

## EZEK 37:15-28—UNITING THE DIVIDED

**INTRO:** I would like us to look at ourselves by asking this question: When have people ever been united? There might be short periods of time when individuals or nations come together in unity, but then that quickly goes away.

- Adam and Eve: Just 2 people in a perfect environment, with God walking with them in the Garden. “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” But then they sin. “This woman you gave me.” There have been problems btw. men and women ever since.
- Nations: When we get independence there is a short burst of togetherness and unity. But shortly afterwards, the same old divisions resurface. Now America is pretty much split in two politically.
- And we could go on and on, with every way we can categorize people: Age; race; wealth; religion; In all these ways we tend to look at others through lenses labeled “Us” and “Them.” There may be short, temporary periods of coming together and unity—but every age, every place, and all people in every situation are characterized by division and separation, from God and from each other.

Today’s passage powerfully addresses not only that problem, but God’s solution to that problem. [READ EZEK 37:15-28]

**PROP: Only Christ brings true unity**—Now you may think it strange that I say that this passage is teaching us that **Only Christ brings true unity** since the name “Jesus” or “Christ” is not even mentioned, on its face the prophecy is only talking about Israel and Judah, and Ezekiel wrote this hundreds of years before Jesus ever came to earth. BUT:

**O/S:** We will see *from the text* how only Christ brings true unity as we consider 2 things: (1) We are naturally separated from God and from each other; (2) With Christ we are united with God and with each other.

In this prophecy God was looking at solving the fundamental problem, not just of Israel and Judah, but of all mankind. *And what is that fundamental problem?*

### **I. We are naturally separated from God and from each other.**

**A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:** God had created the nation of Israel out of the 12 tribes of Israel; God revealed Himself to Moses; He miraculously brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the land He had promised them. But they never really followed Him as they had promised to do. And after King Solomon died, the nation divided into 2: the Northern 10 tribes formed what was called the nation of Israel, and the Southern 2 tribes formed what was called the nation of Judah. And neither of those nations followed the Lord very well either.

- Then in about 722BC Assyria defeated Israel and carried it away.
- In about 586BC Babylon destroyed Judah, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and carried away the people into exile.
- Both N & S kingdoms were separated from God b/c they followed after other gods, and were separated from each other b/c they were defeated and in exile in foreign lands.
- That is the context of this entire prophecy. Ezekiel wrote this prophecy from Babylon approx 580 BC, while the nation was still in exile.
- What was the situation? v. 11—“**Our hope has perished.**” From the prophecy itself we see the rest of the situation: **vv. 15-20**—Since the prophecy promised to make Israel and Judah into 1 stick, that tells us they were still separated from each other; **vv. 21-22**—Since the prophecy promised to bring them back to their land, that tells us they were not living “in their own land”; **v. 23**—Since the prophecy promised to cleanse them from sins, that tells us they were still defiled by their sins; **vv. 24-28**—Since the prophecy promised them their own king, peace, and God dwelling with them, that tells us they did not have their own king, peace, or the presence of God in their midst.
- In short, they were separated from God and from each other.

**B. Just as being separated from God and from each other was Israel’s problem, it is OUR problem too.** We are *naturally separated* from God and others. Just like ancient Israel we are separated from God, and are separated from each other by class, race, and all kinds of other things. WHY? Because we have pursued gods of our own making (\$, sex, power, a comfortable life, and all kinds of other things). As Francis Schaeffer said several years ago our ultimate values now are “*personal peace and affluence.*”

- Those may not be bad things in and of themselves. But when they b/c our most important values they cause us to focus only on ourselves, not others, and certainly not on God. And they cause us to have as our frame of reference only the few years we are living here on this earth in these bodies, rather than

where we will be living forever. Consequently, we pursue our own agendas, not God's. We live as *practical atheists—just like ancient Israel did.*

- The problem is not just an External problem. Rather, our problem is an *Internal problem—IOW*, there is something fundamentally wrong with our mindset, or our ultimate values, or our frame of reference—which then causes us to act self-centeredly, as though “it’s all about ME”—which leads to separation from God and from each other.

So what’s the answer? God’s answer to our problem of separation brings us back to the prophecy of Ezekiel. In the prophecy God was *really* saying, “Your people will be united, like 2 sticks that become 1, but in a more profound way than you can imagine.” The real ans. will be through Jesus Christ, b/c:

## **II. With Christ we are united with God and with each other.**

**A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.** The nation was, in fact, released from its exile in Babylon in about 538BC and allowed to return to its own land. They even rebuilt the temple. You might say that Ezekiel’s prophecy was fulfilled at that time.

So how do we know that this prophecy was talking abt. Jesus? To see how, it is important that we take a look at what God actually said to Ezekiel.

