

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 15:1-8

Topic

Instead of bearing spiritual fruit in the LORD's vineyard, the 6th century Jews chose to be wild vines in the forest.

Title

"Wildwood & Vine"

I thought that it would make great kindling.

A neighbor in San Bernardino was replacing an old wood shingle roof. Whose responsibility was it growing up to tell me that wood shingles are coated with a mixture of deadly chemicals?

Grape branches are mentioned as kindling in our text.

The LORD says, "it is thrown into the fire for fuel" (v4). He wasn't advising them about good sources of kindling. It was an illustration. "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v6).

- Israel was God's vineyard. In Psalm 80 we read "You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared *room* for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land" (v8-9).
- Israel was no longer God's well-tended vineyard. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then,

when I expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?" (Isaiah 5:3-4).

The Jews had gone from the Exodus to exile.

Israel was more like a wild vine of the forest whose fruit was of no value. Might as well burn it.

You can't read this and not think of what Jesus said to His disciples. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much **fruit**. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the **fire**, and they are burned" (John 15:5-6).

Fruit? or Fire? **Its your choice!** I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Your Yield Depends Upon Your Yielding**, and **#2 Your Burning Comes From Your Burdening**.

#1 Your Yield Depends Upon Your Yielding (v1-6)

The most well known list of a believer's spiritual fruit is in the apostle Paul's letter to the churches in the region of Galatia.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love." "Love" is the fruit and the rest describes different expressions of love. Love is "joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

This isn't an exhaustive description of love. Another that we are familiar with is, "Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (First Corinthians 13:4-8).

Ezk 15:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

It's good to go to the Word; the Word ought to come to you as well.

Expect to 'hear' from the Lord. Listen for His still, small voice. Pay attention to the Lord showing you truth through illustrations from your own experiences. For lack of a

better word, be interactive. Of course, test everything by the written Word. But don't forget that God took the initiative to contact us. He invites & enjoys dialog with you.

Ezk 15:2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine *better* than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest?"

I looked-up the structure of a grapevine. We would probably correctly id the roots and the trunk. After that, not so much. For example, what we call "branches" consists of the cordon, the cane, the shoots, the leaves, and the tendrils. That endpoint is where the clusters of grapes grow.

Annual pruning focuses on removing unnecessary or unproductive canes and shoots to ensure the remaining buds and shoots can produce high-quality fruit.

Careful readers will notice that the LORD is asking Ezekiel specifically about "the vine branch *which is among the trees of the forest.*"

Perhaps Ezekiel had walked among the mighty cedars of Lebanon before his captivity in Babylon. He came upon a wild grapevine. In that forest setting the LORD asked, "What is grape wood good for?" Before Ezekiel could answer, the LORD tells Ezekiel what it is *not* good for:

Ezk 15:3 Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can *men* make a peg from it to hang any vessel on?

The original Hebrew is a little more lyrical. It translates, *Grape wood, huh, yeah, what is it good for? Absolutely nothing, say it again.*

You crafty ladies can weave grapevines into wreathes. When we first moved to rural Kings County from big city San Bernardino, one of the ladies in the fellowship invited Pam to make grapevine wreathes. Who would say "No" to that?

Pam noticed they were driving away from town and not to a store. Somewhere along Hwy 43 they pulled into a vineyard and headed up a dirt access road. They came to a pile of pruned grapevines. As if the whole thing wasn't already like *Green Acres*, the gal started making wreathes right then and there. Pam asked if it was allowed. "Sure! People do it all the time."

I guess they don't do it all the time when the owner is there. He pulled up to them on a quad and asked them what they were doing. Pam was mortified. All she could think of was a headline reading, *Pastor's Wife Arrested for Ag Theft.*

The Jews didn't use pruned grape branches ever for building, not even as a peg. Ezk 15:4 Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for *any* work?

Ezk 15:5 Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for *any* work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

No one gathered grape wood for kindling because it burns too fast. It's like the Christmas tree I tried to burn in our fireplace in Running Springs. Again, Who was responsible to tell me about chimney fires?

What is the one thing grape branches are good for?

They bear fruit. In our case, they bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is love.

Describing His vineyard, "[The LORD] dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes..." Who does everything in the vineyard?

Fruit is produced without *any* effort by the branches.

I don't look out at my two pomegranate trees and comment, "Man! Those pomegranate branches are *really* trying today! *Look at them sweat!*"

- I didn't buy pomegranates from SaveMart and show them to the branches, to shame them.
- I didn't buy a bottle of POM juice so my branches would have a goal.

Dan Kimball said, "*The fruit of the Spirit wasn't intended to be a list of goals for us to produce. It is the Holy Spirit through us who produces fruit.*"

"So He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes."

The LORD's expectation for every believer is that you will "bring forth good grapes." Everything you need to produce abundant fruit is already provided. Conditions are perfect. All you do - *all you **can** do* - is yield by believing.

