

## A DISAPPOINTING DRAFT

Scriptures: Isaiah 5:1-7; John 15:1-11

In 1987 the Seattle Seahawks had the number one pick in the pro football supplemental draft. That meant the Seahawks got the first choice of all eligible college football players in the country. They chose Brian Bosworth. The Boz, as he was called, seemed like a good choice at the time. He had played three years for the University of Oklahoma and was a two-time winner of the Butkus award for the best college linebacker in the country. The Seahawks signed him to the biggest contract in team history: \$11 million dollars over 10 years. He played only three years. ESPN named him one of the 10 biggest flops in the last 25 years.

In 1993 the Seahawks tried again. They had the 2<sup>nd</sup> pick in the NFL draft, the 2<sup>nd</sup> choice of any eligible college football player in the country. They chose Rick Mirer from Notre Dame. Rick signed a 5 year, \$15 million contract. You can see how fast salaries were going up. Rick played four years for the Seahawks. In three of those four years he threw more interceptions than touchdowns. Pro Football Reference, a football website, rated him the worst quarterback in NFL history.

I am not sharing this to make you sorry for the Seahawks or to get you ready for the Superbowl in two weeks. I share this because the Seahawks and their disastrous draft choices are directly relevant to today's scripture reading from Isaiah, chapter 5.

Isaiah 5 describes a vineyard planted by the Lord. Verse 2 says, "He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it." The Lord did everything to make this a healthy, safe, and productive vineyard. The Lord had high hopes for this vineyard. He expected it to yield wonderful grapes, but instead it yielded wild grapes, grapes that were good for nothing.

In verse 7 we are told the meaning of this parable. "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting." Israel was God's first draft choice. The Bible says this quite clearly. In Deuteronomy 7, Moses tells the people of Israel, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession." Does that not sound like a first draft choice? Isaiah repeats this point. Isaiah 44:1: "But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!" Israel's was God's first round draft choice. And the Lord signed them to a huge contract. The Lord brought them out of slavery in Egypt. God led them and fed them for forty years as they made their way across the wilderness. God protected them from enemies and gave them a good land in which they could literally plant vineyards and raise crops. In one sense Isaiah 5 should be taken literally. The Lord literally gave Israel a good land which had the potential to produce delicious grapes.

But they turned out to be one of the biggest flops in religious history. Brian Bosworth's career ended after a shoulder injury. Rick Mirer was traded to the Chicago Bears, who later cut him from the team. But Israel's fate was worse. Isaiah 5:5-6:

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns.

This is not just a parable. This is literally what happened to the people of Israel in the time of Isaiah. Their vineyards were trampled and destroyed by foreign armies. Their watchtowers and fortifications, could not protect them. Many of the Israelites were taken into exile. As a result their fields were left unpruned, unhoed, and overgrown with briars and thorns.

Why did that happen? Because Israel did not fulfill its purpose. It did not live up to its vocation, its reason for being drafted. God expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded sour grapes in more ways than one.

In verse 7 there is a play on words in Hebrew. The end of verse 7 says, “God expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry.” The Hebrew words in that verse almost rhyme. I would translate it something like this: “God expected good, but instead got blood; God expected loving, but instead got shoving.” All the good, all the blessing that God expected Israel to bring into the world was replaced by greed, conflict, and destruction.

Now here is the warning. The same could be true for us. In John 15 Jesus says,

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Do you see the connection to Isaiah 5? In both cases a vine was planted and grew branches so that it could bear fruit—so it could fulfill its purpose of bringing blessing into the world. But if it does not do that, it will wither and die. It will end up wasted, like the worst draft pick in NFL history. What a tragedy it would be if we as individuals or we as a church ended up as God’s most disappointing draft choice.

But here is a key difference. In Isaiah 5 God cannot explain what happened to the people of Israel. Do you remember what the Lord said in verse 4? “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” In Isaiah 5 the Lord is at a loss to explain why Israel rejected God, and because there is no explanation for why Israel went bad, there is no solution for them.

But in John 15 Jesus gives both an explanation and a reason for hope. Why does the vine go bad? Because it has separated itself from its source. In verse 4 Jesus says, “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”

The key to bearing fruit, the key to fulfilling the purpose for which you were created, for which you were chosen by God, for which God paid an enormous price to get you on his team—the key to being a fruitful productive vineyard is your relationship to Jesus. In our relationship to him we get the strength, the nourishment, to serve God in all our other relationships.

In his book *Soul Survivor* Philip Yancey tells of a visit he had with a Christian teacher named Henri Nouwen. At the time Nouwen was providing daily help to a profoundly handicapped young man named Adam. Nouwen described his work with Adam in these words:

It takes me about an hour and a half to wake Adam up, give him his medication, carry him into his bath, wash him, shave him, clean his teeth, dress him, walk him to the kitchen, give him his breakfast, put him in his wheelchair and bring him to the place where he spends most of the day with therapeutic exercises. ... He does not cry or laugh. Only occasionally does he make eye contact. His back is distorted. His arm and leg movements twisted. He suffers from severe epilepsy and, despite heavy medication, sees few days without grand-mal seizures. Sometimes, as he grows suddenly rigid, he utters a howling groan. On a few occasions I've seen one big tear roll down his cheek (p. 314).

Yancey asked Nouwen if it was hard to care for Adam day after day. It was difficult at first, Nouwen admitted. Physical touch, affection, and the messiness of caring for such a dependant person did not come easily to him. But he said he learned to love Adam by thinking about what it must be like for God to love us. When he thought about how God loves us—people who are spiritually uncoordinated, relationally retarded, able to respond with nothing better than inarticulate grunts and groans—when Nouwen remembered how God cares for us, and it gave him the strength to go on caring for Adam.

Being a fruitful vineyard, fulfilling our purpose, having meaningful productive lives that bless other people—these things are not easy. The nourishment, the guidance, the strength to keep trying—these things come to us from God through Jesus. People sometimes say it does not matter what you believe as long as you love people. But I say that loving people is about the hardest thing there is to do. You won't last long at the business of loving people unless you believe and remember how much God loves you.

The blessing of love that God has given us in Jesus gives us the strength to be a blessing to others. It is true that faith without love is empty and hypocritical. There are too many people who claim to love Jesus but don't love anyone else. Faith without love is destructive. But love without faith can be downright discouraging. Love without faith will eventually wither and burn out. If you want to fulfill your purpose, your calling, to be a blessing to others, you will need nourishment from Jesus, or you're not going to make it.

- Ken Onstot  
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