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TO OBEY GOD COULD MAKE ONE LOOK CRAZY!

Today's Text: Ezekiel Chap. 12

Extracts:

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,... “Son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight... By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. *Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry out your belongings through it.*” ... So I did as I was commanded [Ezek. 12: 1, 34, 5, 7]

JC's Girls [JC for Jesus Christ] is a Christian ministry that reaches out to strippers and people in the sex industry.¹ Before receiving Christ, the founder, Heather Veitch, was herself a sex worker in an industry that makes over US\$56 billion. Now a beauty saloon owner and happily married with children, the Lord had led her to reach out to her former colleagues and bring them to Christ. She goes to local strip clubs in Southern California area. She attends porn conventions where her ministry takes booths to deliver Gospel messages in leaflets and DVDs neatly hidden inside porn magazines. When she started it a few years ago, she lost a huge proportion of her Christian clients who thought that she was crazy to go to porn stars. Today, her ministry is gaining respectability and requests are coming from overseas.

Think of how many souls have been delivered through the JC's Girls ministry on account of Heather's obedience to the call of God. Think also of the shame and humiliation that she had had to bear from “decent” people who saw her as crazy.

When you choose to obey God's command to do the unorthodox or the extraordinary, people around you will want your head examined. They will call you names, such as 'lunatic,' 'fanatic,' etc. But if you worry about what people may call you for obeying the call of God, what do you think God will do to you if you disobey Him? Why do people tend to regard God-fearing people as weird or crazy? Would you rather fear man than God? These and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

¹ Story based on: “JC's Girls,” www.jcsgirls.com; and The 700 Club, “Heather Veitch: Rescuing J.C.'s Girls (Parts 1 & 2),” www.cbn.com/700club/Guests/Bios/Heather_Veitch032306.aspx?option

1. Ezekiel the ‘crazy’ prophet!

When I was growing up in rural Nigeria in the 1950’s, people with mental problems were not put away in mental institutions. Instead, they lived among their family members and traditional healers would come there to treat them. We had one such patient in our village and we the children loved to watch him “entertain.” Some times, he would laugh all day for no discernible reason. At other times, he would run from one end of the village to the other without being pursued or pursuing somebody or something. Some other times, he would sing and say things that did not make sense to us. We enjoyed it all because we saw it as entertainment. However, the elders always upbraided us for not appreciating the fact that the man was sick. He was crazy.

When people behave in a way that flies in the face of commonsense, our first impression is that something is wrong with them. We would want their heads examined. The problem is not with the rest of us. The problem is with them.

Let us look at today’s lesson from the perspective of the children of Israel. One morning, some kids ran to your home to report that they believed that Ezekiel had gone mad. Over the past few days, they had seen him doing the following things:

- He had packed his belongings and, instead of taking them out through the door, he had torn down the wall with his bare hands and brought them out from there [Ezek. 12: 1-7];
- At twilight, he had carried his belongings on his shoulders, with his face covered such that he could not see the ground. He had said that he was going into captivity [v. 5-7] but had returned soon after!
- He had eaten his ‘bread with quaking’ and drunk his “water with trembling and anxiety” [vv. 17-18].

From a human perspective, you are likely to agree with the kids that something was definitely wrong with Ezekiel. However, readers of the Bible passage *know* that the prophet was not crazy; that he was actually doing what God had commanded him to do. *He did it all for God’s purpose.* For example, the sign of Ezekiel’s preparation to move was a warning to the prince of his impending exile in Babylon. Just as Ezekiel had demonstrated, the prince “shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes” [vv. 8-13].

There are many weird things that God asked His prophets of old to do. For example, He made Isaiah to walk naked (i.e., without an outer garment) and barefooted for three years as a sign of the impending conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia [Is. 20: 1-3]. In another case, He warned Ezekiel, “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.” The following day, Ezekiel’s wife died and he did not mourn her as God had commanded him [Ezek. 24: 15-18]!

2. What has God asked you to do for Him?

According to Scriptures, the whole duty of man on earth is to “fear God and keep His commandments” [Eccl. 12: 13]. God’s commandments include Scriptures as contained in the *whole* of the Holy Bible (*logos*) and the word ministered to individuals by the Holy Spirit from time to time (*rhema*). Therefore, in one way or the other, God has *already* asked you to do certain ‘crazy’ things for Him. For example, He has commanded you to love your enemies and to pray for those who despise and persecute you! When somebody smacks you on one cheek, you are to turn the other to him for more [Matt. 5: 38-44]! What would the world call you if you were to in deed obey those precepts?

For the general principles enshrined in Scriptures, some of us can hide under the pretext that they are not necessarily meant for them but for all. But how about those that are specific to individuals? For example, Noah was commanded to make an ark during dry weather. Those who saw him at work might have attributed it to senile dementia! How about Jehoshaphat who went to war with praise singers ahead of soldiers [2 Chron. 20: 21]?

Right now, you may be in a decision situation. God has asked you to give up a lucrative job and go into full-time ministry. Or, He has told you to take your family and relocate to a new land where you do not know anybody. You may have been praying for a dream spouse. Recently, he showed you one but has commanded that you tie the knot immediately. It is too sudden for you and you are watching your schedule or purse or emotional preparedness. Should you go ahead in any of the above circumstances, the world is likely to brand you crazy. What should you do? Listen to them or to God?

