

The title of this morning's sermon is "*The Song of the Vineyard.*"¹

We are working our way verse-by-verse through Luke's Gospel, and we find ourselves at Luke 20:9, but first, we will look at some verses in Isaiah 5 that lay the foundation.

My dad was always a big fan of working outside. To give you an idea of how much he liked it, I once asked him what he thought would be his favorite job, and he said – and I'm not kidding – "Working on a railroad in the hot sun." Yes, he said the words, "In the hot sun." And he didn't mean inspecting railroad cars. He meant laying down ties to build the track. As a kid, I couldn't imagine many things that sounded more unpleasant, and I feel pretty much the same as an adult. I thought this was what they made inmates do in prison for punishment.

Because Dad liked working outside so much, it seemed like he was always finding things for us to do around the house...even if I didn't think they really needed to be done. If I was home on the weekend or during the summer, I had to work outside with Dad. I tried to get a job as soon as possible for two reasons. First, so I could be inside with air-conditioning. Second, so I could get paid.

One thing Dad loved was having a garden. I remember many hours in the backyard on our hands and knees, removing rocks and picking weeds. Dad would come into the house with vegetables he grew and ask us to try them. He was proud that he thought they tasted better than anything we could find at the supermarket.

It didn't matter to me how good they tasted. I didn't think they were worth the effort. I couldn't understand all that hard work for something we could buy at the store for a few dollars. But I think that misses the main reason my dad, and probably others, have a garden: the satisfaction from watching things grow.

But what if you planted a garden and it didn't grow? What if it never produced anything? Worse, what if it produced what it wasn't supposed to produce?

That would be very frustrating, but this is what happened to God. He had a vineyard. Briefly look at verse 7:

Isaiah 5:7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,

And this vineyard produced the wrong kind of fruit. Isaiah sang about it in these verses, and then Jesus elaborated on it in the parable of the vineyard workers.

Look at verse 1 to see the song...

Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

Isaiah speaks in the first person and refers to God as "My beloved."

Isaiah 5:2a 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;

Pause here.

Notice the wonderful advantages the vineyard enjoyed:

- It belonged to a loving person: my beloved.
- It was planted in a great place: a very fruitful hill.
- The ground was carefully prepared: dug and cleared it of stones.
- Good plants were used to get it started: choice vines.
- It was protected: a watchtower [was] in the midst of it.

- Provision was made for the fruit to be processed: a wine vat [was] in it.

My dad would've been proud!

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Now, consider this verse...

1 Corinthians 10:11 These things [in the Old Testament] happened to [Israel] as an example [for us, and], they were written down for our instruction.

So, this account with Israel is an example for us. It's not a question of whether we should learn from it. It's a question of what we should learn from it.

And there's much we should learn from it...and this brings us to Lesson One...

Lesson One: We shouldn't take God's grace for granted.

I was challenged by this passage because:

- God showed great care and concern for his vineyard, or for Israel, and he has shown great care and concern for me.
- The vineyard enjoyed many wonderful advantages, and I have enjoyed many wonderful advantages.

Because of all this, if the vineyard did not produce good fruit, it is a reflection of the vineyard and not the ground, the owner, or the work that went into it. Similarly, if I do not produce good fruit, it is a reflection of me, and not – let's say – the ground, the owner, or the work that God has done in my life.

[F.B. Meyer wrote, "It will be seen then...that every soul of man had the chance of becoming a fruitful vineyard; and if it became the reverse, it was due to no failure in either the wisdom or grace of God."](#)

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I was having a conversation with Rick DeVos, and he shared something that stuck with me and caused me to appreciate God's grace in my life even more. He was reflecting on his salvation and how blessed he was to be born where and when he was: in the United States where the gospel is so prevalent, and during this time when there are so many Christian resources available to us.

It made me think that I have taken this for granted because there are so many people today who haven't heard the gospel and don't even have Bibles available to them.

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I think about my conversion and how I was surrounded by Christians, like Elwyn, at the school where I was teaching. They invited me to their church when my brother passed away. Then, the pastor and his family spiritually adopted me as a son in the faith, like Paul did with Timothy.

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I look back over every season of my Christian life, and one of God's other graces is he has always surrounded me with godly men I could look up to and who invested in me.

