

Isaiah 5:1-30

"The Foul Fruit Of The Vineyard"

The judgment of Judah & Jerusalem began in Ch 2. It concludes in Ch 5. In Ch 3 God tells them that the way He will judge them is through a series of shortages. There would be a shortage of food, a shortage of water, a shortage in strong civil leaders, spiritual leaders, military leaders... a shortage of any & everything they felt secured *by* or took confidence *in*. & What He would leave them with would be weak, foolish & incompetent leadership who would leave the nation in shambles. Deprivation & desolation would be the result of the choices they had made... God didn't have to do anything special or unique to bring them into judgment. He just let them have their way. In Vs 9 of Ch 3 it reads, "Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves."¹

Here in Ch 5, God expands (in the form of pronouncing "woes") a bit more upon the kinds of sins that are soliciting His judgment. It begins in the form of a parable.

Vs 1-7

The 1st 6 Vs are the illustration (the parable), Vs 7 is the interpretation. It begins w/the prophet sharing in the form of a song. Perhaps if they wouldn't listen to him *speaking* to them, they'd listen if he *sang* to them. After all, (we'll see in a few minutes) they were all about being entertained...

But the parable was about a vineyard. A vineyard on a fruitful hill that had every advantage, every benefit that it could possibly be given. The ground was carefully prepared & cultivated, it was planted w/the choicest vine (the very best that could be provided). It was protected from harm's way (be it animals or people who would steal from it) (the tower was placed in its midst). There was simply no reason why it shouldn't have been incredibly fruitful. The conditions & provisions were perfect. So the owner had an appropriate expectancy... he made a winepress. But rather than bring forth good grapes (a fruitful harvest), it brought forth wild grapes (a foul harvest).

The word for "wild grapes" goes beyond something that's simply sour & unpleasant. It speaks of a foul smelling, rotted, worthless kind of fruit. It would've been bad enough had the vineyard brought forth *no* fruit. But it went beyond that. It brought forth *bad* fruit, worthless, harmful, foul fruit.

Now. We know that this is a reference to what God had done for Israel & the fruit that Israel brought forth after all the love, care, protection & provision that God had made for them.

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Is 3:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But something that we can take note of here is that children are not always the *product* of their environment. – It’s true. Sometimes there will be that occasion where the disobedient, obstinate, disrespectful child is the direct result of the sin or the terrible decisions of the parent(s). **But listen, there are other times when you’ve given them everything they need to succeed. You’ve placed them in the best possible “environment” that you can. You’ve cleared away the debris, you’ve pointed them in an appropriate direction & they still choose the path of sin. They still choose to feed the appetites of the flesh...**

Think about Adam & Eve, they literally had everything *perfect*. God Himself was the One who tended *to* & took care *of* them. You couldn’t have asked for a better *environment*. Yet they chose the way of sin. (Of course, we’re also grateful that the Lord makes a way for restoration through repentance toward God & faith toward Christ). But each individual comes to a place where they have a decision to make (it’s called free will). God could’ve made robots if He wanted them. He didn’t want them. **What gives love it’s meaning is the capacity of choice. He wants us to *choose* to love Him, to follow Him, to walk w/Him & cultivate that relationship w/Him. He’s done everything that He can, what more do you want Him to do? He came to the earth, took on flesh & blood, became sin for us, died for us, was raised so as to justify us... But you & me, we have a decision to make. How will we respond? The invitation goes out, the provision has been made, it’s up to you what to do w/that...**

But God took Israel out of Egypt, He “planted” them in the land that He’d promised Ab to give to his descendants. He hedged them from other nations as they grew. He gave them fertile soil, fruitful land, gave them His word, showed them His ways. Loved *on* them cared *for* them, worked *with* them & provided everything they needed to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. **To be the light of the world. To bring the hope of salvation to a dark & dying world... There was every expectation of good grapes, of a fruitful harvest... But what came forth wasn’t good fruit, it was foul, poisonous bad fruit. They enjoyed the goodness, the gifts, but lost sight of the Giver.**

& Like I said last week, the *interpretation* doesn’t belong to us, but surely there’s an *application*. God has blessed the U.S. w/freedom & prosperity unlike any other nation upon the face of the earth... & My how we’ve enjoyed the goodness, the grace, the gifts, but we’ve forgotten the Giver. The greatness (we like to think) is in our Constitution, our form of government, the capitalistic society.

It's our great ingenuity, our creativity, our hard work & sweat equity. We congratulate ourselves, worship the work of our own hands & forget about God who has blessed us so abundantly out of His grace & His mercy... So what will He do?

