perform strange antics. They were like skits with spiritual meaning.

“Divine dramas”... we could call them. It was God’s way of conveying relevant truths to His people, Israel.

It reminds me of Pastor Tim Keller. When God called him to plant a church in New York City, he knew it would require a great effort and tremendous sacrifice.

When he and his wife moved to New York, they made a deal. She would give him three years of long hours and lonely nights to do what he needed to do.

But after the three years, she expected him to settle into a more manageable and family-friendly routine.

Of course, the three years came and went, and nothing changed. The young pastor was committed to his frantic pace. Until one day, he came home, took off his jacket, and heard a crashing sound from the patio.

He walked outside and found his wife sitting there with a hammer, smashing her wedding china. He thought she’d snapped... *“Honey, what are you doing?”*

She answered, *“You aren’t listening to me. You don’t see how you’re destroying our marriage. I don’t know how else to*

get through to you.” Then she took the hammer and smashed the third expensive saucer.

Keller sat down and pleaded, *“Okay, I’m listening, I’m listening!”* As she talked, he realized she was fine. She spoke passionately, but with purpose. He realized he needed to pay attention to her advice and slow down.

When the tension subsided, Keller confessed, *“Wow, I thought you were having an emotional meltdown.”*

His wife grinned, *“No. I broke three cups years ago, so I had three saucers I didn’t need. I’m glad it didn’t take a fourth.”* But it’s true for us all, at times we need something dramatic - something out of the ordinary - to alert us to our indifference, and grab our attention.

And this is how God used His prophet Ezekiel.

He was like a hammer smashing Israel’s expensive china. God called him to some strange assignments...

In Chapter 4 Ezekiel is told to lie on his left side 390 days - for the 390 years of the northern kingdom’s rebellion. Then as if it wasn’t time to get up and stretch, he was to roll over on his right side and lie another 40 days as a symbol of Judah’s forty years of rebellion.

At the same time he took toy soldiers, and a clay model of Jerusalem, and acted out the coming siege.

And that was just one of many skits... He dug a hole in the wall of his house and acted like he was escaping the city... He packed up and moved from his own house to show the people they would be moving soon.

To accentuate what life would be like in a city under siege Ezekiel ate wartime rations, and cooked them over human waste. Imagine, the Jews at the time, thinking, *“What’s this strange Prophet up to now? It’s not enough for us to have to listen to his sermons - we have to see them - we even smell them.”* Apparently, some of Ezekiel’s sermons must’ve been real *stinkers!*

Ezekiel was also told to take a sharp sword - *we’re talking a battle sword* - and shave his head and beard.

Imagine the nicks and cuts the man suffered. I cut up my face with a dull razor blade, I can’t imagine trying to shave the hair off my head with a cumbersome sword.

Yet God was speaking through Ezekiel’s drama...

God had tired of His people’s brazen idolatry. He was weary of their unfaithfulness. He was about to pull out His sword of judgment to humble Jerusalem.

In fact, earlier in Chapter 24, Ezekiel is called on to act out another drama. God tells him to put on a pot of boiling water. Stoke the fire hotter and hotter. Then put some choice cuts of meat into the pot. *Ezekiel is literally cooking up a sermon for the people of Judah.*

And it didn’t take long for the fat, and oils, and blood from the meat to rise to the surface of the stew.

God makes His point in verse 6, *“Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Woe to the bloody city (that is, Jerusalem), to the pot whose scum is in it, and whose scum is not gone from it!” Can you think of a more fitting symbol for sin than “scum”?*

God and Ezekiel were illustrating that Jerusalem was brewing with sin.

And these kinds of messages were commonplace in Ezekiel's ministry. It was as if the people had become so hard-hearted they were immune to typical sermons.

God through Ezekiel resorted to circus theatrics.

Desperate times call for desperate tactics. Maybe if the man of God lit his hair on fire and ran through the town square people might pay attention to what he has to say - that was the idea. Ezekiel was odd for God.

But every off-beat task God called Ezekiel to do pales in comparison to what happens in Chapter 24...

In verse 15 we read, *“Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke...”*

Notice, God refers to Ezekiel's wife as *“the desire of your eyes.”* That's a beautiful - even a romantic idiom that perhaps characterizes their love and marriage.

It could've been love at first sight for Mr. and Mrs. Ezekiel. The moment he laid eyes on the gal, he knew she was for him... *His wife became his standard for beauty!* Not the supermodels, but his wife is what constituted beauty to Ezekiel. She was his perfect *“10.”*

Recall, this was how Adam felt about his wife, Eve.

God perfectly designed Eve for Adam. He even delivered her to him. God walked Eve down the aisle.

