

The Vineyard

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[0 : 00] Alright, so here we are in Isaiah 5 and when you look at this passage at the very beginning you realize quickly that it's a song. So Isaiah says right at the beginning, let me sing.

And the commentators think that Isaiah is probably at one of the annual feasts that the Israelites would gather for in Jerusalem. And it's very normal at the feast days in Jerusalem throughout the week for people to sing. They would sing in the marketplace, people would sing in the forecourt of the temple, they would sing songs of all sorts.

Of course, many of those songs were positive. And then here comes Isaiah with this song that he sings. And as soon as you read it, the first six verses is the song that he sings.

And you think in verse one, maybe this is a love song. It almost sounds at the beginning like it's going to be like the song of Solomon. Let me sing a song for my beloved.

And you think this sounds good. And then you realize that it's not. It's a sad song. This song is a lament. It's not a comedy. It's a tragedy.

[1 : 08] And you realize it because he's not singing to the beloved, but on behalf of is the word. So he's singing in the name of the beloved and the beloved here is God.

And he's singing a song of lament from the lips of God to the people at one of these great feasts in Jerusalem. It's supposed to be happy and it's not. It's sad occasion.

Isaiah ruins the mood here in the middle of the pilgrimage. And the sad song is about the fact that God had taken Israel, Judah, Jerusalem in particular, and planted her, saved her, planted her as his great vineyard.

And from her, he wanted to produce sweet wine. He wanted to make something beautiful, reestablish the Garden of Eden, even. That's the sweet wine that he wanted to make from her.

And when you get to verse three, you find out what happened. It says that instead verse two, in fact, that she yielded not sweet wine, but wild grapes.

[2 : 11] Now the Hebrew term there is not actually wild grapes, but it says stinky fruit. Very literally it says that he planted this vineyard and all he got was stinky fruit.

The grapes stink, it says. They're rotten. You can't use them to make the wine. They're putrid. And you read something like that and you say, what in the world does that mean for us?

Two things. One, we've got to learn why the grapes stink. And then secondly, how this passage is even worse than it appears and how that actually becomes good news.

All right. So first, why the grapes stink? Why the grapes stink? I don't know is the answer. I'm not sure how actual grapes become rotten and putrid on the vine.

But the point, it doesn't matter because the point of the passage is not a point about botany or viticulture, the word, the science of being a good vine dresser.

[3 : 19] It's a parable, right? You read it, you realize that this song is a parable. God is the vine dresser, the planter, the vineyard maker, and Judah, Jerusalem specifically, is the vine.

And they're the grapes. The people of Jerusalem are the grapes. He saved them, he planted them, and he got rotten stuff out of them. And you read that and you read, if you were paying attention to the reading, you would have seen the misery that comes after this versus eight to 30 describe the destruction, the burning of the vineyard that is coming.

And it's a hard passage to read, especially for us modern people, about what God's going to do to this vineyard. And at the same time, if you've been here for the past three weeks, you've got to say there's nothing new.

I mean, this is the exact same story we've read about every single chapter. In chapter one, God has said, you, you, Jerusalem are prodigal, you're my children, but you're prodigal sons, and you've run away from me, and you're going to be judged.

Then he said, you, Jerusalem are the faithful city that's become a prostitute to me, and you're going to be judged. And then last week, chapter three and four, he said, I'm going to take all the goods away from you that you chase after your idols, and you're going to be judged.

[4 : 35] And so there's nothing really new here, except in chapter one, two, three and four, there's a moment where you, you're a bunch of prodigal sons, but I'm going to redeem you whether you like it or not.

And then you're, you're the faithful city that became a prostitute, but I'm going to make you the great city, the desire of all the nations, whether you like it or not. And last week he said, I'm going to judge your idolatry, but then I'm going to send the branch, as Hunter preached about last Sunday, the branch, the, a word for the Messiah, and I'm going to redeem you.

And then you come to chapter five. This is the last chapter of the preface of Isaiah, chapter six starts the main body of this oracle, of this prophecy of Isaiah.

This is the end of the preface, it's the end of a section, and it's the climax, the height of this section.

