

“The Lord’s Vineyard”

Isaiah 5:1-30

Sunday, July 24th, 2022

You just can’t beat a good story, can you?

A shop owner placed a sign above his door that said: “Puppies For Sale.” A little boy saw the sign and approached the owner.

“How much are you selling the puppies for?” he asked. The store owner replied, “\$50.” The little boy pulled out change from his pocket. “I have \$2.37,” he said. “Can I please look at them?”

The shop owner smiled. Out of the kennel came Lady, who ran down the aisle of his shop followed by five tiny balls of fur. One puppy was lagging considerably behind. Immediately the little boy singled out the limping puppy and said, “What’s wrong with that little guy?”

The shop owner explained that the puppy didn’t have a hip socket. It would always limp. It would always be lame. With excitement the little boy said, “That is the puppy that I want to buy.” The shop owner said, “No, you don’t want to buy that little dog. If you really want him, I’ll just give him to you.”

The little boy got upset. He looked straight into the store owner’s eyes, pointing his finger, and said, “I don’t want you to give him to me. That little dog is worth every bit as much as all the other dogs and I’ll pay full price. In fact, I’ll give you \$2.37 now, and \$1 a month until I have him paid for.

The shop owner countered, “You really don’t want to buy this little dog. He is never going to be able to run and jump and play with you like the other puppies.”

To the shop owner’s surprise, the little boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg to reveal a badly twisted, crippled left leg supported by a big metal brace. He looked up at the shop owner and softly replied, “Well, I don’t run so well myself, and that little puppy will need someone who understands!”

Isaiah spins a story in today’s sermon text, **Isaiah Chapter 5**. Isaiah’s story makes up the first 7 verses. It’s called the Lord’s Vineyard. The remaining 23 verses - verses 8-30 of chapter 5 - cover the bitter crop produced in that vineyard.

We’re 5 weeks into our series of sermons working through the Old Testament book of Isaiah called *The Holy One of Israel*. Isaiah was God’s spokesman to His people, Judah. The message Isaiah brought to them was an unpleasant one; God’s people have invited His judgment because they did not please God in their thoughts and actions. We’ll begin by examining the first 7 verses.

Isaiah 5:1-7:

“Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:
My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.

2 - He 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, but it brought forth wild grapes.

3 - “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.

4 - 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?

5 - And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; *and* break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 - I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.”

7 - For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry *for help*.”

The chapter begins in a way that reminds us of the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) where a Shulamite girl expresses her love for her Beloved. Here in Isaiah, the “Beloved” or “Beloved One” is mentioned three times in the first verse of chapter 5.

In other parts of his great book, Isaiah puts the truth bluntly, plainly and clearly. But here he writes a poem, tells a parable - he paints a picture - and it is the picture of a man who made a vineyard for himself. He picked the best place he could find, on a very fruitful hill with fertile ground. He took all the stones out of it, fenced it, put a wall around it and built a tower. Then he planted these choice vines and he looked for a nice crop.

But, instead of a fine crop of the juiciest and sweetest grapes, he found nothing but wild grapes. Isaiah explains here why this happened, and makes a pronouncement as to what this man would do. Then, having painted his picture, having written his poem, Isaiah himself applies it and says again in verse 7, “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry *for help*.”

Dear ones, like Isaiah, we, the Church, have a message of mercy and truth to declare to others. God is merciful, but He also is just, and He must punish sin. He is merciful in giving us time to repent - to turn away from our sins - but there will come a day when His truth will be poured out upon all who stand in opposition to Him. As Isaiah did in his day, so we must do in our day.

It begins with fellow professing believers in Jesus Christ. *Is there someone you know who is living in sin, a person who also professes to be a Christian?* If so, take some

time to consider whether you are the one who should tell him/her the truth as Isaiah did to Judah. If you are, begin by reminding that person of God's kindness. If this has no effect, warn him/her of God's judgment. Pray for that person to repent.

Having considered the Lord's vineyard in the first 7 verses, Isaiah now spells out what he meant by "wild/sour grapes" (strink-fruit) which the vineyard produced. Follow along with me as I read verse 8-25:

"**Woe** to those who join house to house; they add field to field, till *there is* no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land? **9** - In my hearing the Lord of hosts *said*, 'Truly, many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant. **10** - For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah."

11 - Woe to those who rise early in the morning, *That* they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, *till* wine inflames them! **12** - The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of His hands. **13** - Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because *they have* no knowledge; their honorable men *are* famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. **14** - Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure; their glory and their multitude and their pomp, and he who is jubilant, shall descend into it. **15** - People shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled. **16** - But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness. **17** - Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat.

18 - Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; **19** - That say, "Let Him make speed *and* hasten His work, that we may see *it*; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know *it*."

