

SERMON @ ENE OKWA'S BURIAL.

TOPIC: YOUR MOST PRECIOUS CAN BE TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU.

Text: Ezekiel 24:15-19

"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 sandal on your feet; do not cover your lip, 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?' (NKJV)

The NIV renders the same passage thus:

"The word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, with one blow I am about to take 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 next morning I did as I have been commanded. Then the people asked me, 'Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us?'"

Subtopics:

1. GOD'S WAYS ARE ABSOLUTELY HIS PREROGATIVE-Vs 15-16a
2. GOD'S COMMANDS TEST YOUR OBEDIENCE-Vs 16b-17
3. THE LORD'S WORDS NEVER RETURN TO HIM VOID-V 18
4. MEN WILL SEEK AN EXPLANATION-V 19

INTRODUCTION:

Why do people die?

What kills humankind?

We die as a result of ill-health,

Accidents, wars and crises consume lives,

Sin, evil and wickedness kill,

Some die as a result of witchcraft.

Others God take away and are no more.

Why did God treat Ezekiel the way he did?

Did Ezekiel sin? Did his wife sin? If not why did God chose whom to take away of the two? And why would He give the kind of injunction He gave?

A man and a woman genuinely married, grow together and get welded together. They get to be so tied to each other that you dare not touch the other without hurting the one. Ezekiel and his wife then must have been two friends too good to be pieced up by anything human. They must have become so integrally that separating them would go tearing with either part the other. Is it no wonder then that God described her as the desire or delight of his eyes and permit to say, and not any less of his heart.

1. GOD'S WAYS ARE ABSOLUTELY HIS PREROGATIVE-Vs 15-16a

Some of the Lord's ways and acts can truly shocking just as they can be pleasantly surprising. Abraham must not have least shocked by God's demand of him to take his one and only son, the heir to the Abrahamic dynasty and sacrifice to Him. Job must have been shocked at the turn of events in his life, all of the fruit of his loins gone, his whole life fortune totally wiped off. But that they both were God fearing, they were able to contain it. Though unlike Abraham and Ezekiel's case Job was not notified on what will befall him. Our God is a sovereign God. He handles us differently and does whatever pleases him though man may never understand nor be at home with them.

2. GOD'S COMMANDS TEST YOUR OBEDIENCE-Vs 16b-17

Ezekiel had been told that with a single stroke or one blow the desire of his eyes will be taken away from him. And that when that happens, he was not to cry, weep, or mourn and neither was he to take off his turban and sandals and not to cover the lower part of his face. He was to remain in his prophetic dress ever on duty. This may have been so because the death of his wife not an end in itself, but the means to an end. Yet this must not have been an easy pill to swallow. This was directly a prophecy to the prophet. It is much easier to prophesy to others than to have one for one's self. The way Ezekiel's came, humanly, could be termed mercilessly harsh. And one would have wondered why Ezekiel? Since when

has faithful service to the Lord become a crime punishable by a death penalty? If it were an act orchestrated by a human being, it would have been declared an unprovoked attack and witchcraft. But that it was God, the prophet understood better. His wife-the most prized human figure in his life was to be taken and he was commanded not to mourn her. He was not to engage in anything that has to do with a mourner. The one option left to him to vent his sorrow, was a quiet groan. The Lord expected strict compliance when He gives a directive. Yet some injunctions are very difficult to comply with. Even when we comply, we may do it grudgingly. Ezekiel nonetheless, complied. He had lost a most precious part of him, but behaved as if nothing had happened. That indeed must have surprised and left the people more curious than ever before. In fact in our context, the assumption which may amount to a conclusion, would be that "He killed his wife." Yet Ezekiel obeyed. And the circumstances notwithstanding, what God expects from us in the face of any instruction, injunction or command, is compliance or obedience. When we obey, then the purpose for which he rolls out any such prophecy is established. And the Bible teaches us that obedience is better than sacrifice and to heed better than the fat of rams (1 Samuel 15:22b). Will you obey God even when you do not understand?

3. THE LORD'S WORDS NEVER RETURN TO HIM VOID-V18

The Lord speaking through Isaiah declared, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I send it" (Isaiah 55:11).

"So I spoke to the people in the morning and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I have been commanded" (V18). The Lord's word had gone out telling Ezekiel that with a single stroke or blow his wife was going to be taken away from him while he was at the same time commanded not to mourn her. These words of the Lord had indeed come to pass as He pronounced and commanded them. For our God is not man he should lie nor say a word and change his mind. He is a God whose word is yeah and amen. And Mark you He never speaks doom to His children. Whether He calls to rest or saves us from calamities to live, He has good as the bottom line in either cases. There is therefore the going out of His word for every occasion and for every purpose. The work of the word then is complete unless it accomplishes the purpose for which it is intended. It means then that there is the going out, then the purpose accomplishing which establishes the power behind the word. God had spoken, Ezekiel had informed the people and the accomplishment the death of his wife as declared by God happened in the evening. The next morning further accomplishment of the purpose was done in Ezekiel's compliance with the Lord's command. Do you believe in the effectiveness of God's word? Will you still believe it even if it will hurt or bring sorrow to you? Will you still trust His word even if it accomplishes the loss of your loved one?

Though God did not give us reason for what he did, we are not able to question Him. For even if we do, we would not have an answer from Him right here and right now. Note that as painful as it is to abruptly suffer the death of a loved one and at the same time denied mourning them, Ezekiel did not ask God why. Job said "Shall accept good from God and not accept trouble?" (Job 2:10).

4. MEN WILL SEEK EXPLANATION-v 19

From the children of God, unusual and abnormal behaviour attracts attention, creates suspicion and leads to the search for explanation. Ezekiel had acted contrary to societal norms. It was in the tradition of the Jews that a bereaved person or people dress in sackcloth, weep, cry and mourn their dead. Ezekiel nonetheless, did not do any of those and neither did he betray the fact that he had lost his wife. The Lord had said to him, you must not mourn the dead. Do not weep or cry or wear sackcloth, neither should you cover the lower part of your face. Keep your turban on. Ezekiel had complied and the people could not understand. They appear to have looked beyond Ezekiel's bereavement to suspecting an implication for themselves. They therefore sought to know what all of that had to do with them. They knew that the prophet was not just up to an empty drama. The people had lived in and damped and deepened themselves into the pit of sin. This they have done without the slightest sense of remorse. They had turned the temple more deified than the Almighty God. They had grown to be so proud and fond of it much more than they were of God. They had shed so much of innocent blood that their sins had become so encrusted that they couldn't be purged. God had predicted their destruction and said, "I the Lord have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions..." (Eze 24:14).

By the death of Ezekiel's wife, God was pointing the Israelites to their doomsday. Their harden hardness, was soon to attract God's wrath on them. Their seeking to know what that meant to them, was a fear driven inquiry. The feared death but did not fear sin which penalty was death. Those who are stubborn, who contest God's ways from selfish intentions, clearly portray that Christ is no more living in their hearts. They then are up in arms trying to equally send him packing from the lives of other believers. When inquire of you the explanation of God's riddles, honestly tell the truth; tell them it affects them. Never hide the truth from them; as it is only the knowledge of the truth that saves. "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). He who hides the truth from the seeker is a killer. Such a person is a murderer. How many times have you people the truth and misled them? How long will you continue in that kind of ministry and therefore finish the whole generation of a people? Please do kindly always point every seeker to Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the life. Do that and you have a treasure in heaven.

+Zhumbes.