

Sermon
The Garden of the Lord
Isaiah 5
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February 19, 2017

As we come to study Isaiah 5 this morning, we read a love song, from the Lord. But this is a song of a love gone bad. A song of a love that has been unfaithful. What might God do when our unfaithfulness is exposed?

- 5 Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
- 2 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;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.
- 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
- 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
- 5 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.
- ⁶ I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briers and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
- ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry!

Jelly Beans are popular in the Smith house, especially Jelly Bellys. A couple years ago we found out about Bean Boozled Jelly Bellys. Have you heard of them?

These come in a box with 20 flavors of Jelly Beans: ten classic jelly bean flavors and ten terrible flavors. The problem is that the ten good flavors are matched to 10 terrible flavors with identical outsides. So from looking at the jelly bean, for example, you don't know if the yellow one with spots is Buttered Popcorn flavor, or Rotten Egg flavor. You can't tell until you bite into it if the white one is caramel corn or moldy cheese. Or worst of all if the orange is peach or throw-up flavor. Why these have developed a market, I really can't explain; nevertheless, they are selling like hotcakes...and I've had my fair share of moldy cheese jelly beans. Why am I telling you this? I'm so glad you asked.

In Isaiah 5 is a love song of a vineyard that was not as it appeared; it looked good to the eye, but the fruit was bitter. God in his grace, as the Good Vinedresser, worked to produce a wonderful crop of grapes. And yet, as verse 4 asks, when I looked for it to produce grapes, did it produce wild grapes? Literally what it says in the Hebrew is when I looked for it to produce fruit, why did it produce stink fruit?

The problem was that from the outside, good grapes and stink grapes looked exactly the same! They all looked healthy. You couldn't tell the difference by looking at the surface, but when you bit into the wild grapes, stink fruit, they were rancid and bitter.

Verse 7 makes plain, this song really isn't about a vineyard; it is about God's people. In Judah, things were going well, or so it seemed. They had received blessing after blessing. And it appeared that their lives were fruitful and lush, but when you scratched beneath the surface, there was rottenness. No integrity. Hypocritical. They had their masks up to look good as if they have it all together, all the while rotten to the core in their hearts. They needed a new vine to produce better fruit.

Well, thank the Lord the church today doesn't struggle with that. Right? The people of God today—we-- need to hear this as much as the people of God then.

Let's ask first, What has God graciously provided?

The picture is that the Lord so tended the vineyard that nothing was left undone...good soil (1), removed stones and planted (2). In Israel, there are innumerable stones just under the surface of the ground, so to plant well, these stones must be removed. The Gardner in the song does that

and uses the stones to build a double protection of hedge and wall (5). He tended it. And he expected results, such that he even built a watch tower in the midst of the vineyard, v. 2. A watchtower is a place where the vine dresser lives while tending the vineyard, and cut a wine vat, a place to permanently store the wine after it is produced. What is God communicating in the love song? Judah is precious and his care is nurturing it. God has nurtured his people to be a place for his dwelling—put his watchtower among us! He has done so much, lavished so much blessing, favor, and kindness that his people would be fruitful.

Upon us as God's people, moving from the metaphor of a vineyard, to the reality of what it means for us, we could not do any better than camping out in Romans 8 for a little while. It is quite a catalog of his gracious and abundant provision! God has promised to remove our condemnation through our union with Jesus, by faith in his work. He has offered to us the Holy Spirit, pledged to give us a regenerated heart so that we can live for him and not ourselves. He offers to dwell with us, giving us an internal witness by the Spirit of his fatherly and tender love for us. He invites us by faith to be co-heirs with Christ. The promises of a future and a life with him, in a new heaven and new earth where our hope will be our conscious reality of life. When we are far too weak to hang on and pray, the promised Spirit will help us to hang on, pray for us, testifying in us. Not only this, but he sovereignly moves heaven and earth to turn the events of this world for the ultimate good of his children. He tells us that by faith in what Jesus has done for us, NOTHING could separate us from his love.