20 - Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21 - Woe to *those who are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

22 - Woe to men mighty at drinking wine,

Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, **23** - who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man! **24** - Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

25 - Therefore the anger of the Lord is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses *were* as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

The six woes in these verses should cause us to think of Jesus in **Matthew Chapter 23** where he similarly pronounced woes upon the Pharisees between verses 13 and 29 (7 total). These woes are sins (the "bad fruit" mentioned in verse 5). They brought judgment on God's people. I rely on some of the late Warren Wiersbe's thoughts on these woes.

1st woe - Verses 8-10 picture covetousness. In disobedience to the Law, the rich defrauded the poor and seized their land. These wealthy exploiters built large mansions and extensive farms, but God warned them that their houses would be empty and their harvests meager. Imagine 10 acres of grapevines yielding only a bath which was about 6 gallons of wine and a homer (6 bushels) of seed producing half a bushel (an ephah) of grain! *Do you covet what other people have? Are you content with what the Lord has given you, or do you want more, simply so you can be proud of yourself?*

2nd woe - Verses 11-17 describe drunkenness. The sin was not responsible drinking; it was irresponsible drunkenness. Isaiah describes people so addicted to alcohol that they began their revelries as soon as they woke up in the morning, and they continued their drinking till late at night. Drink was their life! *Is it your life? How do you know? Do you value partying over hard work?*

3rd woe - Verses 18 & 19 illustrate carelessness. This sin speaks flippantly of the Lord and His warnings. They even mocked the Holy One of Israel and dared the Lord to punish them. We have skeptical scoffers today who speak lightly of the Lord and think they will get away with it. God will not be mocked!

4th woe - Verse 20 - pictures leaders using deception to justify their positions. They twisted the definitions of good and evil. That which was good they called evil; that which was evil they called good. A society that has reached the point where this is common fare among its civic and spiritual leaders is a society that could be on the brink of judgment. *Are you able to discern whether your leaders are men of truth or hypocrites like those in Isaiah's day? Pray for your leaders by name.*

5th woe - Verse 21- describes pride. Instead of listening to God, the leaders consulted with one another and made decisions based on their own wisdom. "Professing to be wise, they became fools," (**Romans 1:22**); "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil (**Proverbs 3:7**).

6th woe - Verses 22-25 speak to injustice. The judges who were supposed to enforce the law used their authority to free the guilty and punish the innocent. Isaiah warned such corrupt politicians that the fire of God's wrath was coming and would burn them up. They were cut flowers that had no roots, beautiful for a time, but destined to die and turn to dust.

Isaiah said Judah's punishment for these woes/sins would come in the form of war; an enemy from afar would attack them. These are the last 5 verses of **Chapter 5**:

“He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, and will whistle to them from the end of the earth; surely they shall come with speed, swiftly. **27** - No one will be weary or stumble among them, no one will slumber or sleep; nor will the belt on their loins be loosed, nor the strap of their sandals be broken; **28** - Whose arrows *are* sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses’ hooves will seem like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. **29** - Their roaring *will be* like a lion, they will roar like young lions; yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey; they will carry *it* away safely, and no one will deliver. **30** - In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea. And if *one* looks to the land, behold, darkness *and* sorrow; and the light is darkened by the clouds.

The invader is not named here, but is almost certainly Assyria. Assyria would be God’s judgment of Judah. Judgment might come through disease, famine, war, or some other form. We don’t know. But one thing we can be sure of: if we no longer honor God’s law, judgment will come from the least expected place, and with it will come death and destruction.

A New Testament illustration of this Old Testament text - Mark 12:1-11. It’s amazing how these two passages of Scripture support and mirror each other.

12 Then Jesus began teaching them with parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. **2** At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. **3** But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed. **4** The owner then sent another servant, but they insulted him and beat him over the head. **5** The next servant he sent was killed. Others he sent were either beaten or killed, **6** until there was only one left—his son whom he loved dearly. The owner finally sent him, thinking, ‘Surely they will respect my son.’

7 “But the tenant farmers said to one another, ‘Here comes the heir to this estate. Let’s kill him and get the estate for ourselves!’ **8** So they grabbed him and murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard.

9 “What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do?” Jesus asked. “I’ll tell you—he will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others. **10** Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures? ‘The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.

11 - This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful to see.”

I began with a story, and Isaiah told us one as well. I’d like to close with another.

The story goes back some time ago. A man punished his 3-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and he became infuriated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree.

Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, “This is for you, Daddy.” The man was embarrassed by his earlier over reaction, but his anger flared again when he found out the box was empty.

He yelled at her, stating, “Don’t you know, when you give someone a present, there is supposed to be something inside?” The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and cried, “Oh, Daddy, it’s not empty at all. I blew kisses into the box. They’re all for you, Daddy.”

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl and he begged for her forgiveness. Only a short time later, an accident took the life of the child. It is also told that her father kept that gold box by his bed for many years and whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.