And this is what one of the great commentators, Alec Matier, he says about it.

He says in chapter one and chapter three, there were places where the vineyard was mentioned and the vineyard in chapter one and chapter three was protected from judgment, but not here.

[5 : 45] Now, in chapter five, at the end of the preface, the vineyard is the place where total destruction is pronounced. The future now seems like nothing but a question mark.

Where even the Lord's come to the point where he asked, what more can I do for them? And in chapter five, sin takes away every hope and nothing is left but gathering darkness.

Now you get that, you get, you get the diagnosis in verse seven. This is the song ends in verse six, Isaiah song. Verse seven is the diagnosis. And I want you to hear it.

I want you to hear it, hear it, hear it in the way it was sung for just a moment. It says the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel. And God came down and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed.

He looked for righteousness in Jerusalem, but behold, an outcry. That's an outcry of the oppressed and the poor. Now just it's important to know this is a song.

[6 : 45] Now listen to what Isaiah says. He says in the Hebrew text that God came and he looked at Jerusalem. He looked for justice. He looked for Mishpat in God, mis-pah.

He looked for righteousness. He looks for Sey Daka and God Sey Aka. And so it doesn't come across in English, but in the Hebrew, there's only one letter difference in those words.

And it's saying that God came down and there's only one letter difference, one slight difference between light and darkness. One little change in the song moves from justice to bloodshed.

And the question is, what is it? What's the key? What is the thing that made them stinky grapes? What is the thing that brought them from light to darkness? And that's the lesson for us.

What is it? Why is everything going totally dark and what can we learn? Now verse eight to 30 spells that out, but we don't have time tonight to walk through that and to get all the details because there's so much.

[7 : 46] But there's a thesis statement that tells you everything you need to know in one verse and it's in verse 15. And in verse 15, you've got a thesis and we know it's the thesis because if you look carefully at the structure, you'll see that there's a break at verse 15.

But then also verse 15 is a quote from chapter two, verse nine. And he says in chapter two, verse nine, and here in verse 15, man is humbled.

Each one is brought low in the eyes of the literally high are brought low. That's the point. That's what he, that's the problem.

That's why the grapes stink in Jerusalem. And it's, it's clear. He couldn't say it any clearly. He's saying that the reason the grapes stink is because of pride.

That pride is the problem that has brought Jerusalem from light to darkness, that pride that the people of Jerusalem, after seeing God, after seeing God deliver them, bring them out of Egypt, bring them all the way to the beautiful vineyard of the promised land, planted to be a light in the midst of the nations, that their, the eyes of their heart were lifted high and pride has brought them to this place of being stinking grapes.

[9 : 00] Pride is the problem and pride is what's brought them low. Now what's pride? Pride is really clear what he means by being high, high in your heart, thinking much of yourself here.

And you can tell when you look at verse 16, it says, you see the play on words here. The eyes of the high are brought low, but the Lord of host is high.

You might see a little footnote in your Bible. The ESV translates it exalted, but it's literally high. It says, see the eyes of man are high, but they're going to be brought low, but the Lord really is high. And he's saying that what pride, what pride is, you know what pride is? Pride is when you're a bunch of grapes, but you think you planted the vineyard.

You know, you're, you're the vine and there was a vine dresser that gave you everything that planted you, that pruned you, that gave you your life, that watered you, that pulled the rocks away from your soil.

[9 : 58] But you say, it's when the grape says, I don't want to be the grape. I want to be the vineyard dresser. I want to be the planner. I want to be the master. I want to own the property. I want to be more than just a grape.

And he said that attitude, when the eyes of the human heart are lifted high, that's when we become stinking fruit. That's exactly what's happened in the midst of Jerusalem.

The grape says, I own this place. Now that means that the point is, it's actually really simple. It's, well, it's to say, it's to say that we were the grapes and we live, we live in a vineyard that we did not make.

And we've got to be able tonight to say that I live in a world, you live in a world that you didn't make. You breathe the oxygen that you don't create. You don't produce your food.

You didn't give yourself your birth. You didn't name yourself. You don't give yourself your body, your mind, your heart, your talents. That if you really think about it for just a moment, no matter what you believe in tonight, then almost every single thing you have is pretty much a gift from top to bottom.