Look what He says of Israel in Vs 5. "I will take away its hedge." Ladies & gentlemen there was a reason little Israel was able to survive & thrive among nations mightier & more fierce than they were. God had hedged them about. Militarily, spiritually, economically God had hedged the nation. No one could touch it. Now, (He says), He's gonna burn it down, break down its wall & it shall be trampled down. He won't tend it, take care of it, prune it or anything else... it'll just be overran w/briers & thorns & dried up in drought. – Leave Isaiah, turn to **Matthew 21** (Vs 33-46)

Jesus here essentially reiterates this same point that Isaiah is speaking of & that is the failure of Israel (& it's leaders) to bring forth the fruit that God is looking for. Here, Jesus highlights more than Isaiah. Not only did the landowner do everything to set the vineyard up for success, he sent servants to check up on it. But rather than render fruit they killed the servants (the prophets). Finally he sent his son (a reference to Christ Himself) saying, "Surely they'll respect My Son!" But when they saw *Him*, they plotted/planned to kill Him (which they did) & try to take control of the vineyard for themselves!" Jesus said, "What do you think the landowner will do to those wicked & worthless men when he comes?" The idea being, "Judgment is all that is left for these people... they've had every opportunity to render fruit & they've not only failed, they've intentionally rebelled."

In Jn 15 Jesus speaks again paints the picture of bringing forth fruit. He speaks of Himself being the vine & we being the branches & that we're to abide in Him that we might bring forth fruit. Family, it doesn't get a whole lot clearer. God is looking for the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of His love in our lives.

We talk from time to time about what I refer to as "Divine Initiative" & "Human Responsibility". God initiates, we respond. God has done all the work. (He plants the vineyard, hedges it around, builds the tower). As it pertains to you & me, He did the work. He resolved the sin dilemma, He initiated a relationship w/us through the cross of J.C. He did it all. We simply receive of His grace the salvation that He so freely provides. Yet, there should be a "net effect" of His salvation at work in us. In other words, we were saved by works, but surely God's grace will go to work, produce good works & cause us to walk in good works. There will be results from knowing J.C. that come to fruition in our lives.

Paul said it like this, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*² God's grace will produce works in/through us. So the question that confronts us is, "What is the fruit of God's grace in our lives?"

Charles Spurgeon said this, *"Has it been so with us? Have we rewarded the Well-beloved thus 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 industry; impurity, instead of holiness?"*

God would have us be fruitful for His glory. One of the keys (as we'll see [Vs24]) to being fruitful is getting in God's word, letting His word abide in us.

As for the foul fruit that Israel produced, God spells it out for them in the following Vs by sharing 6 "woes". & Again, though the interpretation belongs to Israel, surely there's application we need to guard against as well.

Vs 8-10

Here we have the 1st foul fruit of greed/covetousness. & It's not so much rural development that God is against (as far as I can tell) as it is the insatiable appetite to buy more & more property to enrich oneself at the expense of others. Meaning, you're buying it all up building a huge estate & now there's no room for anyone else! It comes back to that question we asked a few weeks ago, how much is enough?

Maybe they were developing massive estates to sell to other crooked leaders in the land. Essentially God is saying that all they're doing to enrich themselves is ultimately going to fall apart. The deals won't go through. The houses will be vacant & the fields will yield virtually nothing for them.

Vs 11-17

The foul fruit of drunkenness & substance abuse. – Now, people who like to drink generally get semi-confrontational about the fact that the bible doesn't forbid drinking (& that's true). But you'll be hard pressed to find the Bible expounding upon alcohol in a positive light. I can find you a plethora of passages that speak negatively *about* it or warn you *regarding* it.

Proverbs 22 would be just one example. *"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine."*³

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 15:10-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 23:29-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You understand what wisdom is saying here, right? Alcohol will bring despair, sorrow, contention & complaints into your life. It has this way of sneaking up on you & destroying everything you hold dear. It causes fights, family contentions, wounds w/out a cause... He carries on, *"Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper."*⁴ It looks so tempting, so tantalizing, enticing & alluring... but it's poison. It's drawing you in to destroy your life. *"Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: 'They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?'"*⁵

Just like our present passage. Listen, if when you get up in the morning, you need a little drink to get your day started... 99.9% chance you're an alcoholic. There's already a problem. "Rising early to follow intoxicating drink, continuing throughout the day into the night." God is here indicting that constant party frame of mind. Love the music, love the skilled entertainer (which in & of themselves aren't a bad thing). The problem is, "They do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of *His* hands.

& Just FYI parents. If you're children, see you drinking & coping w/life through various substances, don't act shocked when they turn the same direction. You're giving them the example; they're looking to you...

But back to this exalting of entertainers. People are so eager to regard the work of man... But they don't regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of His hands. We marvel at the operation of Steve Jobs hands (though he's been dead several years, Apple was his baby). We marvel at the work of Elon Musk's hands. Fill in the blank, these guys that push the boundaries & innovate so brilliantly. But I promise you, the reproductive system, the nervous system, (for that matter any system of the human anatomy). Aquatic life, the variety & complexity of creation. The vast enormity of the sun/moon & stars. The galaxies... down to the smallest single celled amoeba... The work of the Lord's hands goes uncelebrated, unappreciated, taken for granted. Yet it all screams to mankind, it's pointing & testifying to a Creator.

