

The Vineyard of God

SERMON

By

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TEXT: Isaiah 5:1-7

PROP: God demands holiness of his people and he orders all things to the end that his people abide in Christ and bear much fruit.

Isaiah 5:1–7 (ESV)

¹ 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 briars 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!

In the text before us Isaiah sings a beautiful love song to God. We are struck with the richness of imagery and beauty of the language. Concerning this song Delitzsch writes, "The winged rhythm, the euphonic music, the sweet assonances of this appeal cannot be reproduced." Indeed the song is most remarkable in that it proceeds from the lofty praise of God to lamentation that soon gives way to denunciation. The prophet sings his love song to YAHWEH concerning his vineyard which we learn shortly is the house of Israel and the men of Judah.

Surely the one beloved by the prophet is Jesus the Messiah. Who else could be the object of such love? He alone is lovely as the Hebrew word *yahdid* connotes. Jesus is loveliness itself and we ought, therefore, to love him with all our heart soul and might. The delightful relationship our Lord has with his people is seen in this image of a vineyard which was planted on a fertile hill, dug and cleared of stones, planted with chosen vines, and protected by a watchtower. There was nothing more he could have done for the benefit of his vineyard that he blessed with every spiritual blessing from the heavenly places. Though his vineyard brings forth sour grapes or stinking things

translated literally, he has purchased his people with a price, he hedged us about, set us apart, planted and cultivated us. All within us that brings forth good fruit is of his creating tending and preserving. All that comes from any of us by nature is stinking things fit for destruction. If there is any good fruit from any of us it derives from our beloved Master's sovereign power. We must belong to Christ to bear fruit. We must be his vineyard. We must pray that every part of us belongs to Christ along with all we are and all we do. We must be in the vineyard of our beloved Lord.

As the vineyard of Jesus we have every advantage and privilege and opportunity to bring forth much fruit for he plants us on a very fertile hill. It is to our great shame that we bear so little fruit for our Lord. We all need to search our hearts and rid our lives of that which is not fruit fit for our beloved Lord. The terms used by the prophet comport with one who is vitally connected to Christ the vine. This is a song of love from one whose heart is changed by the Spirit of God but the song reflects some very disappointing behavior. Instead of good grapes his vineyard produces wild grapes or stinking things. Instead of justice his vineyard produces bloodshed. Instead of righteousness his vineyard produces outcries of distress.

At first reading we perhaps see little of God's preserving mercy in this love song. Though he has planted his vineyard on a fertile hill and cultivated and protected it he now says that he will remove its hedge and break down its protective wall so that it will be destroyed and laid waste. Is the force of the passage to the effect that we can lose our salvation? Here is a vineyard that God himself has planted but with all its advantages it becomes unfruitful. Is God not powerful to save and to preserve his people? Peter writes, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:3–5, ESV)

Paul writes, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:35–39, ESV) Speaking of his people Jesus himself said, *"I give them eternal*

life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ” (John 10:28, ESV)

Nothing can be more clear than this, that God preserves his people through all their tribulation and distress until they are with him forever in heaven. He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* puts it,

1. They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

That his people for whom Christ died will be certainly preserved for heaven follows from the doctrines of grace. His people are foreknown unto salvation. They are predestined, called, justified and glorified so that no one can condemn God's elect. It is Almighty YAHWEH God who saves us and the living Jesus Christ at the right hand of God who preserves us. God preserves those who are his, but we must persevere and we will most certainly persevere because God the Spirit works within us to turn us more and more away from sin unto the righteousness of Christ. **Therefore Isaiah chapter 5 does not teach that God's elect people will lose their salvation.**

The Bible clearly teaches that God's elect are most certainly and surely saved. God's people sin and are judged but they are still saved and he Holy Spirit continues his work of sanctification in them. As the Confession puts it, God's people, "may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves."

God may indeed cast away his people for their sins but a remnant will remain true to the Lord. In the next chapter Isaiah writes, "*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on*

*seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” **The holy seed is its stump.**” (Isaiah 6:8–13, ESV)*

We have here the remnant principle. Paul brings all this into the proper perspective when he writes, *“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*” (Romans 9:6–8, ESV) There are those who are true people of God and they are in various stages of spiritual growth. Mingled in with them are those who are not the people of God but are tares within the wheat. Together they are tried, chastened and judged. In the end those who are not the people of God are separated out and cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels but those who are God's elect people will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

What then does the text in Isaiah chapter 5 teach? **We must understand that God demands holiness of his people and he orders all things to the end that his people abide in Christ and bear much fruit.** Indeed, God chooses those who are in his vineyard and in that sense his vineyard is exclusive. The vineyard exists because God planted it and cared for it and fenced it in. Israel was separated out from the surrounding nations and they alone received the precepts of God and it was on them alone that God set his saving love.