[11 : 07] Even the money you make, maybe you're great at your job, but even the money you make is completely a product of your environment, the house you grew up in, the drive that you were given, the education that you were afforded, all of it.

It's all a gift from top to bottom that we're completely dependent. And pride is the opposite. Just when the grape says, I'm not dependent, I don't want to believe that I'm planted.

I want to say I'm the master. I pruned myself. And God says here that actually what that produces is nothing but rotteness. Rotteness and us and rotteness at a corporate level, it takes it to the point that this type of pride by verse 20 can create a culture where people say evil is good and good is evil.

And you see how that happens? Well, let me tell you how it happens. It happens because the passage makes a really close connection between pride and idolatry.

And you can see it, for example, in verse 8, it says, woe to those who join house to house. And it's saying, woe to people who have a house, but then oppress their neighbor in some way in the ancient world to acquire an extension.

[12 : 22] They said, I've got a house, but I need an extra sunroom. And so they kick their neighbor out of their house and they add house to house to house to house. And it's saying that, what's it saying? It's saying, woe to those who are chasing after wealth accumulation, who are making the true master of their life the God of accumulation of stuff, of material.

Or, hop down to verse 11 and 12, woe to the people who rise early in the morning, drink all day and party all night. Now the point is not that houses are bad, even big houses.

The point is not that wine is bad because God is the great vine dresser. He created it. It's a gift. But it's saying, woe because it's saying, what are those who chase after this little God and make pleasure their master or accumulation their master or whatever it may be.

And you see there's a close connection here between pride and idolatry. What is it? Calvin puts it like this, John Calvin, the great performer. He says, the human heart is a little miniature idol making factory.

And if you read on in Calvin, he says, and it's because pride is the conveyor belt. Pride is the machinery that's cranking the conveyor belt of the heart that's producing these little gods, these little idols that we're chasing after.

[13 : 39] Why? Because what does pride say? Pride says, there's no God above me and there's no law outside of me.

I'm going to make my own way. Maybe God says I'm a great, but I believe I'm the master of the vineyard. And when we do that, that means that we'll chase.

We'll chase a master that is something other than the true master. And that master may be of our own making, our own heart, our own self, our own power, our own wealth or something outside of us, some person, some relationship.

It could be anything. But from Isaiah forward, God has said there's always been a close connection between pride and idolatry. And what happens is when an entire culture embraces what used to be called the pride of life, the pride of life when the grapes say we're the master, we say, well, if I'm my own master, then my own desires tell me what is good.

And if an entire culture says my own desires, my own feelings, that's the definition of the good, then you've got a corporate wide systemic pride where eventually all of our desires become the definition of the moral order.

[14:53] And what if our desires are actually evil? What if our desires are bent and broken? We don't desire the good. But if all of us are walking around in the modern world, oh boy, the modern world, and we say my desires, my feelings, this is the place where I find out what's truly good for life, then you can have an entire culture that calls what God says is good, evil, and what is truly evil good.

You see, in other words, pride says my feelings are the master of my life. And it's when the grapes say to the vine dresser, I don't want to be made. I don't want to be cultivated.

I want to be my own master. Now Calvin says, he says this as we move on, he says, your mind. He says, your mind, your mind, my mind, your mind is as full of pride and as full of boldness.

It dares to imagine a God according to its own capacity as it sluggish sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with a crassest ignorance.

It conceives ultimately unreality in an empty appearance as God. Now Calvin says this, that our pride produces idolatry. And that means we live in a world of illusions.

[16:10] And the very last word he says there is that we are actually living not in reality, but in unreality that pride produces a world of illusion, a world of unreality.

There's a temptation here, reading a passage like Isaiah 5 about the vineyard to say how in the world could a people that were saved by miraculous deeds of God out of the land of Egypt, driven along and sustained by manna in the wilderness, planted and defeating the giants of Canaan come and get to a place where they disregard the living God.

Think about what they had seen. And Calvin like Isaiah is saying, no, no, no, wait, this, don't miss it. This is the condition of your heart.

