

Message #18**Ezekiel 15:1-8**

I know of a case in which a so-called “Christian counselor” actually counseled a client to do just the opposite of what the Word of God said and convinced the client, who claimed to be a believer, that this was right and the will of God. The counsel was worthless and useless and the person followed it and somehow convinced themselves that they were right with God in doing exactly the opposite of the Word of God. This is how delusional people can become. This was like it was when Ezekiel lived, for the entire nation.

God’s people, in Ezekiel’s day, were living in some theological and spiritual fantasy world. They really believed they were right with God and somehow they convinced themselves that they were at peace with God heading to the blessing of God.

False religious leaders like the false prophets and prophetesses (Ezek. 13) and the Elders (Ezek. 14) told them that and they believed it. They told them they did not need to repent of anything. They were loved just the way they were and God would bless them.

But we suspect that deep down inside these people knew they were not right with God. Truth is deep down inside most people have a sense when they aren’t really serious about God’s Word. There was no evidence that any of them were bearing any fruit that would indicate they were at peace with God. The sad fact was they didn’t care.

They were not interested in obeying God and His Word. They were not interested in turning away from sin. They were just drifting along as if everything was just fine. It is possible, in view of this passage that these people had delusionally convinced themselves that since they were the “vine” of Jehovah, and so they had absolutely nothing to worry about.

Asaph in Psalm 80:8-12 speaks of Israel as the vine and God protecting and blessing her. Most people believed they could live life their way and indulge in anything they so desired and be fully blessed by God. So God raised up Ezekiel to tell them no you aren’t right with God and you are heading to serious consequences.

In the next three chapters, God has Ezekiel tell His people three parables designed to communicate the truth to them in a pictorial way:

- 1) The parable of the unfruitful vine (15:1-8);
- 2) The parable of the unfaithful wife (16:1-63);
- 3) The parable of the two eagles (17:1-10).

These parables are not nice little earthly stories designed to warm the heart. These are parables designed to warn and inform a rebellious people that they are useless, immoral and doomed.

In this text what God does is this:

GOD GIVES EZEKIEL A PARABLE OF THE VINE TO SHOW ISRAEL THAT SHE IS FRUITLESS AND USELESS AND HEADING TO JUDGMENT.

Now one thing we will observe from this parable is that God will interpret it. This is not a license to allegorically or metaphorically interpret the Bible. If in fact it is a parable or an allegory, the text typically reveals it and often reveals the interpretation of it.

For example, in Galatians, Paul says it is an allegory and then interprets it (i.e. Gal. 4:24). In II Samuel 12:1-10, Samuel confronts David with a metaphorical story of a rich man who steals a poor neighbor's lamb and then connects it to David. The point is usually the Bible makes the literal meaning of the parable or metaphor very clear in its interpretation.

The vine metaphor is a metaphor often used of Israel (i.e. Hosea 10:1). Israel should have been a nation blessed of God. She should have been the most productive fruit-producing nation in the world. She should have been drawing her life from God and the Word of God. Had she done that she would have been fruitful. But because of her rebellion and sin, she is anything but that.

In **verse 1** we see that the Word of the LORD came to Ezekiel. These warnings and illustrations are not invented by a minister; this was direct revelation given to a prophet.

In **verse 2**, the Lord addresses Ezekiel as “the son of man,” the human on a Divine mission, and He asks him a question. God asks Ezekiel a question from the agricultural and manufacturing world.

The question in **verse 2** is this: “How is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees in the forest?”

Now the only way that wood from a vine is better than wood of a tree in the forest is if the vine bears fruit. If the vine does not bear any fruit, it is worthless. Wood that comes from a grapevine is inferior to any wood that comes off a tree. The only value of a grapevine is the value of producing fruit.

In fact, in **verse 3** God says you can't really make anything with wood from a vine. You cannot build a house with grapevines. You cannot build a table or chairs. You can't even make a peg on which to hang something because it is so weak. Now a peg was the most basic of all things that you could make to hang things on. A peg was not like some elaborate piece of furniture.

God says you cannot even make a peg with vine wood. It is not sturdy enough to hold anything and it certainly is not beautiful enough to display.

God says in **verse 4** the only thing this kind of wood is good for is burning and frankly it isn't much good even for that. When people get wood to burn for fuel or for fire, they typically don't say let's go out and get some grapevines. They want good hardwood for burning—oak, maple.

Now the image of a fire burning is often used in the O.T. to illustrate two things: 1) Destructive Judgment; 2) Purifying Refinement.

God can cause many negative, fiery things to hit people and these two purposes are typically at the heart of it.

In this case here in Ezekiel the fire would be destructive judgment; but if the people responded, that destructive judgment could lead to a right relationship with God. But of course in this case it didn't. As a result, Israel is going to be judged and burned just like vine wood.