And when Adam laid eyes on Eve she too was “*the desire of his eyes.*” He was blown away. It could be Adam whispered to Eve, “*Baby, you’re the only one in the world for me.*” And she was literally and figuratively.

We usually think of Eve as a knock-out... long legs - hour glass figure - shapely, pretty features... But who’s to say she wasn’t bow-legged, 5’ tall, and 400 pounds?

At that point, *Adam’s only standard of beauty was his wife!* His only comparison was an animal - an *aardvark* or a *chimpanzee*. And I don’t care how ugly a woman might look - compared to an *alligator* - she’s beautiful!

It’s amazing how over time the standards of beauty change and evolve. What society deems attractive today isn’t the standard held in the 1920s or 1520s. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Pretty is relative.

And all men need to possess this kind of relativity.

Every man sets his own standard for beauty. If you’re married you need to make your wife *the measure* - not the office girl, or the mom of the kid on your baseball team, or the cutie at church, or a porno snapshot...

Here’s how some single men think... Until I find a wife I’ll just enjoy a few photos. Once I get the wife, I’ll lose the pictures. *I hate to tell you, it’s not that easy.*

When the wife comes, you still have the pictures - maybe not under your bed, or on your computer - *but in your mind...* Pornographic images can remain lodged in your mind for years, and haunt a marriage.

How does a real wife compete with make-believe?

I don't care if your wife was Miss America she can't compete with a digitally-enhanced, photo-shopped, air-brushed picture of a teenage girl half her age. *Men, we need to be careful not to allow our eyes to wander.*

A *manly man* seizes dominion. He takes charge. And the first place he takes responsibility is in his thought life. As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 10:5, **“bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...”**

A real man stays *focused on* and *committed to* his wife. **She is his only standard for beauty and sexy.**

If your wife is tall - *sexy to you is tall*. If she has a big nose - *you're into big noses*. If she's blonde - *pretty is blonde...* Unless she changes hair color next week... if that happens, *read the bottle, that's what's pretty now.*

Here's my perfect “10” - **she's 5'4”, 100 pounds, short blonde hair, cute nose, little north of 39, and has nice legs...** I come home to her every night. Every man should think his wife is the world's prettiest woman.

I love the illustration of the little boy who went to the department store to buy his mother a birthday present.

Somehow he got twisted around and ended up in the clothing department. He asked the clerk to help him pick out something for his mom. The lady said, **“What's her size?”** He said, **“I don't know, but my mom is perfect.”** The clerk handed the boy a size 8 blouse...

The next day a lady walked up the counter to return a blouse. The “*perfect mom*” swapped the size 8 for an extra-large. *But she was “perfect” in her son’s eyes.*

And this should be every husband’s outlook - like Ezekiel, let’s make our wives “*the desire of our eyes.*”

But in verse 15, God says He’s going to take away Mrs. Ezekiel from her husband, “*with one stroke.*”

The implication is that Ezekiel’s otherwise healthy wife is going to die suddenly. *Was it literally a stroke? Perhaps, a heart attack? Maybe, an accident? We’re not told. I like to think, she passed calmly in her sleep.*

But in the sovereign and mysterious counsels of God, the Father saw fit to take from Ezekiel his wife!

Here’s what was happening on the national scene at the time... The culmination of nearly a thousand years of rebellion and idolatry was coming due on the heads of the Hebrews. God had raised up the Babylonian army to besiege Jerusalem and judge His people.

For all intents and purposes, in God’s heart, He was about to watch *His wife*, Judah, die a horrible death.

Notice, in verse 21 God refers to the Temple with the same term He used for Ezekiel’s wife. He calls it, “*the desire of your eyes.*” Over the centuries, the Temple had been as precious and loved by the Jews, as Ezekiel’s wife had been to him. It crushed their heart and God’s, to see the Temple ransacked by the enemy.

And as a sign to the nation, Ezekiel's wife dies on the very day the terrible siege of Jerusalem begins. In essence, two deaths occurred on the exact same date!

What a sermon illustration! Ezekiel has no choice really, but in his heart he's being asked to put God's purposes before his spouse. And though it hurts, and though he has questions, nevertheless he cooperates!

Would you do the same? What if God purposed for your spouse to die? Would you be as compliant?

This is where being a prophet of God was not exactly profitable. It was downright painful... It's easy to serve God when doing so benefits us, but what if we're called on to make a sacrifice? Are we willing to put our allegiance to God ahead of our own family affections?

What a tough ordeal for *the Ezekiel family* to endure.

