

Welcome back to week #2 in our series in Isaiah. Last week we got ourselves oriented to the times and setting of Isaiah's prophecies. Let's do a little review.

Isaiah began his ministry in 740 BC. At the time, the unified nation of Israel consisted of 12 tribes. But, because of Rehoboam's prideful leadership, 10 tribes of Israel in the north seceded from the union, and at the time Isaiah begins his ministry, it's a divided kingdom.

North....South...Israel....Judah....0 good godly kings, 8 good godly kings.

Today Isaiah starts our time with a song, a song about a vineyard. Let's read the words of the song together and see what lessons are in it for us. Look with me at Isaiah 5:1-2a

"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well."

A revealing song about a vineyard.

This song is similar to the parables we see in the New Testament. It's a story that has a veiled message for real life. We don't have to guess who the characters of this parable are. Verse 7 tells us...*My Loved One* -> The Lord Almighty. And the vineyard -> Israel, God's people

We learn God set up this vineyard for success. The vineyard was given every advantage to be fruitful:

1. God cultivated it, he even went so far as to pull out all the rocks.

[Illustration] - That's preparation TLC. When I moved to Cameron Park I had to put in a lawn in my back yard. OMG. The rocks were the bane of my existence. Getting them all out tapped my patience. The more I raked to clear the rocks the more rocks came to the surface.

This detail about clearing it of stones...in Israel...that took patience, determination, and hard work by the vineyard owner. It speaks to the lengths the vineyard owner went to provide everything the vineyard needed to be fruitful.

2. God planted the choicest vines, not the seconds, not the discounted ones, the choicest ones.
3. He built a permanent watchtower...not just temporary harvest shelter. He took a long-term view of the vineyard. He cut no corners.

In Isaiah's time, vineyards were valuable agricultural investments, and watchtowers served several practical purposes:

- **Primary function: Protection and surveillance** – The elevated structure allowed a watchman to spot threats from afar, such as thieves, wild animals (e.g., boars or foxes), or birds that could damage the ripening grapes, especially during harvest season when the crop was most vulnerable.
- **Temporary shelter and residence** – During harvest, workers or even entire families often stayed in the tower rather than traveling back to their homes daily, providing a base for guarding the vineyard around the clock.

- **Storage and utility** – Many towers had a thick-walled lower level for storing harvested grapes (keeping them cool to prevent early fermentation), tools, or equipment; the upper level served as the lookout point.

4. He cut out a winepress including troughs for the juice to flow, right on site. All this highlights the owner's thorough care and investment in the vineyard (representing Israel), expecting good fruit in return.

[Transition] – But notice, even with all these advantages, the last line of verse 2-4 tells us the vineyard produced only wild, worthless grapes. As a consequence, the vineyard owner takes action. Look at verses 5-6 with me.

The vineyard song reveals a sour outcome

Frustrated and disappointed after doing everything possible to ensure a bountiful harvest, the owner announces a series of deliberate actions to abandon and destroy the vineyard as a consequence. These steps reverse all the initial care (clearing stones, planting choice vines, building a watchtower and winepress). These actions transformed the vineyard from a thriving, protected investment into a ruined wasteland.

Now, it's interesting (notice again verses 3-4), before declaring judgment, the owner appeals to the listeners (the people of Jerusalem and Judah) to judge fairly: "What more could I have done?"

This highlights that the failure lies entirely with the vineyard, not the owner—God has provided every advantage (fertile land, protection, care), yet Israel/Judah have yielded only injustice, oppression, and bloodshed instead of the "good grapes" of justice and righteousness.

The actions the vineyard owner takes symbolize God's impending judgment on Israel for their unfaithfulness—likely foreshadowing invasion, exile, and desolation (e.g., by Assyria and later Babylon).

Again, as I shared last week, this divine discipline is not vindictive destruction for its own sake, but a consequence of the people's refusal to produce the moral and spiritual "fruit" God rightfully expected.

[Transition] – Notice how the parable traps the audience into agreeing with the judgment before revealing that *they* are the vineyard. Look at verse 7.

Isaiah now makes it clear that the story is not concerned with horticulture at all, it's about his people. It's about people and their relationship with God. It's about God providing everything they need for life and Godliness and it's about his disappointment in the outcome.

God's vineyard is his people, the garden of his delight. He went to great lengths to provide all they needed for close relationship with him and productive lives in Him. But, something went horribly wrong.

[Transition] –What was it about the lifestyles of the people that offended God so completely? The rest of the chapter spells out in detail, why God was so offended by their lives. I'm not going to take time to read the whole section, let me summarize.

Isaiah tells us there were six sour habits of the people.

1. Verses 8-10 - Greed and land monopolization: His people were living large and greedily grabbing up land and homes all for themselves, displacing others. This was a violation of the Law of

God as the land was to always remain evenly dispersed along tribe and family lines, not amassed by the wealthy insatiable landowners.