Every single one of our hearts is fundamentally prideful. And we're idol making factories living in unreality, a life of illusion, a life where the grape says, I'm the master.

I planted the vineyard. And that means if we were the Israelites and the Jerusalem and living in Jerusalem in the seventh century BC, we would be stinking grapes too.

[17:22] That this is us, that this is every culture, every culture gets here where evil becomes good and good becomes evil. And it keeps happening. And it's because, well, George will finish this point and move on.

George Pinnock, one of the great Puritans, George Pinnock, George Swinnock, I should say. He said it like this. He said, pride is the shirt of the soul, the under garment.

It's the first thing we put on when we're born, and it's the hardest thing to take off. Now that leads us secondly to think about how it's actually worse than that.

It's actually worse than it first appears in this passage. The problem is pride. The problem with the vineyard is pride. But there's something underneath that even.

You come to a passage like Isaiah 5 and you see there's no good news here. Where are we going to get some good news from tonight? And of course we've got to say, well, we've got to go to the New Testament for that to get the good news.

[18:22] And obviously the place where we hear about good news is the Gospels. And we come to the Gospels, and you might remember the reading we did earlier from Luke 20.

We come to the Gospels, we come to Jesus Christ Himself, and Jesus told a parable just like this. You come to the good news, the Gospels, and Jesus talks about the vineyard and it's even worse than Isaiah 5.

Jesus I think in Luke 20 verses 9 to 18 that we read earlier is actually thinking about and expositing in some way. Isaiah chapter 5.

This is the story, the parable he tells about the vineyard. He says, a man, a master plants a vineyard and he hires it out to tenant farmers.

And it comes time for the harvest. And he sends his messenger to receive some of the crop, the produce from the tenant farmers. And what happens?

[19 : 19] The tenant farmers receive the messenger, but they don't want to hear what he has to say and they beat him. And they send him along the way. And this happens three times. Now, who are the messengers that Jesus was talking about in the first century context?

He was talking about the prophets. He was actually talking about Isaiah himself. He's saying that the one that told you the parable of the vineyard all the way back, the prophet Isaiah himself, who came to Jerusalem and you rejected his message.

Let me tell you about the vineyard. This is what's always been happening. I've been sending my prophets over and over again and they've said and sung the parable of the vineyard.

That pride is at the bottom of your heart and you did nothing but beat them to a pulp and send them away. Now, look, you can go read about Jeremiah. Jeremiah was literally beat up when he went to Israel.

The Israelites actually beat him and cast him out of the city. Three times Jesus says this happens. Now, you see, it's the same exact point as Isaiah five.

[20 : 22] Jesus is saying, what? The tenants, the tenant farmers, they don't want to have a master. They want to be the master.

He's looking out at Jerusalem. He's talking to Jews. He's talking to Gentiles. He's talking to the whole world and saying, don't you realize you're created? If you're a bunch of tenant farmers, you've been put in a vineyard and you're leasing it and I've given it to you.

The master's given it to you, but you don't want to be a tenant farmer. You want to be the master. Every time I send somebody to tell you the truth, you just beat them up and they run away.

That means the application is the exact same as Isaiah five. It's very simple for us tonight. No matter what you believe in tonight, you can at least come to a place again where you can see that you are at minimum relatively dependent to others for most things in your life.

The parable here is trying to draw us in to say, what if that our relative dependence on others actually preaches to us an absolute dependence? An absolute dependence that goes beyond all relativity.

[21 : 37] If all of us are relatively dependent on parents, relatively dependent on other people in our life to have the goods that we have, if everybody is relatively dependent, then who is it upon which we have absolute dependence?

There must be one. Jesus is coming to say, don't you see that there's a master? You're a bunch of tenant farmers, but you act like you're the master himself. You're a bunch of grapes and you act like you actually planted the grapevine yourself.

That means that pride is ultimately seeking control over that, which we don't have control of. This week at my house, something happened that happens pretty regularly.

We were standing in the kitchen and my youngest, the three-year-old said to my wife and I, he said, you're not the boss and mom's not the boss.

