

“Till Death Us Do Part”: Mr. and Mrs. Ezekiel’s Last Day Together

EZEKIEL 24:15-27; I CORINTHIANS 7:29-30

Till death us do part” is the most sobering phrase in the marriage vows, but it rarely seems so to a couple reciting them. Today one out of three couples marries for as long as love lasts rather than for as long as life lasts. In such a society, “till death parts” suggests a distant prospect just short of eternity. But later, as years, decades, and generations pass, the reality of the last marriage enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26) looms larger. And while most lovers speak dreamily about dying together and a few contemplate love pacts to guarantee a bereavement-free marriage, the reality is that one partner will go through the ultimate relinquishment and the breaking of the marriage covenant by death. The death of Ezekiel’s wife is one of the few stories in the Bible about the last passage a couple makes together. It is all the more fascinating because Ezekiel was ordained by God to be a living parable to the nation of Israel. Even the death of Ezekiel’s wife figured into his prophetic ministry; the death of his beloved became a

symbol of the coming tragic fall of Jerusalem, the center of the world for Jews in exile. This was no ordinary bereavement, but it pointed to a profound truth: Not just love, but the love of God conquers death.

1. Some social commentators believe that in Western society, death is the last unmentionable topic. Why do you think we find it so hard to talk about this subject?

Note: Mr. and Mrs. Ezekiel were taken in 597 BC against their wills from Mr. Ezekiel's secure ministry as a priest in the temple of Jerusalem to the insecurities of living as exiles in the dusty plains of Babylonia (see Leader's Notes). We know little about Ezekiel's personal life except the details in Ezekiel 1:2-3 and the section we are studying.

READ EZEKIEL 24:15-27.

2. What did God tell Ezekiel, and what was Ezekiel supposed to do about it?

3. What phrases in the Lord's message tell us how Ezekiel felt about his wife?

4. What thoughts and feelings must Ezekiel have had until the next morning when he did what was commanded?

5. Why do you think God asked this prophet to do the exact opposite of what people normally do when they lose a loved one?

How or why would Ezekiel's actions draw attention to a greater tragedy than his personal loss?

6. Many Christians face a dilemma when they lose a loved one. On the one hand they are stricken with grief, as is any normal person. Yet they feel they must not express it as those "who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). How does the text indicate

that God was not requiring Ezekiel to become an unfeeling message maker who was not allowed to grieve?

How can our handling of a loved one's death bring glory to God?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-30.

- ♣7. How does this passage and Ezekiel's experience put bereavement in its proper perspective?
8. The apostle Paul called death "the last enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26). How has Christ overcome this last enemy of marriage?
- ♣9. What fears do you have as you reflect on the possibility of losing your spouse?

What fears can be relieved by constructive action and preparation?

What fears can only be dealt with by faith in God?

- ♣10. It is sometimes said that you can make a success of marriage only if you can make a success of being single. What value is there in preparing to be competent alone should you lose your spouse?

What dangers are there in planning for the possibility of singleness again?

- ♣ 11. Should couples give each other permission to remarry if one spouse should die? If so, why would this be a valuable gift? If not, why is such planning a dangerous move?

FOR REFLECTION

“Somehow we must learn to mourn our loved ones while they are yet alive, not waiting until they are gone and our grief does no one but ourselves any good. At least one kiss each day should be watered with tears and planted on bone. For this sort of wake is really wonder, devotion, faith-wakefulness indeed! The bones must be acknowledged, our respects paid, before the flesh can be celebrated, and love must grapple in advance with remorse, drawing out its sting with little daily acts of tribute. For now is the time to eulogize, now the time to deck with flowers. Today is the day to carry to its rest the whole weight of our love’s flesh upon our shoulders” (Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, Portland: Multnomah, 1985, pp. 177-78).