Ed Simmons was the pastor of the church I was saved in, and Barry Branaman was the father of some girls I was good friends with. Few people know these names, and both passed away at young ages, but they spent lots of time investing in me, so I will always be very grateful to them. I wish they would have lived long enough to see me become a pastor and hopefully recognize the fruit of their investment.

The verse that comes to mind as I think about them is...

Hebrews 11:4 Abel still speaks even though he is dead.

These men still speak through me because of their investment in me.

I don't want to talk too much about myself. These are just examples of God's grace in my life, or you could say, the ways he has cared for me as part of his vineyard. I want you to appreciate, and hopefully not take for granted, God's grace in your life, or the ways he has cared for you as part of his vineyard.

We can take God's grace for granted:

2 Corinthians 6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Paul appealed to the Corinthians not to take God's grace for granted. Instead, we are called to work with God, so his grace is not in vain.

Grace isn't given because of anything we have done or could do. That is what makes it grace or unmerited favor. Grace is given simply because God is gracious.

But even though grace isn't received because of our works, it is given to encourage works. We aren't to be passive. God gives us grace because there's work to be done.

After all of God's grace in Israel's life, he expected fruit, or works...

Isaiah 5:2b and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

The Hebrew word for wild is *b'ušim* (pronounced beh-oh-sheem), and it means "*Stinking or worthless things, stinking berries.*" I didn't even know there was such a thing as stink berries, but that's what the vineyard produced.

Adam Clarke said the wild grapes were "*Poisonous berries...not merely useless, unprofitable grapes, such as wild grapes; but grapes offensive to the smell, noxious, poisonous.*"

We are dealing with something here that is worse than unfruitfulness. These wild grapes, or stink berries, are worse than no grapes at all.

Talk about taking God's grace for granted, the vineyard produced what we would expect if nothing had been done for it. All the love, care, time, and effort were in vain.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: We should examine our fruit.

We use the term "Fruit inspectors" when discussing people's salvation. We say something like, "*I can't say for sure whether someone is saved, but I can inspect the fruit.*" This makes sense because fruit, or works, are one of the clearest evidences of salvation. We are not saved by fruit or works, but if we are saved, there will be fruit or works.

Jesus said as much...

Matthew 7:16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

But based on these verses, I wasn't challenged to examine the fruit in other people's lives. I was challenged to examine the fruit in my own life:

- What bad fruit am I producing in my life?
- How many wild grapes or stink berries are there?

Spurgeon said, *“Has it been so with us? Have we rewarded [God] ungratefully for all his pains? Have we given him hardness of heart instead of repentance; unbelief instead of faith; indifference instead of love; idleness instead of holy industry; impurity instead of holiness?”*

I think we should all examine the fruit in our lives.

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Look what the owner says after examining Israel’s fruit...

Isaiah 5:3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

The owner wants to know who is to blame for the harvest of wild grapes. Is it the owner’s fault or the vineyard’s fault?

Obviously a vineyard shouldn’t be blamed for producing the wrong fruit. Farming is a matter of cause and effect. If a vineyard produced the wrong fruit, the owner is blamed for planting the wrong fruit.

But that’s the point. The vineyard didn’t do what was logical and reasonable for it to do: produce good fruit. It did the opposite: produce bad fruit.

The idea is God blessed Israel abundantly and gave them a land that was rich and pleasant. In return, he wanted them to produce good fruit. But Israel didn’t do what was logical and reasonable. Israel did the opposite: produce bad fruit.

So, look what else God asks...

Isaiah 5:4a What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Isaiah 5:4b When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

This is a rhetorical question that expects a negative answer: there’s nothing else God could have done for the nation of Israel apart from making them robots and causing them to act against their will.

And the same is true for us: there’s nothing else God could have done for us apart from making us robots and causing us to act against our will.

Spurgeon said, *“O you that profess to be his people, what more could Christ have done for you? What more could the Holy Spirit have done? What richer promises, what wiser precepts, what kinder providences, what more gracious patience?”*

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Because Israel produced bad fruit, look what happened...

Isaiah 5:5 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.

God also built a hedge of protection around the vineyard. But he says he will remove the hedge so the vineyard can be destroyed.

We know when this happened in Israel’s history:

- The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom around 700 BC.
- The Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom around 600 BC.