I am. Now, what he actually said was, I'm am because he doesn't know the grammar. So he says, you're not the boss. You're not the boss. Mom's not the boss. I'm am.

[22 : 40] That's it. He can't even get the grammar right. He says that he's the boss. So I responded and I said, well, that's sort of true, but God's the boss.

God's the big boss. He said, you're not the boss. Mom's not the boss. God's not the boss. I am. This is how Paul talks about the problem of pride.

He says that the movement from pride to humility is the movement from childhood to adulthood, is the metaphor Paul uses. It's not just a metaphor.

It's true, right? That the movement, at least relatively, basic philosophy, that when you grow from childhood to adulthood, you've got to grow into a person that realizes that you're dependent.

It's only the mark of the smallest child that truly thinks they're not dependent. And the irony is, of course, that they're the most dependent, that he can't survive without us.

[23 : 39] And the movement to adulthood is actually not a movement towards independence. It's actually the movement that says, wow, I'm totally dependent. You see, it's the movement from pride to humility, that that's the mark of becoming a real adult.

And that's basic philosophy, but it's religious. It's about seeing absolute dependence. It's beyond relative dependence that we experience in the life of this world.

Now, some of you have, all of us have lived a life where we say, I'm independent. But some of us have come to a point in our lives where through our suffering, we've realized we don't actually have control.

We lived a life of independence until we hit the wall. And then in the midst of our suffering, we were forced to say, oh boy, I'm not in control. You know, I tried to do everything.

I tried to put all my ducks in a row. And then that happened. And I lost it. And in those moments, you realize I'm not in control of my life. Now, if you're there tonight, if you've come to that point, then you'll be ready to hear the harder news, which is the point of the parable as we close.

[24 : 52] And here it is. At the climax of this parable, the parable of the vineyard interpreted as Zayah 5, Luke 20, the master says, I will send, you know, they keep beating up my messengers.

I'm going to send my son. And if I send my son, the heir, surely the tenants will give over the produce.

And when the son comes to the vineyard, you know, they didn't like the messengers, and so they punched them and they kicked them. But when the master's son comes, they take him outside of the vineyard and they beat him to death and murder him.

You see the point? The point is, boy, they didn't like the messenger of the master, but they hated his son. And you see the harder point to realize that's being made in Isaiah 5, that's being made here in Luke 20, is that there's something underneath our pride.

Our pride says, I don't want to be a grape. I want to be the vine master. I don't want to be a tenant farmer. I want to own the vineyard. But what's underneath that?

[26 : 04] What's underneath that the Bible says over and over again is actually that we're angry at God Himself, that we are at enmity, enemies of the living God by nature, that when we're born in this world, we're angry at God.

We don't want to be made and we were. I don't want to be a made person. I want to be a person who makes myself. And yet there's a God who exists that made me. And so I'm angry about it. I want to be an independent, but I'm dependent and I know it. You see the problem? The problem is that we all actually know we're dependent, but we don't want to be.

And so it makes us angry. And the symptom of that is the pride of life and the pride of life produces chasing after everything else in life, except the true God who loves us and upon the one, the one to whom we are absolutely dependent.

And so the text here say, now you say that that's a harsh diagnosis, but Romans 8, 4, Jesus, Paul puts it, he says, the natural person, people by nature are is, it says enmity toward God.

[27 : 11] You see, it doesn't say we have enmity that we're sometimes angry. We're sometimes enemies. He says the natural person is enmity is living in enmity against God, the living enemy.

And it says we will not submit to the law of God. Indeed, we cannot. Our hearts won't allow it. Pride is the symptom. Anger against the maker is the true underlying reality.

That's the biblical diagnosis. That's what's wrong with us. Now here's how it ends as we close the very end of the parable in Luke 20. Jesus mixes his metaphors spectacularly.

He goes from vineyard to the stone. He says this. Therefore, the stone that the builder rejected has now become the cornerstone.

He's saying the tenant farmers, all the people of this world that I made have rejected me. To put it in building metaphor, the perfect stone, the cornerstone of the true foundation of reality, you rejected it.

