

EZEKIEL 12:1-11
BEING THE SIGN!

The removal van appears at the front door; the net curtains across the road twitch; the neighbours are moving; you wonder where they're going; you wonder what the new neighbours will be like; if you're really curious you will sit all day & watch what's going on; what furniture comes out etc. The first sign, of course, that people are moving is the 'for sale' sign, the house is on market, so you think people must be moving on, but the real sign of that happening is the removal van; it is hard to miss, it is not something that can be hidden, unless you are the defeated prime Minister whose removal van goes to the Back door of Number 10! There was a removal in Juniper Green recently where two huge articulated removal vans almost blocked the road; you couldn't help but know what was going on.

God told Ezekiel to act out his removal plans. Ezekiel was living in Babylon at the time, living in exile, away from Israel, away from Jerusalem; it was a painful time for Israel because they had also been told that God had gone away – their leaders had been rebellious and had forgotten to worship the living God, they had forgotten to pray to the living God. (see chapter 8) Now God tells Ezekiel to act out for people what will happen next. He was told to do 3 things:

1. *"Pack your..." (12:3f)* Ezekiel wouldn't need a removal van, he had fewer belongings than we would have, but he had enough to fill his small house and whatever he had he was to pack up and put outside as if ready to leave home; pack your bags & be ready to move to another place.
2. *"dig through..." (12:5)* Then he was to dig a hole in the wall of his house. The house made of sun-dried bricks, so it would be possible, though not easy, it would need a bit of hard work to dig a hole in the wall. (What did Mrs Ezekiel think?) Then just as it was getting dark he was to leave the house by this hole in the wall, as if leaving surreptitiously or secretly, as if making undignified exit!
3. *"cover your..." (12:6)* This can mean one of two things: either he is going in disguise, so that no-one would recognise him, or he is pretending to be blind and we will see why in moment!

Ezekiel is to act out all of these things; he had done something similar before, so the net curtains would be twitching all up and down the street – 'what is Ezekiel at this time?' God's whole point is that people see – do these things "While they watch!" They are supposed to see Ezekiel act out this little play, because *"I have..." (12:6)* God is telling Israel what is going to happen back in Jerusalem; Ezekiel is acting out God's word so that people see him and know something of what God is about to do. In 587BC Zedekiah was the puppet king of Israel. He had put there by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, but he had misbehaved, so Nebuchadnezzar's army had come to lay siege against the city. The people of Jerusalem were fleeing city at night through holes in the city wall & Zedekiah tried to run away as well; he packed his bags & fled through a hole in the city wall and did it at night so that the enemy wouldn't see; he was probably in disguise, but the Babylonian army caught him and took him prisoner and blinded him as punishment for his treachery. God was judging His people through the events of history; he had told them years before through Ezekiel that this would happen; Ezekiel was the sign!

We talked earlier about the signs of His love that God has given us today, in the bread and wine of the communion service. But there is a challenge for us to be the sign of God and His grace for other people. Ezekiel was the sign to people; they saw him, they watched him act out a part and understood what God was going to do. So we are called to be signs to people today of the presence of God in our world. *"You are..." (Matthew 5:14-16)* People are meant to be able to look at us & see Christ, to

see something of Christ in us. One difference from Ezekiel – he was acting out a part; we are to be real people, living out real lives in genuine and sincere ways and people should be able to look at us and see something of Christ. The picture of being the 'light of world' is all about being visible: the whole point of lighting a lamp, of switching on the light is that it is meant to be seen; no-one switches on a light, then puts a bucket over it to hide it; it doesn't make sense!

The truth is that, like it or not, we are a sign of something to the people around us. When we come to Church, or are members of Church, or become leaders in Church, we become identified as Christians. People identify us with Jesus. Like it or not, they look at us for an example of Christian faith & Christian life. If people want to see what Church stands for or what Christianity means, they will look at us. So what will they see? They will see something, certainly. Will they see in us a sign of God's kingship, a life lived in Jesus' ways, a faith taken seriously enough to shape way we think, speak and behave? Or will they see sign of something else – of people who sit lightly to faith, for whom faith seems to be incidental to life, who don't put that much effort into following Jesus, whose lives are just same as everyone else's with the same standards and values? We will be a sign of something to the world.

Ezekiel packed his bag, dug a hole in the wall, went out with his head covered, all to be a sign to the watching people: this is what God is like, this is what God will do. Our challenge – to be a sign of Jesus to the world around us. To think like Jesus thought; to speak like Jesus spoke, to act like Jesus acted, to behave like Jesus behaved, to love like Jesus loved – so we will be the light of the world; so we will be a sign of God in our world.