**B. So, what did God actually promise in this prophecy?**

- **vv. 21-22:** He would gather His people “from among the nations” and “from every side” make them “one nation” and “one people” in their own land. Judah was allowed to return to the land, and some descendants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel lived in the land (the Samaritans). But they had the same divisions among themselves as ever. They really weren’t “one”—they hated each other.
- **v. 23-24:** God would “cleanse” them of their idols, transgressions, and sins and they would walk in God’s statutes. Did that happen? No. The books of Haggai and Malachi were written after the return from exile and really are all about the issue “Why isn’t God blessing us, even though we’re back in the land?” The answer is the same reasons why they had problems before the exile.
- **vv. 24-25:** They would have “1 Shepherd” over them and David would be their king “forever.” Was he? No.
- **v. 26:** They would have an “everlasting covenant” of peace. Did that occur? No. For most of their history they were still under the domination of other, stronger nations.
- **vv. 26-28:** God’s sanctuary and dwelling place would be in their midst “forever.” Did that happen? No, it never really did.

So what’s going on? *Here is the key to unlock this prophecy and, for that matter, the entire OT—it is this:*

**C. According to the Bible, ancient Israel, and all of its institutions, ceremonies, and experiences, were an outward, physical sign that pointed to spiritual truths that ultimately were fulfilled in Christ.** The Bible calls them “*types*” and “*shadows.*” IOW, they really happened—but they were pointing to something—actually Someone—greater than themselves.

- **Col 2:16-17** says that the Sabbath, and the festivals, and the law were “**a mere shadow of what was to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**”
- So Jesus could say (**John 5:39-40, 46**) that the entire OT Scriptures “**testify about ME . . . for [Moses] wrote about Me.**”
- In **Luke 24** Jesus went through the entire OT with 2 people on the road to Emmaus and showed them how the entire Bible is all about HIM.

**D. If we understand that, then we will see that Ezekiel’s prophecy extended far beyond merely getting ancient Israel back into Palestine from exile in Babylon—It is all fulfilled in Christ and those who are united with and committed to Him.** So, when God tells Ezekiel:

- **vv. 21-22:** He would gather His people “from among the nations” and “from every side” make them “one nation”: **Rev 5:9** says that God’s true people, His everlasting people—those who belong to Jesus—“**have been purchased for God with Your blood [the blood of Jesus Christ] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**”
- And **Eph 2:15**, in talking about not just the division between Israel and Judah, but the far deeper division between Jew and Gentile, says that Christ shed His blood on the cross, “**so that in Himself he might make the two into one new man . . . and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross.**” What Ephesians is doing is taking the very words of Ezekiel’s prophecy but showing us what that prophecy was really pointing to, and how it was ultimately fulfilled: namely, Jesus reconciling not just one little nation to God and each other, but people from all over the world.
- **Eph 2:16** goes on to say that even we Gentiles **are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are**

**fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household.** IOW, we're not just members of the same nation, but God has gone far beyond that and made us all part of the same FAMILY—His own family.

- **v. 22:** They would be in their own land on “mountains of Israel”; **Heb 12:22** tells us that all people who belong to Jesus “**have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.**”
- **v. 22:** They would be 1 people: **Gal 3:28** says that “**There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**”
- **v.23-24:** God would “cleanse” them of their idols, transgressions, and sins so they would walk in God's statutes: With respect to our sin, Jesus said, “**It's not what goes into you that defiles you, but what comes out of you**” (**Mark 7:15**). IOW, our problem is not an external problem, but an internal one. We can't cleanse ourselves, no matter how hard we try. God has to do it. When John-the-Baptist saw Jesus he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (**John 1:29**). Jesus does for us what we can't do for ourselves.
- As to walking in His statutes, again, we need something that will change us from the inside-out. Jesus has done that by giving us the HS who has come to live *inside* us (**John 14:16-17**). And the Spirit takes God's word to transform us from the “inside-out” into the image of Christ Himself (see **Rom 8:29; 12:2**) as we “abide” or “continue in” His word (**John 8:31-32**).
- **v. 24:** They would have “1 Shepherd” over them: Jesus said I AM the good shepherd (**John 10:11**).
- **vv. 24-25:** David would be their king “forever”: Before Jesus was born the angel Gabriel promised Mary that God would give Jesus “**the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end**” (**Luke 1:32-33**). Following Jesus' ascension, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter explained (**Acts 2:29-36**), “**The patriarch David both died and was buried [but] because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of Christ . . . [So] know for certain that God has made Him [Jesus] both Lord and Christ.**” Jesus is David's greater and perfect son who is reigning now from heaven and will never die. He is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy.
- **v. 26:** They would have an “everlasting covenant” of peace: **Jer 31:31-34** had promised a New Covenant—an everlasting covenant. At the Last Supper Jesus explicitly stated **this is the New Covenant in My blood** (**Luke 22:20**).
  - And we know that when God gave the prophecy to Ezekiel He was talking about the NC, b/c He called it an “everlasting Covenant.” The NC is repeatedly called an “everlasting” covenant in the Bible, but the term “everlasting” is never applied to the Old Covenant God made with Moses for ancient Israel.
  - Further, we know that Jesus is at the heart of the promise of “peace,” because He IS the “Prince of Peace” (**Isa 9:6**). You see, Jesus alone brings us reconciliation and peace with God. And when we truly put Him first in our lives, He brings reconciliation and peace among people.
- **vv. 23, 27:** “**I will be their God, and they will be My people**”: That phrase, “I will be their God, and they will be My people,” is part of the NC, which the Bible repeatedly applies to all those who are united with Jesus Christ (**2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; and Rev 21:3**).
- **vv. 26, 28:** God's sanctuary and dwelling place would be in their midst “forever”: **John 1:14** tells us, “**And the Word [referring to Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us.**” And Jesus said, “**I will never leave you nor forsake you**” (**Heb 13:5**). But this prophecy also points forward to the new heaven and new earth that Christ will establish when He returns. For **Rev 21:3** says, referring to that great, eternal kingdom, “**Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.**” Again, the words of Ezekiel are being echoed here to show the final fulfillment of the prophecy.