We recognize that the iPhone (or the shoes you're wearing, the building you're in, the chairs in which you sit) wouldn't/couldn't exist apart from a designer & a creator.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 23:31-32). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 23:33-35). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Yet all the things I just mentioned (of an infinitely greater degree of complexity) just kinda happened by random chance... No way. It's the work of the Lord. The operation of His hands. The Psalmist said, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world."*⁶

God says here, "My people don't regard Me, nor consider the operation of My hands." "Therefore" Vs 13, "My people have gone into captivity." Why? "Because they have no knowledge." They're ignorant of the word of God. They've blown off the precepts of God & have given themselves over to debauchery. In Hosea, he said it like this: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."*⁷ This is why it's so important to study the Word of God. That we might grow in our knowledge/understanding of Him. That we might lead lives that regard Him, that respect Him (as our Creator/heavenly Father) & that are pleasing to Him.

In Vs 14-17 Isaiah expands on the death & destruction that's coming & how the pride of the people will be brought low & that God alone will be exalted & hallowed in righteousness.

Vs 18-19

Liberalism (the 3rd foul fruit). People plunging into sin. Actually drawing sin to themselves, attracting sin w/ropes of emptiness (or vanity). It's not a "woe" to the man who stumbles (as people sometimes will), but to those who actively pursue & justify sin in their lives. They seek it out & draw it in. They're bound to it & in it, drag it w/them as w/a cart rope... Then they mistake the mercy/patience of God for apathy (or worse yet, approval) from God. They mock the Lord, "Let Him do His worst. Go ahead God, pour it out, give us what You got!" They defy the judgment of God against their sin...

Vs 20

We touched on this last week. There's no closet shame or sin anymore. People openly, arrogantly flaunt their sin as though it's a great thing. Essentially calling evil good. & Good (the standards & absolutes of God's word & those of you who want to see it upheld) evil. You're the evil oppressor because you want to keep sin in its rightful shameful place. We might recognize this as the sin of relativism. A lack of absolutes.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 19:1-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ho 4:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You know, “Who are you to say what’s right for me?” The only absolute is that there are no absolutes. “Speak your truth.” What does that even mean? Listen, something is either true or it’s not! ... & There *are* moral absolutes! Not because I say so, God says so! Right is right & wrong is wrong & the majority approval isn’t what makes something right.

Vs 21

Intellectualism. People who think they’re the expert. Think about your field of study. Mine would be the Bible. I’ve devoted (up to this point) about 30 yrs of my life to studying it, learning it, seeking to live it. But as Shakespeare said, “But man, proud man... most ignorant of what he’s most assured.” In other words, for all that I know in my area of study, you could quantify it times 10 (& well beyond) that I don’t know.

Someone who studies medicine. Maybe cardiology. Perhaps you consider yourself an expert in that field, but concerning the entirety of the human anatomy??? Or even in that field specifically... We just don’t know what we think we know... not fully. But think of all that there is to know in life, how much do you really know? Just read Job 38-39, you’ll discover it’s not much...

Vs 22-23

This is the 2nd time that God indicts the drinker. We might call this person the functioning alcoholic. They take pride in the fact that they can really “hold their liquor.” A person who can “drink you under the table.” Nothing to be proud of here. But rather to be repentant of.

What’s the common thread in all these woes? In all this sin? They’re all about self & self indulgence. Feeding the flesh rather than crucifying the flesh. Looking out for self rather than honoring the Lord.

Vs 24

Here it is again. Why do people do what they want rather than what’s right? Because they’ve *rejected*... & *despised* (that is, had no regard for) the Word of God. Judgment could be avoided through simple obedience from the heart. But instead, they’ll be devoured like fire consumes the stubble & the chaff; suddenly, severely & completely.

Vs 25

He’s still willing to save them if they’ll but turn from their sin. His hand is stretched out to them but they won’t grab hold through repentance... So what will He do?

Vs 26-30

He will take away His hedge, whistle to the nations from the end of the earth...

& Say, "Here they are... come get 'em". Egypt, Syria & Assyria would all come against them & ultimately Babylon would carry them off into captivity. Here's the thing about those other nations. They'd be all business. "No one will be weary or stumble among them... they will roar like young lions... & no one will deliver." The strong men of Judah were "mighty at drinking alcohol". Their enemies would be focused, sharp, prepared for war & Judah would certainly fall...

Final question to consider. As the Lord surveys the "vineyard of our lives" what kind of fruit does He find? The fruit of righteousness? Loving God, loving others? Or the fruit of placing self above all else... Greed, covetousness, perhaps drunkenness, intellectualism, relativism, disregard for His word... Judgment is coming. It'll be severe, it'll be complete. But His nail scarred hand is outstretched still, grace is available, turn from your sin & trust in J.C. today.

Prayer Points:

Father, once again we thank You for Your word. May we honor, regard & obey Your word from the heart. & May the seed of Your word bring forth the fruit of righteousness in our lives.

If you're in that place where if you were to be honest w/yourself, honest w/God you'd say, "The fruit in my life is pretty foul. I need God to wash over me, to cleanse me, forgive me of my sin & make me new." Then for you, it's all about surrender. Turn from your sin, believe on the Lord J.C. & be saved.