

PM Isaiah 5 A Vineyard Destroyed

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[0 : 00] And that's on page 687 of the Church Bible. Isaiah chapter 5.

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard.

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 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.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

[1 : 10] 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?

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 briars and thorns shall grow up.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 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.

[2 : 29] Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing, Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses without inhabitant.

For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.

Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them.

They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord or see the work of his hands.

Therefore, my people, go into exile for lack of knowledge. Their honoured men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst.

[3 : 54] Therefore, Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revellers and he who exults in her.

Man is humbled, and each one is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are brought low. But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.

Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.

Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, who say, Let him be quick, let him speed his work, that we may see it.

Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it. 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.

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right.

[5 : 49] Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust.

For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them, and struck them, and the mountains quaked, and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets.

For all his anger, for all this, his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth, and behold, quickly, speedily, they come.

None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken, their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses' hooves seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind.

Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar, they growl and seize their prey, they carry it off, and none can rescue.

[7 : 33] They will growl over it on that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness, and distress, and the light is darkened by its clouds.

Amen. Thus far reads the word of God. Let us pray once again. Well, please turn with me to this passage that we read together from the prophecy of Isaiah.

The passage before us is often referred to as the song of the vineyard. It speaks of a vineyard that was planted by someone whose identity isn't initially revealed, but it becomes clear as the chapter develops who the vineyard planter and owner is.

And so the chapter begins with a love song addressed to Isaiah's fellow Israelites. Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard.

And in the love song about the vineyard, two things we should notice. First of all, we should notice the loving care, even the lavish care that had been shown to the vineyard.

[9 : 13] Look at what it says about where the vineyard was planted. It was planted on a very fertile hill.

And then look at the soil of the vineyard. We're told that the vineyard owner dug the soil.

He spent much time and effort in preparing the ground. He even clears it of stones. And then we're told that it was planted not with any old vines but with the choicest of vines.

He planted it with choice vines. So we've got a fertile hill, we've got well prepared ground, dug over, cleared of stones, and then we have choice vines planted in the vineyard.

but there's more. A watch tower is built in the midst of it. That was to provide permanent housing for permanent staff who would be there constantly to watch over it and to spend time dressing it and keeping it.

[10 : 38] And with all this effort spent on this vineyard there's clearly a hopeful expectation of a great harvest and vintage because the owner takes the time to hew out a wine vat in it in order to store the vintage.

He was expecting a bumper harvest. Fertile, hillside, a well dug over and cleared soil, choice vines planted, watch tower to house permanent staff to look after it, and a big wine vat hewed out of the rock in order to store the wine that would be the result of a bumper harvest.

But the second thing we should notice beside this lavish loving care spent on the vineyard is the deeply disappointing harvest.

It wasn't the harvest that the owner was expecting was it? and he looked for it to yield grapes, we read, but it yielded wild grapes.

The harvest was deeply disappointing, cruelly disappointing. It wasn't what was expected. And the only course of action open to the vineyard owner was to abandon the whole project and to make a new beginning.

[12 : 35] And look what it says further down the song here. I will remove its hedge he says 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. Briars and thorns shall grow up. And I will command the clouds no rain shall rain upon it.

By that stage I'm sure those who heard Isaiah singing this ballad the song of his vineyard of his beloved's vineyard realised who the owner of the vineyard was.

There's only one who can stop the rain from falling. The vineyard belongs to the Lord. And then you have this hammer blow in verse seven at the end of the song.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And if you want to know what the fruit expected was here we read and he looked for justice and if you want to know what the wild stinking grapes are he looked for justice but behold bloodshed for righteousness but behold an outcry.

[14 : 14] This is a prophecy and the events that it prophesied took place in 587 BC when the Babylonians from the north ravaged the countryside of Judah and battered Jerusalem to the ground.

But God began to build up a remnant almost at the same time as these tragic events took place. And that remnant was nurtured under the ministry and preaching of Ezekiel the prophet while in exile in Babylon.