3. Why obedience to God looks crazy

Among others, the following reasons should be noted:

a) *It is not logical!*

Something is said to be logical if we can explain it with our senses of smell, taste, touch, sight or hearing. For example, when Thomas, one of the disciples of Christ, was told that Jesus had risen from the dead and been seen by others, he said, “Unless I see in His hands the print of His nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails ...and my hand into His side, I will not believe” [Jn 20: 25]. So, when God commands us to do something, it tends to fly in the face of logic. Why should I leave the certainty of a settled life for the uncharted course of the wilderness? Why should I marry right away somebody that I have not had the privilege to

study over time? Why should I keep a business that is making huge losses? How could people understand that Abraham at 99 and his wife, Sarai, at 89 could still bear children? It does not make commonsense! It is crazy!

According to Scriptures, “a wise man’s heart is at his right hand, *but a fool’s heart at his left*” [Eccl. 10: 2]. A fool has been defined as the one who says in his or her heart that there is no God [Ps. 14: 1]. We know that the human heart is on the left side of the chest but not on the right! So, when you say to your spouse, “I love you with all my heart,” which heart do you mean? It is certainly not the biological heart; otherwise animals would also love and marry! Human love is expressed with the spiritual heart, the heart on the right side of your body, which is faith-based. So, it is foolish to base our walk on logic rather than faith “for we walk by faith, not by sight” [2 Cor. 5: 7].

Interestingly, we walk more by faith than logic in our worldly affairs. For example, at work, you get paid *in arrears*. You work first and they pay you later. On the basis of your current job, you make long-term decisions on housing, children’s education and pension. What logic tells you that you will still be alive or working tomorrow or that your employer will not go bankrupt? So, if you can believe human beings, why can’t you trust God?

b) *We are too short-sighted*

A popular cliché says, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” That means that the certainty of the present should be preferred to the uncertainty of the future. Such reasoning is acceptable only if we are short-sighted. Yet, the word of God says, “the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” [2 Cor. 4: 18]. For example, Isaac accepted as wife Rebekah whom he had never met before because God had chosen her for him [Gen. 24: 57-67]. It is instructive that of the three patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), only Isaac was married to one wife to whom he remained faithful until death.

When you attempt to do God’s bidding that challenges reality or expectations, it may not make any sense in the present. You cannot explain it to your admirers, not to talk of your detractors. The only logical conclusion that they can draw is that you are crazy!

c) *We prefer pleasure to pain*

Although God is never late, He is never early either! Therefore, both by time and activities, what God commands us to do can be quite painful. For

example, from David's anointing to his coronation as king, it took almost 13 years. During that time, he was mostly in the wilderness, hiding from his arch-enemy, King Saul. During that period, "everyone who was in distress (or) debt (or) discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him" [1 Sam. 22: 1-2]. That was a painful responsibility for a fugitive! Yet, human beings are hedonists who prefer pleasure to pain. Why suffer when you can avoid it? Why go on pathways when you have freeways? There will be many advisers around you, all able and willing with the easy way out. If you refuse them, they brand you as crazy!

However, the word of God says, "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction (but) narrow is the gate and *difficult is the way* which leads to life" [Matt. 7: 13, 14]. Gain without pain is vain. If you want the crown, you have to first take the cross!

d) *We are looking for peer approval*

Most of us have people that we use for measuring our self-worth. We are likely to be more comfortable if peers approve of what we are doing. So, aspirations, goals and success are measured on the basis of peer rating. People join clubs or cults just to be close to their peers.

Unfortunately, doing what God commands of us can put us at variance with what our peers want. As we saw earlier, Heather (of the CJ's Girls ministry) lost many of her Christian beauty clients because she was reaching out to porn stars. They left her because she refused to be swayed by peer approval. Therefore, they saw her as crazy.

From the foregoing, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Believers are not considered crazy if they do not upset the world. You can sit on padded pews in decorated churches with large congregations. If you do not threaten world values or if you make your place of worship more user-friendly than God-fearing, you are normal! But, when believers succumb to the standards of the world instead of doing what God commands, they are stiff-necked and rebellious. They leave themselves vulnerable on both sides for "whoever ... wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" [Jam. 4: 4].
- On the other hand, believers who are zealous for God and want to obey Him at any cost are in deed crazy in the eyes of the world. They are too fundamentalist, too irrational and too dangerous! That is why those "who desire to be godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" [2 Tim. 3: 12]. Even Jesus, for daring to obey the will of His Father, was the target of the religious leaders in Jerusalem and the political powers in Rome.

- On balance, it is better for the world to brand you crazy for your faith than to crown you a hell-bound star for disobedience. When the chips are down, they cannot defend you against the wrath of God that is the portion of the disobedient.. That was God’s message through Ezekiel to the rebellious house of Israel when He said, “I am the Lord, I speak and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed” [Ezek. 12: 25].

4. Conclusion: Get crazy for a change!

Whether you are in Canada or Cambodia, Cuba or Aruba, Cape Coast or Cape Cod, God’s message is clear: His word will no more be postponed. It will soon come to pass. His word has been manifested in flesh as Jesus the Christ who will soon return to judge all nations. The era of thinking that you have all the time is over. One of these days, the sky will suddenly split open and the King of kings will appear. Therefore, now is the time to get crazy for Him because later may be too late.

But you may say, “What has He asked me to do?” So much already. Do you uphold the truth of Scriptures in all that you do? Have you heard His knocks at the door of your heart? If you have heard, have you opened to invite Him in to dine with you and you with Him? If you have, then you are already crazy for God. Otherwise, now is the time to get crazy!