So you see: the prophecy God gave to Ezekiel so long ago, extended far beyond probably what even Ezekiel had in mind. Ultimately, it's all about Jesus. The prophecy extended to the coming of Jesus. It extends to us. Christ has begun His kingdom now. We have it now in part. But Ezekiel's prophecy even extends to Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming when Christ will consummate His everlasting kingdom on the new earth. Then there will be perfect unity. Never again will there be any pain, or loss, or division, or separation, either from God or among people.

### **III. So how do we apply this prophecy? Two things:**

**A. First, if you are not yet united with Jesus, then you need to be united with Him.** You can do that right now. If God has been tugging on you, then take the step. You can say to Him right now in your heart: “Lord, I know I have been going my own way for all my life. It's not working. Please forgive me. From right now, I'm going to live for You. Please come into my life as my Lord. I give you control over all aspects of my life: my money, my time, my actions, my relationships. I have faith in You that, by the blood of Jesus that

He shed on the cross, You have changed my heart and will change my life. For it is by Jesus that I pray, and believe, and thank you for giving me new life.”

- If you do that, then tell someone. Get connected with this fellowship of believers or some other church where Christ is proclaimed and His Word is taught.
- *Maybe you aren't quite ready to commit your life to Christ, because you have some questions.* If that's the case, then do something about it. Talk to me. Talk to pastor Wade. Talk with a mature believer in Christ whom you trust. But do *something*. B/c there ARE reasonable answers to your questions. The stakes are too high for you to just sit back and do nothing.

**B. The second thing is this: If you ARE united with Christ and are a follower of Him, then YOU are part of His project to work for reconciliation among people NOW.** We need to ask ourselves, “What am I doing to bring about reconciliation in the setting where God has placed *me*?”

- **The Apostle Paul puts it this way in 2 Cor 5:17-18: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave US the ministry of reconciliation.”**
- *You see, God does restore and reconcile people.* WE are His agents for His work of reconciliation.
- **This is important, b/c as one Christian writer says:** “Who could believe in a God who will make everything new ‘later’ if it is in no way apparent from the activity of those who hope in [Him] that he is already beginning to make everything new *now*?” (Schillebeeckx 1968: 183-84)
- **So, what can we do?** Here are just a few suggestions:
  - On one side of the coin: Expose the people who live near you or work near you to the Gospel. Become friends with people and show yourself a friend by helping them, doing unexpected, kind things for them. And when they thank you, you can tell them: “You know, I care for you more now because Jesus has changed my life, and I want to share Him.” As you get to know the person better, and as they see that Jesus is real in you, you can talk to them about Jesus in your life, or invite your friend to come with to you learn of Jesus here in church.
  - Opportunities are all around us. Our problem is that we all are so interested in ourselves, that we fail to see the hurts and needs of others right around us. But God has put us where we are, so that others would see Him in us. But we have to open our eyes.
  - On the other side of the coin: Don't be a stumbling block to people. What do I mean? We all offend and hurt people from time to time. When we do that, most people simply try to justify themselves. That's not the way Christians should be. When we do things that offend people or hurt their feelings, WE should be the ones *quickly* to apologize and ask for forgiveness. God may be calling to your mind one person whom you have offended and to whom you need to apologize, or someone who you need to forgive. Do it. Be God's agent of reconciliation. *That is our calling.*
  - And this applies within our own families—maybe especially within our own families. And let me tell you something DADS—this applies to US. Many husbands and fathers think that “I am the head of the household, so I never apologize to anyone.” That's wrong. I have 6 children: 3 boys and 3 girls. And I have had to learn, as a husband and a father, to apologize to others, especially to my wife and to my girls. And I'll tell you something: IT DOESN'T KILL YOU TO DO IT. When you do, a great weight is lifted from you, and from the family. And I'll tell you something else: when you do that, it's like when Jesus knelt down and washed His disciples' feet: they didn't respect Him less because He did that; they respected Him MORE.

**CONCL:** Only Christ brings true unity. Without Christ we are divided from God and from each other. But with Christ we are united with God and with each other. Ezekiel prophesied about 2600 years ago. His prophecy applies to us today. God wants to use US to be His instruments to bring unity among people. He WILL use each one of us, as we open our eyes to see the opportunities, and then apply the ministry of reconciliation He has given us.