And through that work that God did to raise up a remnant his plan would eventually be brought to fruition when from that remnant his anointed one the Lord Jesus Christ would emerge at the appointed time in order to bring salvation to the world.

The vineyard is the vineyard of the Lord of hosts and those who were the vine were the men of Judah and the house of Israel.

what does the Lord I wonder look for in our lives and what kind of fruit does the Lord find when he comes at harvest time?

[15 : 55] Does he find grapes or does he find wild grapes? In the rest of chapter 5 the prophet you notice utters six woes six words of judgment against the nation of Israel because of the wild grapes or literally the stinking fruit that they have produced.

And we get an insight into the sin that call forth these woes of judgment as we read through the rest of the chapter. So let's look at them one by one and see if we can learn lessons from what the prophet declares.

The first woe is found in verses 8 to 10 of chapter 5. Let's read these words together. Woe to those who join house to house who add field to field until there is no more room and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

land. This is a woe pronounced upon what we might call property or land speculators.

The promised land of Israel was a God given inheritance to the people of Israel. And it was to be held by these people in sacred trust.

[17 : 24] land of Israel. And that's the land with father handing down his property to the eldest firstborn son.

We get a glimpse of this don't we in the story of Naboth's vineyard. Naboth owned this vineyard in Jezreel that Ahab the king of Samaria had his eye on and wanted for his own possession. And he came to Naboth and he offered him whatever he wanted as the price of the vineyard. But Naboth refused to sell it. He said the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers. In both Israel and Judah it appears in the days of Isaiah at least that rich and powerful landowners were using their strength and position in society to maneuver the poorer landowners from their land. They were wanting to enlarge their own estates and they were often forcing the poor landowners the smaller landowners off their land by giving them a pittance for their land in order for them to clear their debts.

[19 : 04] And so they were ruthless and unprincipled and the Lord's punishment pronounced upon them is dreadful.

Look at what he says here in the rest of this section. The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing surely many houses shall be desolate large and beautiful houses without inhabitant.

For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. here were men who wanted to increase their property.

To remove the smaller landowners to increase the size of their farms. To have one house in the middle of the land in the middle of the country.

All the neighbouring houses cleared made way for fields or vineyards or whatever. And their hope was to become rich. to increase their harvests.

[20 : 12] But God in his judgment pays them back in their own coin. The Lord's punishment upon these unscrupulous men affected them where it mattered most as far as they were concerned.

their houses their large and beautiful houses would become desolate without inhabitant.

And then the yield on the land that they had unscrupulously acquired would be pitiful. for ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath.

A bath was an ancient measurement of about six gallons. Ten acres would only produce six gallons of wine.

and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. A homer was the dry equivalent of the bath.

[21 : 30] And an ephah was only about I think a tenth of a homer. So you spend a homer of seed but you only get a tenth of that back.

It's an echo of what we were looking at in part this morning when we were thinking about Adam's fall.

Adam in his pride and arrogance wanted more than God had given. He snatched at being like God and being able to decide things for himself but what we attempt to gain through pride and greed we cannot get.

And it brings down God's judgment upon us. And here these men don't get the harvest they long for. Isn't it ironic?

God comes to his vineyard. He looks for a harvest. He looks for grapes but he gets wild grapes. Here are these men who have enlarged their farms at the expense of their neighbours who have exploited the poor and they hope for a harvest but they get so very little and their houses are doomed.

[23 : 05] woe to those who join house to house who add field to field until there is no more room. And then the second woe appears in verses 11 to 17 and this is a woe that is pronounced upon the drunkard.

Let's read these verses again together. woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may run after strong drink who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them.

They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts hearts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord or see the work of his hands.

This is one of many references to drunkenness in the prophecy of Isaiah and that probably gives us an indication of the prevalence of the sin amongst the nation at that time.