2. Verses 11-12 - Drunkenness and hedonism:

3. Verses 18-19 - Defiant sin and mockery of God: Bonding

themselves to sinful habits, like a horse to a cart, and daring God to do anything about it.

4. Verse 20 - Moral inversion: They convoluted moral and ethical values. They were calling evil good and good, evil. They were calling darkness, light and light, darkness. They were calling bitter, sweet and sweet, bitter.

5. Verse 21 - Arrogance and self-sufficiency:

6. Verses 22-23 - Perverting justice for bribes: Mixing the excess of alcohol with practice of injustice.

The vineyard that had every opportunity and advantage to succeed and produce a valuable and worthwhile crop; produced only sour grapes, stinking, rotten, sour grapes.

God looks at their lives and his heart aches. He grieves over their choices to live their lives according to their own priorities. God's hurting in these passages, not for himself as much as for them. Because he knows full well what they could be and what they could do if they would just turn to him and surrender to him. He knows their full potential, and he sees what they are settling for and it grieves him.

[Transition] - Chapter 5 ends with the people of God estranged and unclean. But thank God, He's not a quitter!! Israel's sinful practices have earned divine discipline, BUT God's stern warnings serve as a call to repentance. He has not given up on those he loves!!

Set in refreshing contrast to the dismay and disappointment of Israel's sin and sickness is the absolute hope filled holiness of God. Right here, right now...as we turn the page to Chapter 6 Isaiah flashes hope into our hearts. In contrast to the hopelessness of sour grapes, Isaiah gives us some sweet news.

He compassionately describes his story of personal encounter with God. This is sweet news for the sour grapes of the vineyard song, and it's sweet news for you and me and the sour parts of our lives. Read 6:1-4.

Despite a sour crop, Isaiah gives some sweet news.

What a powerful description of God Almighty on his throne. The whole scene declares his majesty and dominion. His attendants are "Seraphs" literally "burning Ones."

- Fire is the chief symbol of God's holiness.
- The train that filled the temple is a picture of God's presence tangibly flowing through and around, filling the lives of his people.
- Wings covering their faces is often interpreted to symbolize reverence, awe, and humility—even these exalted beings can't directly gaze upon God's full brilliance.
- Wings covering their feet is also seen as pointing to humility, modesty, and respect.
- And wings flying points to a readiness for service, obedience, and swift action, poised to carry out God's will.

And notice the theme of their continuous song, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*" Hebrew uses repetition to emphasize the quality or quantity of something. But only in regard to the holiness of God is the repetition raised to the third power...holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.

And as they called to one another the sound was louder than the surround sound pegged on the best sound system. The building shook like the buildings at Aerojet when they test fire a rocket.

[Transition] - Notice Isaiah's response to this display of God's majesty. Read 6:5.

Woe is me! This is the verbal form of that sinking feeling you get when something profoundly distressing hits you and your life passes before you. Isaiah essentially describes that he is stunned into silence at the profound sight of God's holiness and majesty. He says, "I am ruined." Literally that means coming apart. I'm disintegrating.

The holiness of God is indescribably distressing to Isaiah because of his sin and the sin of those around him. The contrast between God's holiness and the sin-stained heart of a human stuns Isaiah, leaving him speechless and fragmented.

[Illustration] - Now, I don't know...but, sometimes I hear people talk about what they are going to do or what they are going to say when they see God. You remember the old song... "I'm gonna sing, I'm gonna shout? "When those gates are open wide, I'm gonna sit at Jesus side, I'm gonna sing, I'm gonna shout, Praise the Lord." Or the song, I Can Only Imagine. At least it asks the right questions, "Surrounded by Your glory, What will my heart feel? Will I dance for You Jesus, Or in awe of You be still? Will I stand in Your presence Or to my knees, will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all?

Granted I don't know for sure, but I have a hunch that when you and I lay eyes on God all our words will leave us. In that instance I don't think we're going to sing, I don't think we're going to shout, I don't think we're going to dance...I think we'll fall on our faces in utter awe and submission. I think singing and shouting and dancing will definitely come later, but in that moment, we might say as Isaiah did, "Woe is me."

[Transition] - Isaiah adds something to his expression of dread. He identifies and owns his own sin...that's huge. Then, he identifies the sin of the people. Now, notice what happens as soon as Isaiah owns and admits his sin. Read 6:6-7.

Upon his confession, Isaiah's guilt is removed and his sin is forgiven by the touch of a hot coal on his lips. This is a powerful image of atonement as coals of fire were taken inside the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement when sacrifice was made to atone for sin (Lev. 16:12). This was no ordinary fire...this was a coal from the fire of the Altar...the place where God's holiness was satisfied by the death of a substitutionary sacrifice.

The live coal encapsulates the ideas of atonement, appeasing God's wrath, satisfaction, forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation. All these realities became true for Isaiah, the moment he was touched by the live coal. Isaiah, the doomed sinner, is left in no doubt when the seraph explains; 'Behold, as soon as this touched your lips your iniquity went, and, as for your sin -paid by ransom!'