We notice from the text that the vineyard is well cared for. It is fenced in and its stones are removed. It is cultivated and protected. God commands the clouds to rain on it. He provides all that is necessary for its existence and continued growth and fruitfulness. Indeed, God brings each one of his elect into existence. He foreknows them unto salvation and predestines them, calls, justifies and glorifies them. Christ and the Holy Spirit intercede for us. We are chastened by God like a father chastens his children. We are therefore sons of God and not illegitimates. God reveals himself to us in the Bible and opens our hearts to believe his word. He has placed us on the earth that so eloquently declares to us his glory. There is absolutely no reason from God's

perspective for the production of wild grapes or stinking things in view of his gracious provision.

A well known physics experiment illustrates this truth. A series of steel balls are suspended horizontally with each ball in contact with the ball next to it except for the balls on either end of the series. If one end ball is pulled back and allowed to swing into the line of hanging balls, one ball will swing away from the other end. If two balls at one end are allowed to swing against the line two balls at the other end will swing away. This experiment proves the conservation of momentum. Thus does God expect to receive back from his vineyard what he has put into it. But people are inherently wicked and evil. As Jeremiah puts it, *“for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”* (Jeremiah 2:13, ESV) We all need to examine ourselves to determine the kind of fruit that we bear for the Lord. We need to see to its quality because God demands holiness from us. He demands holiness from those who are in his vineyard.

That God demands holiness from his people is implicit in the judgment meted out to Israel. *“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.”* (Isaiah 5:5–6, ESV) God is not casting out his people because they can repent. He calls upon them to wash themselves and cease to do evil. He calls upon his people to reason together and know that though their sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow. If they repent they will eat the good of the land. He invites his people to walk in the light of the Lord. Indeed, the righteous Branch, Jesus the Messiah, will be sent to take away their sins and whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

We must observe that judgment is brought upon sin even in God's own vineyard. God overlooks no one's sin. To punish disobedience, the land of milk and honey is taken away, the dispersion occurs and his people are humbled. (Note that the remnant was included in the dispersion.) They lose fellowship but there is a way back. God never removes the path to repentance and he is patient with those whom he has called to himself. *“And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”*” (Luke 13:6–9, ESV)

God judges his people for their sins but always with mercy. He endures with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory. The Lord teaches us in John 15 to abide in Christ or be burned but branches that are vitally connected to the vine do abide even though they must be chastened and tried in order to rid them of the dross of their sin. **There are two sides to eternal security, preservation and perseverance.** God preserves his people but exhorts them to persevere and to be holy.

What was the particular sin of Israel? *“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.”* (Isaiah 5:24, ESV) Are we capable of this? Is this not the very sin of the modern church of Christ? All sin amounts to a rejection of the law of God and a despising of the lawgiver the Holy One of Israel. As we read through chapter 5 of Isaiah we see the greed of Israel. We see her drunkenness, her love for sin, her false teachers and her conceit. All of this is despising the law. If Israel could sin in this way, given that she was planted by God as his peculiar vineyard and with every advantage and benefit from God, how much more can we and do we sin against our great God and Savior. The purity of our own church and denomination depends on our own personal holiness.

God has the right to demand holiness of us. He has revealed much to us as he says, "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done it?" Though he reveals himself to us in his word and in his creation we still turn to idols and abominations. This is our tendency even though we have been converted. We must be continually exhorted to be holy, *“Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God.”* (Leviticus 20:7, ESV) The angels and saints about the throne of God do not sing wise or just is God (he is indeed wise and just), but they sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." That is to say, God himself is sinless and righteous not despising his own law. He is perfect in all his ways. He is not at all like an earthly king who delights to force his people to keep his laws while he is free to break them as he chooses.

It is biblical to exhort God's people to persevere. *“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,”* (Ephesians 6:18, ESV) *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”* (1 Corinthians 15:58, ESV) *“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”* (Galatians

5:1, ESV) “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **take care** that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” (2 Peter 3:17, ESV) “and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who **endures to the end** will be saved.” (Matthew 10:22, ESV) “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us **run with endurance** the race that is set before us,” (Hebrews 12:1, ESV)

God demands holiness of his people and he orders all things to the end that his people abide in Christ and bear much fruit. Let us all see to ourselves and strive to be holy even as our Lord is holy.