Now drunkenness is bad enough but this is drunkenness first thing in the morning which was a thing that was widely condemned by all.

[24 : 29] It was particularly reprehensible to be drunk in the morning. You remember how the mockers on the day of Pentecost said of the believers who were speaking in tongues and declaring the great works of God in all these foreign languages said all these men are drunk and you remember how Peter stood up to defend them and said we're not drunk as you suppose.

It's only what nine o'clock in the morning. But here were men who as soon as they woke up were after their wine and their strong drink.

Strong drink has brought ruin to many and the dissolute character which it produces has brought whole nations low and this was the state of Judah at this time.

And what does Isaiah say will happen to the nation as a result of God's judgment on the drunkenness of its associated and its associated evils? He pronounces death and exile.

Death and the death of the nation in effect. Look at these words from verse 12 and think carefully upon them. God says through his prophet therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge.

[25 : 55] Seems that there was a lack of preachers in those days. People who would teach the people the laws and ways of God.

My people are going to go into exile for lack of knowledge. if they had been taught my covenant and the terms of the covenant.

Blessings for obedience and faithfulness to the Lord. Curses resulting ultimately in expulsion from the land if they go away from the Lord and break his laws.

But there was no one to teach them. They were in the dark. For lack of knowledge these people are going to be thrust out of the promised land and to be taken far away to live in exile with the pagan nations.

Their honoured men go hungry and their multitude is parched with thirst. Economic deprivation is coming.

[27 : 09] Therefore sheol has enlarged its appetite and opens its mouth beyond measure and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exalts in her.

Man is humbled and each one is brought low and the eyes of the haughty are brought low. The great, boastful, proud, arrogant men who live for their drink, who live for their revelry.

They're going to go down into Sheol, the place of the dead, an Old Testament foreshadowing of death without mercy of God.

God. This is the consequence of the misgovernment by the nation, of its undisciplined drunken leaders.

This is the judgment pronounced by God upon such lifestyles. And then there's a third woe which we find in verses 18 and 19.

[28 : 30] And this is a woe that comes upon the blasphemous. You'll understand what I mean when we read these words again. Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, who say let him be quick, let him speed his work, that we may see it.

Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come that we may know it. These are people who are pictured as pulling sin along, like men hauling a heavy laden cart with big strong ropes, while at the same time they are mocking God and taunting him to act, if he could act.

And we get so much of this, don't we, in the world today. Men who are bold and brazen in their sin, who even though sin has its toll upon them, nevertheless they continue to pull it forward.

They can't get enough of it, even though it is self-destructive. And while they do this, they mock God. Where is your God?

You know, there's no such thing as God, there's no such thing as judgment. I've sinned, I live my life the way I want to, I get up to all these sinful actions and lifestyles.

[30 : 11] Lightning hasn't struck me down. Where is your God? Let him be quick. Let him speed his work that we may see it.

Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and let it come that we may know it. Oh, they're such brave, brave souls, aren't they? Yet, when God will rise in judgment, they'll be the first to call upon the mountains, to fall upon them and to the rocks to cover them and to hide them from the fierceness of the wrath of the Lamb of God who will one day come in judgment.

And then the fourth woe is found in verse 20 and this is a woe upon the morally perverted. 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.

Sin unrestrained invariably warps our judgment and affects our sense of moral values.

And it also makes us insensitive towards God. I think you should look back at the second part of verse 12 which says and these are people that have given themselves to partying and to drinking and to all sorts of sensual pleasures.

[31 : 53] What is the effect of that kind of thinking and practice upon the human soul? people. But they do not regard the deeds of the Lord or see the work of his hands.

There's no thought of God in their minds, in their hearts. And in that spiritual vacuum, as it were, their judgment is all out of kilter, all out of balance.

And they call evil good and good evil. They put darkness for light. They put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Do we not see this in our world today? It's not a modern problem per se. It's as old as the hills where God is taken out of the picture where we are left to our own devices.

