

The Bitter Song of the Vineyard – *Isaiah 5*

Introduction – Jesus said that you would know a tree by its fruit (Luke 6:43-45), and the sour grapes from this vineyard speak to the kind of plant Judah has become. Isaiah 5 is not one of those passages in Isaiah that, in the midst of dark judgment, has an obvious silver lining of hope and promise – unless one considers verse 16 with faith and the knowledge of the Vine of the New Israel.

The Song of the Vineyard (vv1-7) – Isaiah begins to sing a sad song about the house of Israel (see also Psalm 80 where this song is sung again when it had come to pass). “My *Well-beloved*” is the Lord and the vineyard is the house of Israel, planted on a fruitful hill (or upon the “*son of oil*” even David, the anointed king – v1). God did everything, using agrarian metaphors, to clear and prepare and plant and protect and cultivate His vineyard – nothing was to be expected but wonderful fruit (v2). He opens Himself up for charges (v3): what more could He have done (v4)? And yet, because it has brought forth such terrible grapes, He is going to tear it all down (vv4b-6). Primarily the charge is laid upon the heads of Judah: where there should have been justice (*mishpat*) there is oppression (*mispahk*), where there should have been righteousness (*tsadaqah*), there is wailing (*tse`aqah*).

A Bunch of Sour Grapes (vv8-25) – Seven woes would describe the fullness of the bunch, all spoiled, all wild, all sour and worthless. Only six are listed here (the seventh woe is delayed until later – John would delay the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet in the same way in Revelation).

The Bad Fruit of Greed (vv8-10) – God curses those who seek to expand their wealth at the expense of the poor, by ignoring God-given property rights (like Ahab did with Naboth – 1 Kings 21), and promises that He will cause that land and property to be desolate and unfruitful. You do not want to own anything that does not have the blessing of God upon it. It has been said that God does not mind his people having money; He minds money having His people. Riches are given by God to be received with thankfulness, generosity, and an obligation to use it for kingdom-good (1 Tim 6:17-19).

The Bad Fruit of Debauchery (vv11-12) – They have given themselves to unrestrained, self-indulgent immoral behavior, boasting in their ability to party harder than anyone else. God is no kill-joy; he is not condemning wine or music, but the use of such things without restraint, and especially when the chief interest in life has become self-pleasure and not the works of the Lord. It is the difference between a table heavy-laden with a Thanksgiving feast in order to give thanks and a vomitus tailgate party where no one remembers where they are or why they are there.

Therefore: Exile and Sheol (vv13-17) – The immoral use of these blessings brings forth a dreadful, national humbling from the hand of God. And it is done by Him to His glory (v16, Rom 9:22). When judgment falls from the hand of God, this in no way dilutes His glory; rather, His glory is magnified (Rev 19:1-5).

The Bad Fruit of Blasphemy (vv18-19) – They mock God for not coming quickly and for not protecting His followers (Psalm 22:8); they claim they see no sign of God’s presence in this world. There is a saying: God’s mills grind slowly, but they grind very small.

The Bad Fruit of Perversity (v20) – Despising God and His Word, they rewrite ethics, they reinterpret truth, and they redefine pleasure/beauty. Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are perverted.

The Bad Fruit of Arrogance (v21) – They became wise according to their own standards (Prov 3:7, 26:12; Rom 1:22). They became their own gods.

The Bad Fruit of Injustice (vv22-23) – Here are the great men of the nation, who are only great behind a bar. But this is only one fruit of such lack of self-control. These self-absorbed men accept bribes from the wicked and discard justice for the people. They rarely only destroy their own lives.

Therefore: Destruction and Ruin (vv24-25) – God is just. God will vindicate His name and His holiness. God will repay every evil and every sin. Jesus uses the same language, the same parables, and gives the same warnings in His ministry to Israel in His day (Matt 21:33-45).

Whistling up His Wrath (vv26-30) – God calls up the enemy – and we will see later that it is Assyria. The destroyer of the vineyard is to be a foreign invader, who will believe he is acting autonomously and from his own motives, and yet will actually be the instrument of the Lord’s hand. This is not a quaint view of ancient history. Even the first Christians understood that Herod and Pontius Pilate, in conspiring to bring about the death of Jesus, had merely played into God’s sovereign hands per His script (Acts 4:27-28). There also is a speed, an astounding quickness, to the moment God brings His judgment. While He is slow to wrath (Psalm 103:8), once He says “now,” at His whistle “*they come out of their hive like bees to do his bidding*” – Oswalt. Every man and woman who thinks there is plenty of time to repent needs to heed this warning. Every nation that thinks it has plenty of resources, strength, wisdom or goodwill needs to heed this warning. Jesus warned that such judgment was just at the door for Israel in that generation as well (Matt 24:1-3, 34). And He came.

The Vine of the New Israel – There is no hope here, unless you know the words of Jesus as well. He is the true vine and His vineyard is the true vineyard (John 15). Everyone who abides in Christ will bear much fruit, good fruit, good grapes (15:5). And everyone who does not abide in Christ will not bear good fruit and he will be cast out as a branch, gathered and thrown into the fire (v6). Do you want to bear good fruit? Simply ask while abiding in His Word (vv7-8).

And this is what is going on in the world since the coming of Jesus and the New Israel. Instead of good wine (justice and righteousness) there was blood. Jesus has come, has poured out His blood-judgment, shedding His blood in the city of blood, blood which becomes wine in the resurrection of the New Jerusalem, a new city of righteousness, *“so that Jerusalem, the city of blood, might become a vineyard, a city of justice, a city of wine”*- Leithart

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