

God Speaks in a Dark World

07/07/24

The book "Night" is written by Elie Wiesel. He tells of what he and his fellow Jews had to face during WWII with the Nazi Regime. They lived in a world of daily beatings and death. Elie Wiesel talked about how he and his dad tried to survive in the German death camps – places where death was the way of life. Death camps were places a human being could stop being a human being. It was a place where many a Jew questioned God and asked where was God in these places of horror. During Elie Wiesel's imprisonment, he had to witness the hanging of a small boy. Two adult men were hanged with him, but they died quickly. Since the boy was small, he suffered for half an hour. The camp had been called out to watch the hangings as a lesson to be obedient to their rulers. They had to stand and wait till the small boy died. During this time, Elie could hear voices around him asking where was God. Elie Wiesel states this in his book when he heard the voices questioning God, "And from within me, I heard a voice answer: 'Where He is? This is where – hanging here from this gallows...' (Wiesel, 65)". Often, when we do look for God during times of great trial and suffering, we usually look for God, not to just find answers, but sometimes to complain in anger. I didn't live during the days of the Holocaust. I have no right to pass judgment or say how the Jews should have behaved. It was a time where this sinful world had one of its darkest moments and the Jews of that time period suffered beyond our understanding. We can read books about it, but we can't capture the whole picture. Elie Wiesel does the best he could in doing this, but he could only go so far. At times in our own lives, a little darkness can and will fall. These are times where our faith can be greatly test. It's also a time where our faith can grow. It depends on our frame of mind during these events. If we're caught up in all the suffering we're going through or someone else is going through, this thought process can make our mind focused on the bad event or we can say our mind can form tunnel thinking. We have allowed the event to shape our thinking. So, this thinking can make us become negative toward the Lord. It happens all the time.

I remember someone told me some years ago how their relative had lost a baby and during that tragic time, the mother turned against the Lord. Her thinking had become so focused on the tragic event that she blamed the Lord, but at the same time she didn't want anything to do with the Lord. The family prayed for her, but she had closed her mind and heart to God. She would not allow the Lord to speak to her. We do have to realize that the Lord can and still does speak in darkness, even if it's total darkness like in a concentration camp.

We've been looking at the darkness of the Old Testament and today we'll continue with that journey. We've been looking into the writings of Jeremiah and today we'll take a peek into the writings of Ezekiel, who was a priest during Jeremiah's day. Ezekiel had been one of the first groups taken captive to Babylon. Let's turn to Ezekiel 1:1 where we read this, "In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. (NIV)" We start here by seeing that Ezekiel meets Yahweh in a special way. There are some different thoughts on the number and dates here. Some think that Ezekiel is making a reference to his age here. Some think this date makes reference to when the book of the law was found in the Temple of God, which would have been thirty years. Maybe, it means both. If Ezekiel did reach thirty years of age, it would make sense since priests entered the priesthood at the age thirty. They would spend many years in training. What we do know is that Ezekiel had been in training to be a priest. A priest was to stand before the people in the presence of God and do human work in the Temple. Now, Ezekiel has a major job change. Ezekiel is away from Jerusalem where the Temple is. The Temple would be fully destroyed shortly and the rest of the Jews left in Jerusalem would be killed or taken captive. So, now Ezekiel's job is gone because they are captives in a pagan country that worships false gods. Ezekiel now is called to do the work that Jeremiah is doing back in Jerusalem – being a prophet. When Jerusalem is fully destroyed, Jeremiah will be taken captive at some point as well. However, for the time being, Ezekiel has now become a prophet to the captives in Babylon. This is very important here. God's chosen people had been hard hearted and disobedient toward God. They had broken their end of the Covenant God had made with their ancestor Abraham.

The captives deserved their punishment. God had allowed the Babylonians to attack them. Even during this very dark time in Jewish history, we see that God had not totally given up on them. God calls out Ezekiel to become a prophet. A prophet receives the Word of God from God and then translates it to the people. God has called Ezekiel to be His spoke person to the captives. The fourth month and fifth day suggests the time of year in the Hebrew calendar which is different from our current calendar. It is said the date is actually July 31, 593 B.C in our calendar. So, we see that God has not forgotten or has given up on the disobedient people of Israel or Judah.