When you line all this up, rehearsing all this grace and blessing, it makes the pain of v. 4 all the more prominent. **What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done it?**

What more could be done, he asks, for this people upon whom grace after grace has been given and yet they live as if they have never been touched by grace and kindness at all?

This song is a lament, of a love nourished by every blessing, yet it was unreturned. The problem is that the vines of our hearts—the roots of our souls—are riddled with the disease of sin. We need to be joined to, grafted into a new vine.

But what specifically was the problem with the stink fruit? That image sounds bad, but there is a particular flavor to the rancid condition within the souls of religious people like us.

The Nature of our Rottenness

Look at v. 7. What happens when the vintner comes to inspect the crop?

**7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry!**

Isaiah uses words that sound alike. **Justice (mishpat) but saw bloodshed (mishpah), righteousness (sedaqa) and heard outcry (se aqa).**

Why the poetic use of sounds here? The words sound so much alike, but are so different in meaning. Same is true for Judah. On the surface things looked so good, felt so good to many, but underneath, was horror, sin

and devastation. When you look on the outside of these grapes, they looked fine. But when you taste, bite into one, it is only bitter. This is so like our lives. Are we satisfied with lives that look good on the outside by appearing godly, and yet rancid fake fruit is the truth of our hearts? But We can't beanboozle the Lord. He can tell the difference.

Diseased vines produced sick fruit, just like sin-sick hearts produce the fruit of sinful lives—even when those lives may look good and well put together from the outside. When the masks are on and the pretense of playing church is high, at first glance no one may be able to tell that our lives produce stink fruit.

Our problem is seeking to take advantage of all the benefits of being the people of God, and yet living with dead hearts! THAT was the problem in Judah, and is still such a problem for US, the people of God today.

The question for you and me today is: What have we done, and what will we do with all this amazing grace poured out upon us? Does it even matter to us? Are we content to live hollow and empty lives, playing church, seeking to look like a fine little vineyard from a distance, and yet have rotten and bitter hearts? Are we happy with that? Are you happy with looking good on the outside, but nurse a heart of darkness on the inside?

Martin Luther King, Jr. said once "the worst atheism is practical atheism." Are we content with a life of practical atheism, a ritualized church life that has no power to transform, just a box to be checked. OR, do we desire the sweet fruit of grace in our lives? **To put a fine point on it:** do we want a society church, a location to see and be seen, OR a harvest of lives renewed and transformed by all the blessings Christ has lavished on us, a life in keeping with what he is doing for us? What do you want? For Central? For yourself?

Isaiah takes us on a tour of the vineyard through much of the rest of chapter 5. He holds up to our view six bunches of these stink grapes that fill up our lives. What does our practical atheism look like when examined?

Quickly, v. 8, the first bunch is greed. Joining house to house was about amassing a huge estate such that the rightful land inheritance of other families was taken away and oppressed at the hand of the land tycoon. Wealth itself is not evil. However, wealth gained through injustice, through acting on covetousness, is offensive to God! When we live as if we must provide for ourselves by any means, we have forgotten the God who provides. It is a practical atheism.

The second and third bunches, in v. 11-12, 18-19 are alike, showing a passion for indulgence of the flesh which dulls passion for the Lord. When pursuit of our pleasures takes root, then passion for Jesus lies fallow. These passions for pleasure, v. 13, can never satisfy; we only grow thirstier. Indulging sin is like drinking salt water. The more we drink of it the thirstier we get. It may look innocent on the surface, but sin increases its own appetite. Or as v. 18-19 picture, sin becomes like thick cords that bind us to our sin. Where are you finding yourself thirstier for sin? Bound and unable to break free? Living for man's approval will only have you crave more of it. That first look at pornography will bind you to want more and more. That 1st click becomes the 2nd, becomes the 49th, as the sin takes us deeper in, making us thirstier and thirstier for it. It is a practical atheism that assumes God can't satisfy me, so I'll satisfy myself.