[28 : 20] You threw it out like it was a garbage stone. But now that stone has become the cornerstone. You see what he's saying? He's saying that when the tenant farmers kicked out the son of the master and they beat him to death and they murdered him, something completely unexpected happened, he actually became, he became in that moment.

He became in that moment the architectural foundation of a new city, a better Jerusalem. One built not upon the foundation of pride, but true humility.

You see, when Jesus was cast outside the vineyard, Jerusalem, and he was murdered by his own creation, the grapes, who said, we don't want to be mastered.

The master himself became fundamentally humble for us. He humbled himself all the way to the bottom. And now the new cornerstone of a better city, the new vine of a better grapes is humility.

The foundation of all hope is that the master became the humbled. And he says, I and ultimately humility have become a new and fresh cornerstone for you.

[29 : 34] There can be a new city based in humility, not pride. There can be a new vine because he's the true vine, he said, based in humility, not pride.

That God in the midst of our enmity against him is so for us that he would build a new thing like that. And the point of the passage, he says at the very end, he says this, that either you see that and Jesus Christ becomes the cornerstone of your life.

That humility in him becomes the rock bottom foundation of a better way for you or you break against that rock. It says, Jesus says, all who reject the cornerstone, that they're smashed against it.

And you see what he's saying? He's saying when pride bumps up against such a hard rock like truth, it can do nothing but shatter into pieces.

And that if you come to the truth, you say, boy, I really am absolutely dependent, that that's the foundation of a new and better way, a new and better life. The true cornerstone himself, the humility of Jesus Christ becomes the city in which you now live, in which you now exist.

[30 : 44] Now, let me say two things to you in two minutes to how to respond to this, how to respond. Here's the first.

True faith tonight has got to be categorized as an act of humility. You know, if pride is our great problem in enmity against God, then we've got to come tonight and say, what does it mean to have faith in this God, the Son of the Master who came for us?

It simply means to put on humility, to stand before the living God and put on the humility of faith.

That's how Paul talks about it. He says that faith is just simply humbling yourself tonight.

This is not, if you're a non-Christian tonight coming to explore, this is for you. If you're a Christian tonight, this is for you. Put on tonight the humility of faith before the living God that you need to survive the work week this week, that you need to come to the, to have joy, to know who you truly are, to not be the grape that walks through the world and says, I don't want to be a grape, I want to be the vine dresser.

But boy, when you say, no, I'm a grape. I'm a grape. That's when actually you stop stinking and you start to, you're starting to become sweet again because you've given your life away in humility.

[32 : 07] Humility in other words is true sweetness. It's true joy. It's a life that's really, really fulfillment. Pride is emptiness. It takes you to the point where you have to eventually realize I'm not in control.

Now the second thing is very simple and it's obvious and that's this. If you've got the humility of faith and you've got a faith that takes you to the place of freedom and what's true freedom?

True freedom is to walk the path of life saying, I truly am a tenant. I truly am a tenant farmer. In other words, it's to say, I actually recognize that there's a moral order above me, that there's a God on whom I depend, that I don't get to define the moral law.

I don't get to live according to my feelings, that I have to actually subject myself to the life that God demands of me. And the Bible says it over and over again that that is actually the movement from unreality, as Calvin put it, to reality.

Everything in God's vineyard, the way God wants us to live. That's the movement from the unreal to the real, from the illusory to the truth. And it's in the midst of that again, that you can actually find fulfillment, that you can actually find joy.

[33 : 22] It's an invitation. This is an invitation tonight on this Sabbath day evening. Come to a life of absolute dependence tonight on the living God who's come to rescue you from your own pride.

And if you do that, humble dependence, you're walking in the place of real joy. And that's an invitation. Let's pray.

Father, we ask that you would help us to see that without Jesus we're stinky grapes. That's strange as that sounds to say, but that's how you put it in Isaiah 5, Lord.

So we do ask, Father, that as many times as we've bumped up against the rock, the cornerstone himself and been shattered in our pride, that tonight we would find in him our architectural foundation and that in humility we would completely turn around and say, we depend on you.

And so that's the cry of our heart, give it to us as a gift. And we pray it in Christ's name. Amen.