In our day and age, Christians are weathering a full-scale attack on biblical marriage and family. In response, we exhort each other to *focus on the family. Rightly so.* We need to prioritize marriage and families.

But more important than your love and loyalty to either your spouse or kids, is your allegiance to God.

In our frantic and guilt-induced attempts not to overlook our families, we sometimes go overboard.

You can turn family into an idol. I know parents who have no life. Everything revolves around their kids.

They abort their duties at church, waste hours, take time off from work, so Suzy won't miss a dance recital, or Johnny gets to his umpteenth soccer tournament.

Trust me, I'm not throwing stones. Kathy and I made sure we carted our kids all over creation, as well. But it was vital my kids knew that there was someone bigger than *them* in their parents' life. *We bow to Jesus!*

Even our precious kids came in second to Jesus.

Years ago, Christian musician, Keith Green, sang a challenging song where he pledge it all to the gospel...

"I pledge my wife to heaven, for the gospel, though our love each passing day just seems to grow. As I told her when we wed, I'd surely rather be found dead, than to love her more than the one who saved my soul..."

Green sings a second stanza, *"I pledge my son to heaven for the gospel. Though he's kicked and beaten, ridiculed and scorn. I will teach him to rejoice, and lift a thankful praising voice, and to be like Him who bore the nails and crown of thorns."* You don't hear that kind of sentiment much today. Church-goers seem to think Jesus and Church exist to serve their family, rather than their family existing to serve Jesus and Church.

But what did Jesus Himself teach us? In Luke 9 a man came to Jesus, and asked to be His disciple, "Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." He was focused on his family. Following Jesus shouldn't interfere with family...

“But Jesus said to him, ‘no one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” In other words, to be a disciple of Jesus, loyalty to your Lord has to supersede family sentimentality.

In Luke 14:25-26 Jesus teaches a similar lesson. He uses hyperbole - a figure of speech. He exaggerates for emphasis... “He turned and said *(to the multitudes)*, if anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

Certainly, Jesus isn't advocating literal hatred for our families. In other places we're taught to love our family.

But what He's teaching us is that our love for father and mother and wife and children should look like hate when placed next to our love for Him. Jesus tolerates no rival affections. Our relationship with Jesus should be paramount. It should tower over other relationships.

It reminds me of George Keller of Washington state.

An arsonist in the area had done millions of dollars in damage. When the police released a profile of the serial arsonist, George noticed it described his son.

He reported his suspicions to the police, and worked with authorities to eventually convict his own son, Paul.

At the trial, George was choking back tears. He told a reporter, “He's our son and we will love, support, and pray for him. We will not desert him. (But) you've got to do what's

right, and sometimes, as Christians, what's right isn't necessarily what is comfortable."

Most of the time Christian discipleship and family devotion run hand in hand, but there're moments when we have to choose. Ezekiel loved his wife, but he loved God more. And if God wanted to take his wife to say something to *His* bride, the nation Israel, then so be it.

I've heard if you go to an auction to make a purchase you should always set your upper limit beforehand.

Know how much you'll bid - how high you'll go. Don't get caught up in the moment and blow your budget.

And there're some people who use this same tactic in their relationship with God. *They'll only go so far.*

That was not Ezekiel. God expected from him a level of commitment he'd never imagined. He wasn't even given a heads-up to prepare himself. God sprung it on him. But when the time came he rose to the challenge.

I'm sure losing a spouse is a sacrificial act few of us have ever considered. Never in our wildest dreams have we thought God might take our spouse as a sign.

It reminds me of the newlywed wife who called the pastor. She was crying profusely. "O pastor, Bob and I had our first fight. It was awful. What am I going to do?"

The pastor tried to calm her, "*Joanna, it's okay. Every marriage eventually has a first fight. It's natural.*"

Joanna replied, "I know, I know, but what am I suppose to do with the body?" Ladies, maybe there've been times when *you* thought of sending your husband on to meet His Maker -

you just never thought God would do it Himself. *And I'm not suggesting He will. What happened to Mrs. Ezekiel was a rarity. Only once in the Bible do we find such a scenario, Ezekiel 24!*

Here's a rule when it comes to hermeneutics... *and some might ask, "Herman who?"* **Hermeneutics** is the study of how to apply the Bible... And one rule is this, **don't take the odd-ball case and apply it universally.**

Just because Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot doesn't mean a fiery chariot is coming for you...

Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave, but that doesn't mean you'll exit Eternal Hills after four days...

And the fact Isaiah was told to walk around Jerusalem naked for 3.5 years as a sign to his people, doesn't mean you going naked to Snellville Days will also be seen as a sign... *a sign you're crazy and need to be locked-up perhaps...* but not a sign from God.