The fourth, fifth and sixth bunches in v. 20-23 are alike: perverting God's commands to make sin seem normal. V. 21, sin can become so normal, that we call it good. We may find ourselves redefining sin so that it doesn't sound so evil; it becomes "just the way we do things." Or we

look for loopholes in God's commands and still try to technically be faithful. The evil of using words to berate or harm, can be twisted to say, "I'm just a truth teller." Or sexual perversions recounted are dismissed as "boys will be boys." Or I lied, I took advantage of that situation or person but no big deal. No one got hurt. It is a big deal. There are no victimless sins and abuses. When we normalize evil we are one step from being overtaken by it. It is a practical atheism that says I know better than God what is serious versus what we can wink at dismissively.

Why show us so vividly these things? The reason is so that we will spit out the bitter fruit and turn to him for sweet fruit.

The Jelly Belly company has marketed a BeanBoozled game, and my kids love it. You have a board with a spinner that you flick to go round and round and land on a color. Whatever color that is, the person whose turn it is must take a jelly bean that color and eat it. But again, you don't know if the spotted one, for example is tutti fruttii or stinky sock...until you bite down. But when you do bite on the stinky socks taste, you just spit it out. We play this game with the trash can right next to us. You taste the bad and get rid of it immediately.

That's why our Shepherd is so vivid here for his people. When we taste the bitterness in our souls, we will spit it out, REPENT, turn from it and be healed to produce the sweet faithfulness he calls us to have!

Do you see yourself here? A situation. A sin. A problem. A practically atheistic life? Spit it out! Repent and turn to Jesus for help.

But none of us are capable of reviving ourselves because the vine is diseased! What ever nutrients are put into a diseased vine contribute to diseased fruit: stink fruit! We are desperately needy for a vine transplant. **We need to be joined to another vine another root that will produce**

different fruit thorough us. We need a revival of heart, of will. We need a NEW VINE to be planted within us. You may know of yet another place in the Bible where the vine is spoken of, John 15, where we see a new vine, which produces a new life.

We are Joined to a New Vine, for a New Fruitfulness

The vine in Isaiah 5 only produces rotten, rancid fruit. But listen to Jesus in John 15.

Jn 15:1, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus is aware all through the Gospels of Isaiah's prophecy, and here he offers himself as the TRUE vine, the TRUE man of God, who lived perfectly righteous life of obedience, and died upon the cross as payment for our sin. In the crucifixion, our old nature, the bent and broken, stink fruit of our lives went into the grave cursed in Jesus. Our guilt removed by his blood. Yet when he was raised, new life for us came with him; the power of our sin has been broken by his resurrection life—now in us by faith! He's saying if you want new life, we must be grafted into a new vine. If we long for fruitful lives that honors the Father, then our lives must be connected, in union, with his—so that the nourishment, the stuff of life come to US from HIM! Through him!

He is saying to us, "I am the one who bears fruit for God. Without me, you can do nothing. If you abide in me, you bear fruit that lasts."¹ Do you

¹ Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Isaiah* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL, 2005), p. 73.

want genuine fruit that honors God? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control? You want those? They are ALL drawn from ME!

By faith, we are connected to Jesus as a part of him as we abide, or remain, in him. Do you want to see the power of those old sins broken in your life, that old diseased vine put away? Then abide in the new Vine, the Lord Jesus! Remain in His Word so that the nutrients, the chemicals, the life that you need comes from the Vine! Remain in his love that says no matter what is going on today, you are a daughter or son of the king. Nothing will change that because you are ingrafted into the Vine, the Lord Jesus. By faith that it is true, the assurance of his love can strengthen you.

You know the only way to ensure with those Beanboozled things that all the yellow ones are buttered popcorn—not rotten eggs, is to go back to the manufacturer. You have to make sure you are drawing from the right box. When we draw from that box of trying harder, or image management, we will ONLY find the rancid fruit of rebellion. Instead, draw on Jesus who produces the sweet fruit of holiness within us when we are united to him in faith. Repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus that he might change us from the inside out.

His promise is to nourish us, by his Word, by His Spirit, in the Supper today. Trust in the Vine, given for you.