Our sense of moral values is deeply affected. And things begin to flip. Things that in any right understanding of reality would be wrong is now paraded as being right and something to be approved of and commended.

[33 : 29] And God pronounces a woe upon such moral perversion. And then the fifth woe is in verse 21.

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight. This is a woe to the self-conceited. such people are wise in their own eyes and such new walls have no conscious need of God.

Do they? They're so confident. They're so self-assured. They're right in their own eyes.

But what shall we say of their confidence? confidence? It's just an illusion. Proverbs 16 verse 18 has a comment to make upon such thinking.

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Here are people who are wise in their own eyes who are sure that their way thinking is right.

[34 : 50] They're confident in themselves. They think their judgments carry weight. They're full of pride because they are the people that know it all.

And yet that confidence is just an illusion. It's not real. God is the judge and before God these people are acting very foolishly.

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. There's another proverb in chapter 14 verse 12 that says there's a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death.

this warns us doesn't it not to take our moral bearings from the world not to receive our teaching from the great and the wise of this world who are so full of themselves and confident in their conclusions but to remember that we can only know God we can only understand the truth by a revelation that comes from God himself we can only grasp the truth by taking heed to his word reading it letting it shape our thinking and controlling our thoughts using the word as the balance to weigh the thoughts and opinions of men to see if there's any light in them if there's no light in them then we reject it and we hold fast to the word of

God and then the sixth woe at first may seem to be a repetition of one of the earlier woes but because it's about drunkenness again but the context of this sixth woe shows us that this is really a woe upon the judges of nation so it's a woe to the drunk judges of the nation look at verses 22 and 23 woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and valiant men and mixing strong drink who acquit the guilty for a bribe and deprive the innocent of his right so it's really a woe upon the judges who sit over the law courts of the land and who deprive the innocent of their right before the law and who pass sentence in favour of the guilty instead these men ought to have been the champions of the poor and of the innocent underdog but instead they are mighty only in their drinking bouts heroes at drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink and in their adult state their judgment is all wrong and perverted and they acquit the guilty for a bribe something the law of

[38 : 30] God utterly condemns and they deprive the innocent of his right to justice so what did such a catalogue of sins deserve well chapter 5 verses 24 to 30 tells us there is foretold by the prophet Isaiah a sudden and devastating punishment on its way God through the prophet tells what he is going to do God is going to punish God is going to destroy his vineyard and how is he going to do that well he is going to do it in Israel's case by a foreign invasion do you not find the metaphorical language of these final verses of Isaiah chapter 5 absolutely terrifying let's read these words again together therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble and as dry grass sinks down in the flame so their root will be as rotteness and their blossom go up like dust for they have rejected the law of the

Lord of hosts and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them and the mountains quaked and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets and then these awful words for all this his anger has not turned away and his hand is stretched out still and then these words he will raise a signal for nations far away and whistle for them from the ends of the earth and then the picture of the armies that are coming towards Israel the nature of the army how well equipped it is how strong it is how fit the soldiers are behold quickly speedily they come none is weary none stumbles none slumbers or sleeps not a waistband is loose not a sandal strap broken their arrows are sharp all their bows bent their horses hooves seem like flint and their wheels like the whirlwind their roaring is like a lion like young lions they roar they growl and seize their prey they carry it off and none can rescue they will growl over it on that day like the growling of the sea is there any hope and if one looks to the land behold darkness and distress and the light is darkened by its clouds these foreign invaders are not merely fortunate opportunists who looking across the border see

Israel in a weakened state by its moral depravity and think now's the time we can get in there and destroy no that's not the way it is here look again at verse 26 he that's referring to the Lord the Lord will raise a signal for nations far away and whistle for them from the ends of the earth and behold quickly speedily they come God himself think of that God the Lord God of Israel is so disgusted with his people's behaviour and thinking and sin and rebellion and transgressions that he considers them as evil as the original inhabitants of the land whose iniquity was full and who were ripe for judgment and that judgment fell at the time of the conquest and now in 587

