

Review

Our third study in the book of Isaiah has brought us to chapter five. So far, we have seen God's rebuke of the Jews for their failure to acknowledge Him, as well as for their dead religiosity in simply going through the motions of worship and sacrifice. He also told them about the nature of the Millennial Kingdom, when He will personally rule and reign on earth. Isaiah told the Jews of his day that since people would worship and submit to God in that day, they should follow that example and do it now. He also warned that if they did not repent, they would die.

Now, as we pick up in chapter five, Isaiah starts by singing a song...

5:1 The Vineyard

Isaiah sings a song for a person who he loves dearly. This beloved person owned a vineyard that was situated on a fertile hill. It's a great place for a vineyard - fertile soil, and an ideal location. Certainly, this vineyard will be the envy of everyone.

5:2 The Worthless Produce

Unfortunately, the vineyard didn't exactly live up to expectations. It certainly wasn't the owner's fault. He prepared it just right, and planted the best vines. He set up a guard tower to keep away thieves, birds, and pests. He did everything he could in expectation and anticipation of a fruitful harvest.

But in spite of everything the owner had done, the only thing that this vineyard produced was worthless grapes. Interestingly, the word translated "worthless" here is "**be-oo-SHEEM**," which is the plural of "**be-OSHE**," which means "stench, foul odor." It's not like these are simply flavorless grapes - they are stinkberries.

5:3-4 Judge Between Me And My Vineyard

In the song, the owner says, "Hey, men of Judah - I want you to judge between me and my vineyard! If you think the fault is with Me, tell me what more I could have done. Why hasn't it borne any fruit at all?"

5:5-6 Judgment On The Vineyard

While the men of Judah are still listening, the owner says, "Because the vineyard has proved to be utterly fruitless, in spite of everything I've done to make it fruitful, this is what I'm going to do: I'm going to let it be ruined. I'll take away its protective hedges, break down its walls, and let people walk across it. It will be trampled to the ground, laid waste. No one will work the land, and it will be consumed with weeds and thorns. I'm not even going to let rain fall on it."

Of course, at this point, we have to wonder what kind of vineyard owner has the power to charge rain clouds not to rain... This vineyard owner who is so loved by Isaiah is the Lord Himself.

God And Fruitlessness

When we read the Bible, one thing that we discover about God is that He insists on fruit. What is fruit? It's the produce of your life, and God wants it to be both existant and abundant.

John the Baptist warned,

Matt. 3:8 "...bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance"

The writer of Hebrews said good fruit was...

Hebr. 13:15 ...praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

And the apostle Paul told us that...

Gal. 5:22-23 ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

We are to be

Phil. 1:11 ...filled with the fruit of righteousness...

...and we must...

Col. 1:10 ...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

This is what fruit is. This is what God is looking for regarding the produce of our lives. He's watching to see the fruit of repentance, thanksgiving, love, righteousness, good works, and increasing our

knowledge of God.

God doesn't just want fruit. He insists on it. Remember, Jesus cursed the fig tree for not bearing fruit:

Matt. 21:19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He *said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered.

He also taught a parable about God's requirement of fruit, and willingness to do anything it takes to bear fruit:

Luke 13:6-9 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

God will do what it takes, but fruitlessness will result in destruction. That's what God is saying will happen to His vineyard. Now, the natural question at this point is to ask, "What, or who, is the vineyard?" We find out in verse seven...

5:7 The Vineyard Is Israel

The vineyard is the Jews. God came looking for the fruit of justice and righteousness, but instead, he found corruption.

There is a play on words happening in this verse, which is only obvious in Hebrew. It says that the Lord came looking for "**mish-PAWT**" (justice), but behold, "**mis-PAWKH**" (bloodshed). For "**tsed-aw-KAW**" (righteousness), but behold "**tsah-ak-AW**" (a cry of distress).

The Lord came looking for fruit in the vineyard, but found only stinkberries. We can't help but think of the parable Jesus spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people:

Matt. 21:33-41 ...There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" They *said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons."

Matt. 21:45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

It's hard to miss the direct quotation Jesus makes from Isaiah when He speaks His parable. God had come looking for the fruit, but there had been no fruit. Those that were left in charge to produce the fruit - the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees - had not done so. They only wanted the vineyard for themselves, and would kill anyone who stood in their way.

5:8-10 Six Woes

"Woe" (Heb.: "**HOH-ee**") is an interjection meaning "alas!" It is used in the Bible to imply, "You are in store for deep suffering, dreadful affliction, ruinous trouble, and terrible grief."