Don't apply the special case to all people at all times, but what we can do is examine these oddities for principles that do apply in the common situations...

For example, Elijah was taken to heaven and that's where we're headed... the grave couldn't hold Lazarus and it won't be able to hold us, we'll rise when Jesus says so... and Isaiah told the people the naked truth, which is also what ever Christian needs to do...

If we take *this* approach to Mr. and Mrs. Ezekiel's marriage, here's what we glean... *it was see-through.*

By looking at their marriage you could see through it to the spiritual truths God was choosing to display.

And God wants every marriage to be *see-through*...

My wife and I are hunkered down on Earth, we're saddled with real, nitty-gritty, everyday duties. But if you look closely at my family life you should be able to see through it to spiritual realities that are just beyond.

I love my wife like Christ loves the Church... She follows Christ by following me... We represent God to our kids, and have set them on a God-ward trajectory.

German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote, "Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy ordinance..."

In your love you see only your two selves in the world... only the heaven of your happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal - it is a status, an office..."

Bonhoeffer is clear, more is at stake in a marriage than just the happiness of the participants. God wants the world to be able to see *through* your relationship to the spiritual realities a Christian marriage illustrates.

Does your marriage and family life have an ulterior motive? Do you want the world to see Jesus through you and yours - especially in the heart of your home?

It's interesting, you would think the loss of his wife would be tough enough on Ezekiel, but that was not the only burden the Prophet was called on to bear...

God's instructions continue in verse 16, *“Yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow.”* Imagine, God taking your wife; then you hearing the words, *“Sigh in silence...”*

God tells Ezekiel he can cry and mourn, but not in front of the people - not where anyone can hear him.

In Ezekiel's day public displays of bereavement were common. The Jews would hire professional mourners to help with the expected grieving... But this was all forbidden to Ezekiel. God tells him not to uncover his head - don't take off your sandals - don't eat the food associated with funerals. The modern equivalent would be to avoid the wake - don't cry at the funeral - go about your normal day as if nothing had happened.

And notice what Ezekiel does, *“So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded.”*

This is tough... and it echoes what God often asks of us. We're ambassadors of Christ. That means our job is to represent Christ's feelings, not our own.

At times this involves suppressing our own emotions.

With some people I'd like to lash out, and give them a piece of my mind. But God is patient and loving towards them. I

need to shut-up... At other times I'd like to celebrate, but if God isn't pleased over what's happening, it's wrong for me to party with the culprits...

Often as God's representatives we have to muzzle our feelings. Reflect how God feels, not how we feel. This is our job even in a politically correct world...

And I hope you realize people at the office do watch!

They know you're a Christian, and when someone tells a dirty joke they look to see if you laugh... When Betty announces her engagement to Lucy co-workers will look at you to see if you approve... This is why we need to be see-through... where folks can see through our actions and reactions and know the mind of Christ.

Even in the midst of Ezekiel's personal grief this was his desire. Thus he says, *"I did as I was commanded."*

There's a walkway around Tianmen Mountain in south-central China. It's a 3.5 foot path suspended 4000 foot above the valley. But what makes the path terrifying is that it's see-through. It has a glass bottom.

When people see-through it they get scared.

And this can happen to people who don't have your faith. They see-through your life and see what makes you tic, and realize there's a steep drop-off between your faith and theirs. *That's okay.* Your job isn't to make people feel comfortable - it's to point them to the truth.

Your friend won't aspire to great heights, if he thinks everybody lives in the valley. Show him a higher path.

Recall, Ezekiel was a contemporary of another Hebrew prophet. Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet.” In contrast to Ezekiel, Jeremiah heard that the city was destroyed and he cried and wept. And he needed to weep - *the demise of Jerusalem grieved God*. Jeremiah’s weeping reflected God’s broken-heart.

Yet God told Ezekiel not to shed a tear. Jerusalem was receiving her just reward, and God didn’t want anyone to assume His judgment wasn’t righteous.

It’s interesting, it took the approach of both men to reveal the totality of God’s heart. The Lord was just and right in all his judgments, as Ezekiel showed. But they saw through Jeremiah’s tears that God was also broken-hearted over their sin. It was strategic that both men did *as they were commanded*. Thus, their friends and peers would be able to see-through them to God.

Which brings us full circle... *Are you a see-through Christian? Is your marriage a see-through marriage?*

Can people look through your life and see that it’s governed by God? Do people see through your marriage to the biblical foundation on which it’s built?

There’s more to life and marriage than just our own happiness. Let’s live a see-through life that points people to what’s beyond - *to why we do what we do*.

Let's you and I point people to Jesus!