BC Israel and Judah are in the same state morally spiritually and God is going to do to them what he had done to the original inhabitants of the land those pagan nations and God himself raises a signal for those nations from afar to act as his instruments of justice God himself is said to whistle for them just the way someone would whistle for a dog and I think this tells us something very important about the God of the Bible God is never checkmated by the actions of individuals or nations he's never at a loss what to do oh what am I going to do

Israel has departed from my ways and from my covenant from my laws what shall I do God knows exactly what to do his plans are never thwarted he is in control he is sovereign over the nations he's sovereign over the actions of individuals and nations he is sovereign over all and despite the

ruinous guilt of the people Isaiah the prophet never doubts that God is sovereign over history and he can dispose of nations in judgment as well as in mercy and if you read on through the book of Isaiah you will see that theme of God's sovereignty over the nations grow stronger and stronger until ultimately you see

[45 : 37] God's plan revealed in greater clarity I think there's some lessons we can learn from this passage before we close this evening the first one that comes to mind is again a quote from Proverbs chapter 14 verse 34 that tells us the old truth that righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people this is not just a principle that relates to Israel but it relates to every nation of this world if we want our nation to be exalted to do well to prosper under the blessing of God then we need to turn away from sin as a nation and to turn to the Lord righteousness exalts the nation what is righteousness amongst other things it is a right relationship with God it's a right relationship with one another it's a right relationship to ourselves righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people second thing we can learn is that God observes and he notes the sins of nations one of the features of this chapter is the way in which the woes are pronounced upon specific groups judgments pronounced and specific sins

God sees all God notes all he records all the new testament tells us that there is a day set when God will judge the world by the man that he has appointed the Lord Jesus Christ it also tells us that on that day of judgment books will be opened and we will be judged according to the things done in the body whether good or bad what are the books that are opened for they are a symbol aren't they a metaphor to show us that God remembers everything he notes everything that is done he observes he notes the sins of individuals and nations and he will bring them into judgment the third thing we can note from this passage is that the many sins that are listed throughout the passage that come under these six woes that we have seen

I think can be summarized under a statement that we read in chapter five and let me find it the second part of verse 24 for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel that boils it all down to the essential element all of these sins that have been committed all these woes that are pronounced are because here is a people that have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and they have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel my friends that brings the message very close to our own situation here week by week you come to church and you hear the word of God being read and preached you know what

God's word says you hear it explained applied to your own situation but how do you respond to that word these are people here who rejected the law of the Lord because they despised the word of the Holy One of Israel and out of that rejection and out of that hatred flowed a life of sin which ultimately ended in eternal misery for them and my plea to you this evening would be repent which is basically have a change of mind and heart and you say well how can I change my mind how can I change my heart perhaps you've been many years living in a way that has been a rejection of the Lord and you say well how can I change at this late stage in my life turn to the Lord and say to the Lord in prayer what David said create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me say with David blot out all my transgressions take my sin away this is a difficult chapter to read and expound it deals with issues that we'd rather not think about and yet God has revealed it to us that we might be humbled before him and learn that he is a God who brings temporal judgments into this world because of individual and national sins but he's also the God who will one day bring a final judgment to bear temporal judgments are not final judgments temporal judgments are there to awaken that we might turn from sin to the

[52 : 27] Lord these prophecies were announced at least a century and a half before they took place perhaps longer there was time still in Isaiah's day to listen to the word and to repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness but the final judgment from the final judgment there will be no escape seek the Lord says Isaiah while he may be found and call upon him while he is near and let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts let him turn to the Lord this is why Isaiah is called the evangelical prophet because there's good news here the Lord will have mercy upon him turn to our God and he will abundantly pardon isn't that good news we may have sinned like these people but if we turn to the

Lord while he may be found he will abundantly pardon may God bless his word to us we're going to sing together in closing the words on the back of the uh