Now the real point of this is that vine wood isn't even good for burning. Frankly, it isn't even much good for that. Sometimes it doesn't even burn right like other wood.

You throw it into the fire and everything is burned and charred. Ends and middle. Frequently vine pieces of wood would just half burn. You would look in the ashes and there would be pieces of vine that hadn't even burned up completely. It was just a charred, useless piece of wood.

Now charring wood typically can make it stronger and it makes it better. But you can char a vine on both ends or middle and you still cannot make anything out of it.

So it is with Israel. The whole nation was charred by sin and not useful for anything. The image of being burned at both ends and in the middle is an image of total judgment throughout the entire Promised Land. God's judgment would hit at both ends and also in the middle. No one would be unscathed.

But even if God chars the nation Israel, He still can't make anything useful out of her because she is so rebellious.

God had charred Israel with judgment at both ends and in the middle and still she would not repent. She was still useless. The same is true today. It has not mattered what God has done to Israel, she has refused to turn to Him.

Verse 5 is very sad. God says if you can't use vine wood to make anything when it is intact, then how much worse it is when it has been consumed by fire.

In other words, Israel is totally useless. She is useless before God judges her and she is more worthless after God judges her. It just does not resonate with her.

Now these were people who were telling others they were right with God. They are a useless waste of space and they aren't good for anything.

Now having said this God communicates four main thoughts and applications:

THOUGHT #1 – God has given up His own people in Jerusalem to be burned and destroyed.
15:6

The people of Israel were about to be like the wood who would be burned up like fuel. Jerusalem was like that vine wood. Its fate was inevitable. It was good for nothing and fit for nothing.

The first burning occurred in 597 B.C.. This was the first exile in which Babylon came in and took captives. But that did not change the people of God. It did not achieve its “redemptive purposes.” The people did not learn from this. They did not repent. They did not become more fit for God’s work.

THOUGHT #2 – God will set His face against His own people. **15:7a**

Even though some of them would survive one judgment, they will not escape. They will be destroyed by another judgment.

We know that some of the exiles did survive in 597 B.C. (II Kings 24:10-16). Eventually Jerusalem was literally burned by fire in 586 B.C. (II Kings 25:9).

The people of Jerusalem had surrendered to Babylon in 597 B.C., but they did not repent of their sin. So God says I will set My face against you and send them back to finish the job.

THOUGHT #3 – God’s people will know He is God. **15:7b**

To this day, most have not figured this out. This is not an optimistic way to know God. You do not want to get to know God by His judgments against you. You want to get to know God by His grace extended to you.

This is so important. People need to know that God is a God who will judge. God is a God who will do negative things to His own people if they do not deal with sin. He is gracious and He does give them time to get things straightened out, but we do not ever want to presume on the grace of God and persist in sin. God’s people need to know this about God.

THOUGHT #4 – God will make Israel’s land desolate. **15:8**

Israel is supposed to have a land, the dimensions of which are first given in Genesis 15:18-21. She has never had the totality of this land ever. Why? Why hasn’t God given Israel her land? Why does God allow horrible things to happen to Israel?

The answer is right in this book of Ezekiel. Because of her unfaithfulness. Her entire existence has been one of acting unfaithful.

Now how did the unfaithfulness begin? Where did this all start? The answer is it started with a bunch of corrupt leaders.

Now we believe there are still prophetic horrors yet to happen to Israel in this vine illustration. When Jesus used the vine parable pertaining to Israel in Matthew 21:33-41, He spoke of the fact that because Israel rejected Him, He would bring those “wretches to a wretched end.”

The worst sin that Israel ever committed was when she rejected Jesus Christ. This is why she will go through the Tribulation. This is why God will send the Antichrist because she rejected the true Christ.

But this also has application to the church. When Jesus was here on earth, He also made a Church Age application. He used the illustration of the vine in John 15 concerning N.T. believers. He said the goal is to use the vine to bear fruit and if it doesn't bear fruit there will be punitive consequences.

In fact, He made it very clear that apart from Him, the vine is worthless. God uses negative things to prune us. Suffering is a part of the pruning process that enables us to be more fruitful.

Several Applications we may make from this chapter:

- 1) The purpose of God judging His people is so that they will know He is God and respond to Him.
- 2) Whatever God does in judgment is always just and right.
- 3) Religious frauds make a living telling people what they want to hear, not what God's Word actually says.
- 4) Persistent Unfaithfulness will catch up to a person because God will cause them to reap what they have sown.
- 5) It was false religious leaders who led God's people away from truth and into judgment.
- 6) God gives His people time to turn from their rebellion and if they refuse, He will set His face against them.