Isaiah now pronounces six "woes," which help to illustrate what

kind of stinkberries God had found in His vineyard.

Adding Houses And Joining Fields

The first woe is pronounced upon those who add house to house, and join field to field. In other words, these were the men that were taking advantage of the poor by buying their inheritance. Every acre in the land of Israel had been given by God to the various tribes, and divided up by clan and family. But there were greedy men in Isaiah's time who were playing Monopoly - trying to buy up every piece of real estate until they'd taken over the entire board. They were so covetous that God said they wouldn't stop until they were alone in the midst of the land!

But God won't allow their investment to pay off. Their land will produce almost nothing.

5:11-17 Drunkards

The second woe is pronounced against drunkards. People who are alcoholic - having to start drinking first thing in the morning, and continue drinking long into the night. They are going to end up in exile as prisoners, where they will not be able to drink.

Jerusalem will be invaded, and strangers will inhabit it.

5:18-19 Iniquity And Falsehood

The third woe is also spoken against sinners of a certain sort, but an interesting word picture is used. These sinners are keeping their distance from their iniquity. They are dragging it behind them "with cords of falsehood." It is like they are pulling a cart of their sin.

They talk as if they are not sinners: "I wish the Lord would judge all of these sinners. I wish God would hurry up and do what He needs to do!" It makes me think of Christians who talk the talk, but secretly harbor unrepentant sin in their lives. They talk about how they wish the Lord would come back and judge this immoral world, hiding the fact that they are going to be the first ones judged!

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the

outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

5:20 Substituting Evil And Good

The fourth woe is upon those who switch evil and good. They call the righteous unrighteous and the unrighteous righteous. They call sin acceptable, but holiness is wrong.

Certainly we see evidence of this sort of behavior all around us in our society today. Christianity is called evil, but homosexuality is called good. Victims of crime are treated ruthlessly by defense lawyers, but criminals are given every opportunity to be released.

In 1995, Robert Harlan was convicted of kidnapping, raping, and murdering a 25-year-old cocktail waitress in Adams County, Colorado. He also shot and paralyzed a person who tried to help the woman escape. The jury unanimously decided that he should be put to death. But in March 2005, the Colorado Supreme Court threw out the death penalty because of "juror misconduct." What had they done that was so wrong, a rapist murderer would not be put to death? The jurors had discussed Bible verses during their deliberations.

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil.

5:21 The Wise And Clever

The fifth woe is against people who think that they are wise and clever. Someone who is wise in their own eyes is a fool and doesn't fear God. The proverbs say,

Prov. 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

Prov. 26:12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

When God pronounces a woe against you, your only hope is to repent. But someone who thinks more of himself than he does of God will probably not be repenting.

5:22-23 Heroes Of Booze

The sixth and final woe is also against drunkards. But while the

previous woe that mentioned alcohol was against the alcoholic, this is against the person who is a hero in drinking wine, and against the bartender.

How can someone be a hero in drinking? Just ask any college fraternity. These organizations often make drinking a test of manhood, or to determine who is "cool." Someone who can binge drink and "hold their liquor" is respected by his peers.

But that is like respecting someone because they are good at Russian Roulette. The 2005 issue of the Annual Review of Public Health reports that alcohol consumption among college students is increasing dramatically each year. There are almost 2,000 alcohol-related unintentional fatal injuries among US college students, and almost 3 million of them drive under the influence each year. More than 300 college students each year die from alcohol poisoning. Hail to the heroes.

And the bartenders who serve alcohol aren't any better off. In God's eyes, binge drinkers and bartenders are the equivalent of cops and judges who take bribes, who are willing to knowingly arrest and sentence innocent people if it makes them some money.

5:24-25 They Have Despised The Word

God will judge the nation because of their sin. Why? Because "they have rejected the Law of the Lord of hosts." Because they have despised God's Word. This is why God's anger burned against His own people.

Imagine what He thinks about the church today. So many churches and denominations have completely forsaken the Word of God. They won't teach through it, they refuse to read from it, they deny the reality of it, and instill doubt in it.

2Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Is it any wonder that we aren't getting teaching, sin isn't being re-proved, people aren't being corrected, hardly anyone is being trained in righteousness, and most Christians aren't equipped anymore?

The Jews were in the same boat, and God had struck them. But instead of repenting, they continued down their path of apostasy.

5:26-30 The Promise Of Babylonian Invasion

God would strike them harder soon. He was preparing the Babylonians to invade them. Their army would be as dedicated to their duty as the Jews were to their sin...