But notice God didn't destroy the vineyard. He didn't need to. All he needed to do was remove his protection. And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Three: God only needs to remove his protection to discipline us.

God can discipline us actively or passively. Active discipline is when he introduces something into our lives:

- The speeding ticket for speeding
- The job loss for embezzling money
- The lost relationship for gossiping

Passive discipline is when God stops protecting us, or in the language of the verse, removes the hedge.

I can only imagine the things God keeps out of our lives when he's protecting us, and the things he allows in our lives when he disciplines us...like he did with Israel.

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Just so you don't wonder if God works this way, let me give you a biblical example.

Listen carefully to this verse...

James 5:11 You have heard of the STEADFASTNESS OF JOB, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how THE LORD IS COMPASSIONATE AND MERCIFUL.

We know **the Lord is compassionate and merciful**, but it is strange to read that in this verse, because the verse is about Job!

We might expect to read this when God forgave Manasseh, Nineveh, the Prodigal Son, or when Jesus prayed God would forgive the people crucifying him. In these accounts, God seemed compassionate and merciful.

But, my suspicion is if someone said, "Show me a biblical example of God being compassionate and merciful," you wouldn't take them to Job. Trials – especially those Job experienced – don't make God look compassionate and merciful. If anything, they make God look like he's NOT compassionate and merciful. We tend to think if God were compassionate and merciful, he would not let people experience trials...especially like the ones Job experienced.

So how can James say God WAS compassionate and merciful with Job?

Part of the reason is God put a hedge of protection around Job that restricted what Satan could do. We might not be comfortable with that hedge. Maybe we wish it was higher, but it still showed God's compassion and mercy.

Listen to this...

Job 1:9 Satan...said [to the Lord], "Does Job fear [you] for no reason? 10 Have you not PUT A HEDGE AROUND HIM AND HIS HOUSE AND ALL THAT HE HAS ON EVERY SIDE?"

Satan said that Job only feared God because of the hedge of protection, not just around him, but around everything around him.

Job 1:11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." 12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand."

God removed some of the hedge of protection, and Satan was able to destroy Job's possessions. But God still prevented Satan from harming Job physically.

At least until the next chapter...

Job 2:6 The Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; ONLY SPARE HIS LIFE.””

Now, God said Satan could hurt Job physically, but he still couldn't kill him. This protection demonstrates God's compassion and mercy.

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The reason I'm showing you this is it illustrates what God did with Israel, but with a person. Look back at Isaiah 5:5 one more time...

Isaiah 5:5 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.

Job was a real man, and Israel was – and still is today – a real nation.

God had a hedge of protection around both. All he had to do was remove that hedge, and they suffered. And if God wants to discipline us, all he has to do is remove his protection from our lives.

It makes me want to stay in God's will and under his care.

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Now God describes the desolation that will come to his vineyard...

Isaiah 5:6a I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up;

Pause here.

This describes the land after being invaded. If you remember, when the Jews came back to the Promised Land after their exile in Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed. The desolation was so bad that in Nehemiah's day, even though the Jews had been back in the land for a century, the city still had no walls.

The rest of the verse...

Isaiah 5:6b I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

The Mosaic covenant God made with Israel was conditional versus unconditional. In other words, how people acted determined what they experienced:

- If they were obedient, they were blessed.
- If they were disobedient, they were cursed.

Deuteronomy 28 records the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. If they were obedient, they received rain:

Deuteronomy 28:1 If you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord...12 The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season.

If Israel was disobedient, God withheld the rain:

Deuteronomy 28:1 If you will not obey the voice of the Lord...24 The Lord will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

That's exactly what we see in verse six. There was no rain because of their disobedience.

Last verse...

Isaiah 5:7 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!

This describes:

- The good fruit God wanted: justice and righteousness.
- And the bad fruit he received: bloodshed and outcries, referring to people crying out for help because of the violence being done to them.

There is a fascinating play on words here:

- The Hebrew word for justice is *mišpāt* (pronounced mish-pot), and the Hebrew word for bloodshed is *mišpāh* (pronounced mis-pakh).
- The Hebrew word for justice is *s^ədāqā* (pronounced tse-uh-kah), and the Hebrew word for outcry is *s^ə‘āqā* (pronounced tse-uh-kaw).