How do we instead "bring forth wild grapes?"

When the apostle Paul insisted that the fruit of the Spirit is love, he said its antagonist was the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh that Paul lists are things like “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21).

When you believe and are saved, you receive a new nature, and you receive the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. *Your physical body remains unredeemed.* You will be in a fierce struggle between the flesh and the Spirit until you receive your resurrection body. It will happen when Jesus comes to resurrect the deceased believers of the Church Age and rapture all living believers.

If anything on the list of “the works of the flesh” describes you or I, we are “in the woods,” spiritually speaking. We are yielding to the flesh.

There is something else that we must beware of that is not as obvious. Also in Galatians the apostle said, “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (3:2-3).

You need not wonder what this is like. Read the circular letter Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus in the Revelation. He listed a bunch of their good works, but He threatened to cancel their witness because they had left their first love for Him. The Ephesian Christians were doing works that seemed good, but they were doing them without love.

You and I can spend our entire Christian walk as pre-transformed believers being content to be wild, forest grapevines producing little or no fruit. Charles Ryrie noted, “That a Christian can be characterized as carnal cannot be denied, simply because the text of First Corinthians 3:1-3 says there were carnal believers at Corinth. Paul addresses these people as ‘brethren’ and ‘babes in Christ,’ then he describes them as ‘men of flesh’ and ‘fleshly.’ So there were carnal or fleshly Christians in Paul’s day.”

Let’s get practical and take a peek inside the marriages of believers to amplify the scope of what we are saying. I’ve done my share of sitting down with couples in crisis. It doesn’t take long to realize that one or both of them **is not bearing spiritual fruit.** They are most definitely *not* joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, kind, good, faithful, gentle, or self-controlled. They are not “bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things” (First Corinthians 13:7).

Your marriage is a vineyard where God expects to find fruit because of what He has done.

"What more could He have done that He has not done in order that you would bear fruit?"

All of the descriptions of love assume you will be in adverse circumstances. If the fruit of the Spirit is self-control, *you will need to be in situations in which you would lose control if you were depending on your own efforts.*

A.B. Simpson said it best: "Beloved, have you ever thought that someday you will not have anything to try you, or anyone to vex you again? There will be no opportunity in Heaven to learn or to show the spirit of patience, forbearance, and longsuffering. If you are to practice these things, *it must be now.*"

**#2 Your Burning Comes From Your Burdening
(v6-8)**

When you get saved, you see what can be, unburdened by what has been.

Jesus *did* invite us to be unburdened. "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

In context, Jesus was talking about the religious burdens heaped upon the Jews by their leaders. "They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden" (Matthew 23:4 NLT).

Let's not be like them. Let's say, "Go, and sin no more," when a person deserves to be stoned.

Ezk 15:6 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

The Jerusalem Jews could have repented, turning to God *from* their idolatry. They refused.

Ezk 15:7 and I will set My face against them. They will go out from *one* fire, but *another* fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I set My face against them.

Out of the frying pan, into the fire. If they escaped the sword, they would perish by the famine; if they escaped the famine, they would be led away captives to Babylon.

Ezk 15:8 Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,' says the Lord GOD."

"Persistent unfaithfulness" is a tragic but accurate diagnosis of the nation of Israel throughout a great deal of her history. Has God abandoned His people? Look to the East. Israel is a nation once again, in the Promised Land. She is the epicenter for the End Times. All Israel will be saved. They will recognize Jesus as their Savior.

What about the fire? Is this eternal, Hell-fire & brimstone?

No, it is not. Earlier we quoted Jesus. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much **fruit**. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the **fire**, and they are burned" (John 15:5-6).

- How does Jesus "abide in believers"? By the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.
- How long does the Spirit's indwelling last? In John 14:6, Jesus promised, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, **that He may abide with you forever...**"

If you have God the Holy Spirit, you will have Him "forever."

Christianity uniquely emphasizes that God Himself dwells *within* believers through the Holy Spirit.¹ Buddha doesn't live in you... Krishna doesn't live in you... Muhammad doesn't live in you... Joe Smith doesn't live in you.

These verses cannot be about losing or forfeiting the gift of salvation. They are about believers bearing fruit. You can "do nothing" apart from Jesus. What can you do with Him? All things He asks or commands, by believing and not by effort.

The Ephesian believers would 100% agree they could do nothing apart from Jesus. Even as they said it, *they were doing **everything** without Jesus!*

¹ John 14:16-17, First Corinthians 3:16

There are four not-so-secret 'secrets' to a believer bearing spiritual fruit:

1. Pray without ceasing.
2. Read your Bible in a way that it is reading you.
3. Immerse yourself in a local fellowship that holds to the inerrancy & the authority of the Bible.
4. Tell others that Jesus lives! and that He is coming back at any moment.

These are not burdens. You can burden yourself, or heap burdens on others. Or you can believe the Lord and bear fruit like you believed Him for salvation.