Now, let's turn to Ezekiel 1: 25 – 2: 2 where we read about the vision Ezekiel is a witness of, "Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like a glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. He said to me, 'Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.' As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. (NIV)" We often read the Book of Revelation in the New Testament where John tries to describe the vision he was given and put into human terms. In other words, John tried to translate Heaven into human terms, and even with the help of the Holy Spirit, it's hard for us to fully understand. I can't wait till we get new minds and bodies when Jesus returns in His full glory! Ezekiel is having a John moment. The heavens are open to Ezekiel and he is allowed to see visions of God. Ezekiel tries his best in describing the visions of God to us, but he becomes overwhelmed and we see in verse 28 that Ezekiel had to fall facedown because the glory was too great for him. Then, God makes an important statement. Yahweh states, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you. (NIV)" The name "Son of man" is used about 90 times in Ezekiel. This term was used in Hebrew to emphasize the lowliness of the

creature in comparison with the splendor of the Creator. The captives in Babylon had forgotten about the splendor of the Creator. How often do we forget about the splendor of God while living in darkness? I've stated this before that the Psalms of David are a good example of David reminding himself of the great splendor of God even during trying times. God is reminding the captives in a powerful way that they are the son of man and He is their Creator. I find it interesting that God reminds them about 90 times in this book about who they are. He is their God and only God and they are just a mere human. They are lowly in comparison with the splendor of God and this is why God allows Ezekiel to see this glory and try to describe it. Then, after God calls Ezekiel the son of man, then God tells him that He will speak to Ezekiel. What God speaks to Ezekiel will then be spoken to the people. Even in complete darkness, God speaks. What a comforting reality. These were sinful people and they actually created their own problem, but still God was there in their captive state to speak to them – son of man. Elie Wiesel stated that even while watching a small boy suffer while being hanged by the Nazis, an evil regime, he tells us that within him he heard a voice – where is Yahweh? This is where – hanging from the gallows (Wiesel, 65). The problem with when God speaks to us is how we'll translate what God has spoken to us. If you read Elie and many other Jews during this time period, they think God had gone away or had died. When we live in darkness, we grasp for the light. We grasp for some kind of answer from God. We may question God why certain events are going on in our life. If we truly want an answer from God, God will speak to us. What we have to realize is that we need a translator to understand what the Lord is saying to us. I have to deal with Hispanics at the park at times and it drives me up the wall when I can't understand what they are saying to me because they can't speak English or don't want to speak English. The danger is we can misinterpret what they say or twist the translation into the wrong translation. Verse 2 of chapter 2 of Ezekiel is very important. When we ask for the Lord to speak to us during a storm of life, we must also ask the Lord to help us to understand it. In verse two, God speaks to Ezekiel and the Spirit came into Ezekiel, raised him to his feet, and then he heard Him speaking to him. The Spirit helped Ezekiel to see things which were not revealed to other men. Ezekiel had been truly blessed. In today's world, the Lord still speaks to us, but we need

to be filled with His Spirit to be able to understand. This is why we need prevenient grace before we know Jesus. That grace puts conviction on our heart and helps us to understand the Gospel message. Without that grace, we would be lost.

There is another reason why God still speaks today to us and why we must listen through the Spirit. In verse 5 of chapter two, we read this, "And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious people – they will know that a prophet has been among them. (NIV)" When the Lord speaks to us in the middle of a storm either through inner peace, or through Scripture, or any other instrument God can use, it can be used as outreach to the outside world as well. When someone asks us what kept us going through a dark time, we can tell them how the Lord spoke to us through the darkness. We give the Lord praise and tell the other person about Jesus all at the same time. As I look back, I can see more and more times when the Lord spoke to me in many different ways. As our faith grows, these special times become more common and we are blessed by them. It requires more than head knowledge of God; it requires the filling of the Holy Spirit within our lives. When has been the last time the Lord has spoken to you?

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Hill and Wang: New York, 1958