Isaiah's confession focused on his unclean lips, and the unclean lips of the people. This is the source of his unworthiness because speech often

reveals the heart, and speech was root of Isaiah's prophetic ministry. So, the seraph addressed the exact point of his self-indicted sin.

Friends, this is God's way. He loves to touch our lives directly at the point of our need, at the point in our lives where we feel the effects of our sin. For Isaiah, it was his lips and his speech, ...what might it be for you?

Notice, the effect of the touch of God is instantaneous! It's comprehensive. You've heard of the Jewish Holiday, Yom Kipper, right? "Kipper" is the Hebrew word for atonement. Yom Kipper—Day of Atonement. "Kipper" means, "the total amount needed to cover a debt" This is what covered and permeated Isaiah.

[Transition] – The immediate effect of this touch from God is forgiveness, reconciliation, and intimacy with God. Notice, at first Isaiah saw God from a distance—high and exalted, but now he's close enough to listen in on God's dialog with his attendants. And now he learns another fruit of being brought near to God. Look at verses 8-13

Isaiah is called to share the sweet news.

Isaiah learns he was not saved to sit but redeemed to serve the cause and passion of God. God says, "Go and tell this people..." But, as we have already seen in the opening chapters of Isaiah, the effect of the confrontation and warning of divine discipline will be a further hardening of their hearts...they hear but refuse to take ownership for their rebellion...they see, but don't internalize it. In fact, by going and telling them straight up that they need to repent, Isaiah will make them harden themselves even more toward God.

In verse 13, the sentence that begins with the image of felled trees, ends in a sea of stumps. Lifeless, cut down, and barren. And while this all seems hopeless and sad, the last phrase sprouts the only green shoot of hope for life in this otherwise charred picture.

Remember, God's not a quitter!! Though he's forced to bring his divine discipline, spouting from the ashes is a seed of life. The holy seed will come out of a stump in the land. There will be a few faithful that will turn to God and remain devoted to him, and he will grow a new people out of them. And out of that people will emerge a messiah who will breathe life back into their spiritual deadness.

In just a few chapters, Isaiah will make it even more clear when he writes, *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord*—Isaiah 11:1-2

Implications and Applications

When we step back, Chapters 5 and 6 form a powerful unit: The song of the Vineyard in Chapter 5 gets raw and honest about human failure and the consequences of unfaithfulness.

However, we're immediately transported to heaven's throne room in Chapter 6. Here we witness God's transcendent holiness and hear his eager willingness to cleanse our sin and use us to accomplish his work in the world. God's not a quitter. If we'll turn to him he'll forgive and restore and use us for his glory.

[Transition] - Let me suggest three really important practical applications of these truths for our lives.

- 1. Pursue justice and righteousness in daily life, bearing “good fruit” that honors God’s investment in you** (from Isaiah 5)

The song of the vineyard reminds us the how God lavishes care on our lives (blessings, opportunities, abilities). In fact, Peter says, “He’s given us everything we need for life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3).

As he provides everything we need, he rightfully expects healthy “fruit” to be born out of our lives. So, here’s my challenge to you: Regularly examine your life—what are you producing? Are you producing the “good fruit” God desires in your work, relationships, finances, and community?

A good place to start the inventory of your life, might be to look at the obvious. Seek to avoid the woes: greedily accumulating at others’ expense, inverting right and wrong, or perverting justice. Instead, actively, and intentionally choose fairness, generosity, and moral clarity in all your decisions.

- 2. Cultivate awe and reverence for God’s holiness.**

Isaiah’s experience of the exalted Lord on the throne, with seraphim crying “Holy, holy, holy,” shakes him to his core, leading to confession: “Woe is me... I am a man of unclean lips.”

Spending time reflection on God’s perfect holiness works to expose our own inadequacy. Beginning this week, in your prayer, worship, or quiet reflection time, begin to focus on God’s majesty rather than just needs or feelings. This fosters humility in us. It also works to raise our

awareness of our sin, or the ways our lives are out of alignment with God's ideal for us. This practice also guards against becoming too casual and treating God too lightly like a buddy or a genie. And it can inspire you to pursue greater personal purity and alignment with God's heart for you.

3. **Tune your willingness to God's call.**

God doesn't leave Isaiah in despair—a seraph purifies his lips with a coal, atoning for sin. Only then does Isaiah volunteer for a tough mission (proclaiming to a hardened people). His willingness flows out of his gratitude for God's cleansing work in this life.

Seek to allow your gratitude for all God's work in your life, to inspire your willingness and bolster your courage to respond to God's callings and promptings in your life—the big and small, the life callings and the moment-by-moment promptings.

All along the way, as you experience his grace, say "yes" to service—maybe it's sharing faith, helping others, or stepping into hard things with limited visible success. Remember, a willing heart matters a ton to God.