The wordplay shows that Israel’s sin didn’t simply fail to reach a standard. It’s not that there was supposed to be justice, but instead, there was bloodshed. It shows that Israel’s sin distorted good into evil. It changed justice into bloodshed and righteousness into outcries of violence.

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And with that, we have the background we need for Jesus’ parable of the vineyard owner. Go ahead and turn to Luke 20.

Let me remind you of the context for this parable. The religious leaders just finished [questioning Jesus’ authority](#). Jesus responded by preaching this parable, not to the religious leaders, but to the people to warn them about the religious leaders.

Look at Luke 20:9...

Luke 20:9 And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.

We know from Isaiah 5, which Jesus’ listeners would have known as well, that the owner is God the Father, and the vineyard is Israel.

This farming arrangement was a common practice in Jesus’ day, especially around Galilee. Areas around Galilee contained vast estates owned by foreigners who lived far away. They would give out the care of their land to local people or tenants. The Greek word for tenants is *geōrgos* (pronounced gee-or-goss), and it literally means “workers of the soil.”

Because the owners were far away and didn’t have the communication we have today, such as email, texting, and video calls, they could only check on their property by sending servants or visiting themselves. This meant two things:

1. The owners had to trust the honesty, cooperation, and hard work of the tenants who managed the land for them.
2. The tenants were able to enjoy much independence.

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The owner returned to his home, but there was an understanding that after the harvest, he would receive fruit from the vineyard, which is what happened in the next verse...

Luke 20:10a When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.

We are pausing in the middle of the verse because this is as far as we can get this week. We must deal with one of the main lessons. In both passages – in the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5 and in this parable in Luke 20 – the owner comes looking for fruit. And this brings us to our last lesson...

Lesson Four: God expects fruit.

Notice the verse says, “When the time came.” This means the owner was reasonable. He didn’t send servants to get fruit too early when the tenants were not ready.

In other words, God isn’t going to expect us to produce fruit that we aren’t ready to produce yet.

But at the same time, because of all God has done for his vineyard – Israel in the Old Testament or us in the New Testament – he still expects fruit.

The key New Testament passage supporting this is James 2. Please turn there. After Paul’s epistles: Hebrews, James, Peter. We will not read all the verses, but I want to draw your attention to some of them.

Here’s the context. In verses 14-26, James contrasts two kinds of faith: saving faith that does produce fruit and dead faith that doesn’t produce fruit.

James gives two examples of people with saving faith that produced fruit.

First, he mentions Abraham...

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works (or fruit) when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

Abraham wasn’t saved because he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. But the fact that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac was evidence he was saved, or evidence that he had living faith that produced fruit.

I feel like this has been a theme recently in our sermons: we don't do good works to be saved. We do good works because we are saved.

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The second example is Rahab...

James 2:25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Again, Rahab wasn’t saved because she hid the spies, but she hid the spies because she was saved.

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And James talks about unsaving faith that lacks fruit or works...

James 2:17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Again, in verse 26...

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

This is faith, but it doesn’t save because it lacks fruit or works.

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And James even gave give an example of individuals with this dead, unsaving faith.

Look at verse 19...

James 2:19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

If people have faith that doesn't produce any fruit or works, they have the same faith as demons, which isn't saving faith.

Now, I want to conclude by leaving you with some encouragement regarding producing fruit. Jesus said...

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

This analogy is fitting because branches don't work hard to produce fruit. It's something they do naturally if they're attached to the tree. Similarly, we don't have to work hard to produce fruit. It is something we do naturally if we are attached to the tree – in this case Christ: if we abide in him and he in us.

Why is that?

Because if you are thankful for what Jesus has done for you, it will not be difficult to serve him and produce fruit. We will be motivated by our love for Christ.

It's like our relationships with our spouse, children, or parents. We like to do things for them, not because we feel like we have to, but because we love them and want to serve them. It's not straining or striving. Instead, it's a joy and privilege.

So, don't leave today thinking about what you HAVE TO do for Jesus. Leave today thinking about what Jesus has done for you and what you GET TO do for him in return.

If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Done on Isaiah:

- JM
- Nelson
- Life Application
- EW
- Moody
- ESV study Bible