

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"Fire Burn and Caldron Bubble"

11:1-13

Introduction

Two cannibals meet one day. The first cannibal says, "You know, I just can't seem to get a tender missionary. I've baked them, I've roasted them, I've stewed them, I've barbecued them, I've tried every sort of marinade. I just cannot seem to get them tender."

The second cannibal asks, "What kind of missionary do you use?"

The other replied, "You know, the ones that hang out at that place at the bend of the river. They have those brown cloaks with a rope around the waist and they're sort of bald on top with a funny ring of hair on their heads."

"Ah ha!" the second cannibal replied. "No wonder... ***those are friars!***"

We're going to see the princes of Jerusalem describe themselves as "meat" in a cooking "caldron." It sounds bad, and it is - **but they thought otherwise.**

How could they think being in the caldron was something good? Just as a cooking caldron protects the meat from the fire, they thought that living in the city of Jerusalem - the caldron - would keep them - the meat - safe. Surely God would never let His city or His Sanctuary fall to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

God is interested in His people. He's interested in you personally. Sanctuaries and cities are important historically and geographically, but only as a set and a stage for God to work in and upon your life.

The Jews of Judah in the sixth century had come to a place where God must destroy the props around His people in order to get their personal attention.

Ezekiel 11:1 Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the East Gate of the Lord's house, which faces eastward; and there at the door of the gate were twenty-five men, among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.

We've commented before about the Holy Spirit Transportation System. Apparently it was common for a prophet to be lifted up, to be carried away, by the Holy Spirit and to find himself transported to another location.

There's another sense of being "lifted," one we can use by way of application. The Holy Spirit can lift you spiritually, can lift your 'spirits,' we might say. God is portrayed in the psalms as "the lifter of our heads." With tenderness He elevates our gaze from earth, from our problems, to look into His beautiful face. Be lifted up!

In our last study we saw that the Lord was departing from His Sanctuary and, eventually, from the city. Here we see Him pause at the "East Gate."

Sometimes a famous or important person, like a president, will stop his motorcade, get out, and begin to engage with folks in the crowd. It's always a very endearing moment as he takes time for that one person.

God didn't simply tell Him what He was going to do, or tell him what to say. He brought him into His counsel and showed him some of the reason for what He was about to do.

God pauses for us. He's always paused, as it were, waiting to bring us into His counsel. Pause with Him.

Ezekiel was shown "twenty-five men." Earlier he had been shown twenty-five priests. These are a different group; these are "princes of the people"-

secular leaders. There is some confusion because there was a “Jaazaniah” in the first group, among the priests, as well as here. But they have different dads and so it’s just a coincidence. Jaazaniah was the most popular boys name of the sixth century (I guess).

It might be one person or more than twenty-five, but all of us have people that seem to oppose the Word and the work of God. Often they are in positions of authority and power over us. But you - you are an ambassador for Heaven. You are a person with godly authority.

Ezekiel 11:2 And He said to me: "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give wicked counsel in this city,

Ezekiel 11:3 who say, 'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the meat.'

Why were they discouraging new housing? The background for this in in the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was back in Jerusalem giving his prophecies to the princes. In Jeremiah 29:5 we read something that Jeremiah told to the exiles in Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.

Jeremiah, speaking forth the Word of God, instructed the exiles in Babylon to settle down. They should “build houses and dwell in them” because the exile was going to last a long time - seventy-years, in fact.

The princes of the people blew-off Jeremiah’s counsel. They scoffed at the Word of God through him. Instead of accepting the prophecy of a lengthy exile, they told the people of Jerusalem that “this city is the caldron,” protecting them, “and we are the meat.”

They thought themselves a prime cut of the best beef or pork. *They were more like Charlie Tuna!* “Only the best tuna gets to be *Starkist* tuna.”

(I never really get the commercials where the main characters want to qualify to be eaten. The Foster Farms chickens come to mind. Or how about those cookies that get eaten one bite at a time while you watch?).

The princes were in a position of leadership and example and, as such, they could give “counsel.” Trouble was, their counsel was “wicked” because they were too busy devising “iniquity.” Their sin and sinful habits made them dull to the warnings of the prophet and, to justify ignoring it, they gave counsel of their own.

What is biblical counseling? See if you agree with this statement: “Biblical counseling is Christ-centered, Holy Spirit empowered, loving and practical application of God’s truths with the goal of spiritual maturity and fruitfulness.”

