

## “The Sad Song Of The Vineyard”

(Isaiah 5:1-7)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon Text:

***"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard:  
My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.  
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.  
Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.  
Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.  
What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?  
When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?  
Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard:  
I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.  
I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there.  
I will command the clouds not to rain on it.  
The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard bitter cries."***

Dear friends in Jesus,

At the beginning of Spring some of us probably start thinking of gardening, and some of us actually start to do something about it. Keeping a garden is hard work. We say gardening is 'fun', but when we think about it, we realise that the 'fun' comes in seeing things grow and in enjoying the vegetables and fruit and flowers that our garden produces.

Let's imagine that you have worked hard on your garden all Spring. You carefully prepared your soil, then planted your garden. Every evening throughout the hot Summer months you watered your garden as needed. And then you make a heart-breaking discovery. What you have worked so hard for has turned out pretty badly. Diseases and bugs affected the vegetables, fruit and flowers. How do you feel?

That's the kind of story we have in our Bible text today, which I will call the saddest song in the Bible. You see, Isaiah faced a problem we sometimes must face and solve. We must tell the truth even when we know that the truth will not be well received. But to be a real friend, a true neighbour, a good husband or wife, or a good church member, we need to tell the truth even though it hurts.

And that is so lacking in our society today! So Isaiah did what we often do. He came at the problem from the side so to speak, to present his message in a way that wouldn't 'turn off his hearers, even before he could get to the point. Because we all like a story, Isaiah told a story in poetic form, the story of the vineyard.

The vineyard owner in Isaiah's story also went to great pains in caring for his vineyard. He chose a site on a hill where the soil was well drained, turned over the soil carefully, cleared the stones out of the area, built the terraces where necessary, and then purchased the highest quality vines for planting. The owner even built a watchtower to look out over the entire area, as a lookout for any thieves who might try to break in. Finally, he made a winepress in anticipation of the good wine that he expected to make from the grapes.

Then came the awful discovery that all his efforts had ended in utter failure. The vineyard failed completely. It produced grapes that were 'wild', that is they were totally unfit for making into wine. They were bitter and shrivelled up.

Now Isaiah says to the people to whom he tells the story, "***You be the judge! Did the vineyard owner do the best possible job in setting up his vineyard and in growing his grapes! Did he do everything in his power to assure himself of a good crop?***" Of course the answer is obvious, and a second question naturally follows: What should the vineyard owner do now? This time the answer is supplied. He will cut down the hedge, break down the wall, and allow the vineyard to revert to desert.

Isaiah makes a clear application to his story: "***For the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel and the people of Judah.***" What are the wild grapes? He says, "***I looked for justice but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard bitter cries.***" In our translations we miss the play on words here. In Hebrew the words for 'justice' and 'bloodshed' sound very much alike as do the words for 'righteousness' and 'bitter cries'. In place of the desired fruits of justice and righteousness, the gardener reaped a harvest of bloodshed and bitter tears.

There are wild grapes in our vineyard, too. This sad song in the Bible is repeated throughout history. God created a beautiful world, perfect in every respect. He put into it people made in his own image. But God's beautiful creation yielded the fruits of bitterness, bloodshed and self-destruction. God finally obliterated the word with a devastating flood. Then God called Israel and made them a special people. He saved them from slavery in Egypt and led them into the Promised Land. He set up a wall of protective laws around them. Those same laws, largely now unknown today, are still there to protect us. But they also failed to produce the fruits of justice and righteousness.

And isn't that all too often the same story with us today? God has saved and redeemed us, his people, from the desert of self-service and selfishness. Through the suffering and death of his own dear Son and the power of the Holy Spirit he has brought new life to our dead bones. The fruit he now looks for in us is spelled out so clearly in Galatians 5: "***The fruit of the Spirit***" writes Paul, "***is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.***" But all too often, for such sweet fruit, we substitute the spirit of rivalry, bitterness, jealousy, anger, gossip and greed. It's sobering to think what we have done with God's wonderful gifts. How long will he put up with us?

Only one thing gives us real meaning for life and helps us. It is God's precious Word — his gift to us! That Word is the message of God's presence and forgiveness, spoken so clearly through Jesus. By his death for us he has demonstrated God's amazing love for us, and he has overcome the evil one for us. By his glorious resurrection he has cleared the way for our resurrection to new life in God's service, now and forever.

We're often like little children playing out in the back yard fighting over a toy. "I want the truck!" "No, I want it; I had it first," and so on. Between us is tension and bitterness. But then Mum comes to the door and she has a treat for us some ice-cream, a cool drink, and some biscuits. Suddenly the bitterness is over and the fighting is forgotten. The toy truck we have been fighting over is dropped in the sand, because Mum has something much, much better.

So we want to turn to the Source of all our good our God who has appeared to us so personally in his Son, Jesus. He can and does make all things new and well again, and when his Word lives in us richly, once again good fruit will come forth, and we shall praise and glorify his saving Name forever and ever.

**Amen.**

**The peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck 4 October 2020