(Visit the International Association of Biblical Counselors website if you’re interested in learning more about what they call “counseling God’s way”).¹

Biblical counseling, in a word, is **discipleship**. We normally think of discipleship as what the world now calls ‘mentoring.’ We work with younger, or less mature, believers, teaching them principles and precepts. That’s certainly discipleship. But anytime a person needs what we normally would call ‘counseling,’ we need to treat it as discipleship. Thus we are not looking for the latest psychological methods or techniques. We counsel the same way we disciple.

Ezekiel 11:4 Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man!"

The princes denied and defied God’s prophet. *So God spoke to them through another prophet!*

When people deny and defy God’s Word, the answer isn’t to appeal to them from some other source. It’s to give more of the same, more of the Word.

Ezekiel 11:5 Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said to me, "Speak! 'Thus says the Lord: "Thus you have said, O house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind.

Ezekiel 11:6 You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain."

¹ <http://www.iabc.net/>

Earlier we learned that Ezekiel was a functional mute only speaking when God told him to speak. Even with the Word we must have the leading and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The Word without the Spirit is impossible to follow.

Had the princes followed the advice of Jeremiah, things would have remained status quo in Jerusalem. Instead the counsel of the princes made things worse. It “multiplied” the number of people “slain.”

They said, “O house of Israel.” In other words, they spoke with an apparent authority to the people. But their counsel was wrong, in their case because they were in sin.

Christians can give poor counsel for a variety of reasons.

- They can be in sin, like these princes.
- They can be ignorant of God’s Word and say things like, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Not in the Bible!!!, by the way.

One thing you must become very sensitive to is counsel that is legalistic rather than based on grace. It’s too easy to put burdens on people that they simply cannot bear.

I happened to hear a talk given recently that really troubled me. The gist of it was that you can’t go to movies, watch TV, cheer for sports teams or even be involved much with playing sports. You shouldn’t spend any time on the computer, especially with things like Facebook.

It might seem spiritual, but it isn’t. It is all based on externals, on a form of righteousness that cannot further your walk.

Externals do not make you either more acceptable or less acceptable to God. Externals therefore do not make you either more approved or less approved by men.

You are free to have your own individual convictions of conscience in external things.

Ezekiel 11:7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Your slain whom you have laid in its midst, they are the meat, and this city is the caldron; but I shall bring you out of the midst of it.

Ezekiel 11:8 You have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you," says the Lord God.

God turned their illustration back on them. The people they had led astray would be brought "out of the midst," meaning that the city would afford no protection for them.

They had "feared the sword." They put on a strong front, but it was a false front. With their mouths they told each other and others that they would be safe, but in their hearts they worried.

Compare that to Habakkuk who received the truth that the Jews would be taken captive, and who spoke openly of the ensuing political and economic woe, but said he trusted God in it all the more.

The princes were like the modern health and wealth teachers. Never say you are sick - *even when you are!* - because that shows you have no faith.

Habakkuk went from fear to faith while these princes went from false to fear.

Ezekiel 11:9 "And I will bring you out of its midst, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and execute judgments on you.

Ezekiel 11:10 You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 11:11 This city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst. I will judge you at the border of Israel.

This was a clear message, easy to understand, using the terms and images that were familiar to the princes and the people.

It's just wrong to try to sound overly-complicated, or to use words and images folks cannot readily comprehend. We aren't trying to get people to say how smart we are but to see how wonderful God is.

When the city fell, and folks tried to escape, they would not get beyond the “border of Israel.” All of this was necessary to remind them, in their sin, that God was their Lord.

Ezekiel 11:12 And you shall know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes nor executed My judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you." ' ' "

Here was the bottom-line: Instead of following God they had gone after “the customs of the Gentiles” around them.

Ezekiel 11:13 Now it happened, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried with a loud voice, and said, "Ah, Lord God! Will You make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?"

One among the princes, “Pelatiah,” suddenly and unexpectedly died. It was an Old Testament example of sin unto death - the idea that sometimes God kills you rather than let you go on in sin. It was a sort of token, a foretaste, of God’s coming judgment. It was a sign to them that the prophecy was true.

The rest of the chapter will be God’s answer to Ezekiel’s question. He was worried about the godly remnant. He need not.

Reviewing we would say that it was a time of prophetic upheaval. God lifted His prophet, empowered him, and he warned the people of the coming judgment.

Sounds just like us!

