

Sermon Notes & References
God's Unfruitful Vineyard
Isaiah 5:1-7
June 28, 2009

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A. Introduction

1. Love Songs or Poems

- a. for most of us, even the 'super spiritual!'
- b. these form a part of our romantic memories
- c. depending upon our generation, what they are differ
 - (A) for the youngest, these memories are in the future
 - (B) my memories go back to when there was a special vocabulary for love songs: moon, June, spoon, croon
 - (C) and there are all the variations in the years between
- d. if you are a classical music buff
 - (A) you may have an operatic favourite
 - (B) such as Musetta's waltz song from La Bohème
- e. if you have literary tastes
 - (A) it may be Browning's Sonnets to the Portuguese
 - (B) or Shakespeare's Sonnets
- f. and if you are a country and western fan, there may be some 'hurtin' music' that you enjoy with nostalgia
- g. and so on

2. The Bible has both love stories and love songs in it

- a. the Book of Ruth is my favourite love story
- b. and the Song of Songs is a Mid-Eastern love poem
 - (A) describing the love of Solomon and the Shulammitte
 - (B) which Jewish rabbis of the time of Christ questioned whether or not it should be in the Bible canon
 - (C) maintaining that no one should study this book until they were at least 30 years of age
 - (D) interpreted by the Jews as the story of Israel's history in being redeemed out of Egypt into Canaan
 - (E) and by Christians as describing the love between Christ and his bride, the church
 - (F) Bernard of Clairvaux, author of 'Jesus the Very Thought of Thee,' had preached 86 sermons by his

death on the first two chapters of Song of Songs alone

c. our text today is another Bible love song

d. and it begins this 5th chapter of the book of Isaiah; listen– «

3. as we now read Isaiah 5; doing so, as is our habit, in its entirety »

a. the song is found in verses 1 to 7; Isaiah relates it, perhaps even sings it, before people from Jerusalem and Judah

(A) it uses the special vocabulary of a love song, words such as would be used in a song by the 'best man'

(B) who first sings of 'my beloved', i.e., 'my best friend'

(C) then sings of the bride as 'the vineyard', a term that is used in a similar fashion in the Song of Songs

b. so, in a sense, we can describe this as a 'hurtin' song'

(A) the bridegroom has gone to great lengths to provide

(B) to provide for a bride that spurns and disappoints him

(C) now this is the picture underlying the song which no doubt would be recognized by the audience of the day, but we shall leave it and look just at the song itself

c. the song consists of three stanzas

(A) the first stanza is a parable as well as a song, telling what the owner-Beloved, the best friend of the singer, has done for his vineyard

(B) the second stanza first asks the people, and then tells, how the owner will deal with his unfruitful vineyard

(C) the third stanza, departs from being a parable, and makes clear what that parable means, for any in the audience who have not yet picked up on the meaning

(1) that the owner, the Beloved is Jehovah God, and,

(2) the vineyard is the house of Israel

d. let us look at these verses more closely, and I shall be using the NKJV as I reread them

- B. The first stanza comprises Isaiah 5: 1-2 and is in two parts
1. the first part tells us the setting
 - a. **Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard ...** (Isaiah 5: 1a NKJV)
 - b. These words are being spoken – or sung – to, as verse 3 shows, the people of Jerusalem and Judah
 - c. the first few words do not quite adequately express the meaning; Isaiah is not asking permission, but calling the people's attention: **'I am indeed going to sing ... will you not come and listen?'**
 - d. and having summoned them, he introduces the love theme – a theme which will normally get most people's attention
 - e. **'I am singing to, or concerning my Well-beloved, a song of my Beloved'** – you can see the special vocabulary even in English, but in Hebrew it is even more striking – the word for well-beloved, for example, is 'lididi,' which reminds me of the Irish folk-love song of the **'drummer who loved the one-eyed cook'** where every verse ends with **'la, da da, da di di, la la low'** – I'll spare you my singing it – but the point is, it sounds like a love song; you know, June, moon, ...
 - f. it's a **'song of my best friend concerning his vineyard'** – that sounds like a love song ... let's stop and listen
 2. so here is the story in the rest of verse 1 and verse 2:
 - a. **... My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.** (Isaiah 5:1b-2 NKJV)
 - b. the love song continues as it should: 'lididi'
 - c. here are the things the owner has done for his vineyard
 - d. we will take advantage of our privileged position in having already heard the whole song, so that we know
 - (A) that the well-beloved is Jehovah God himself – and this is unique in the OT, that the prophet referring to God describes him, literally, as 'the One I love'
 - (B) and that the vineyard is the House of Israel
 - (C) and God took steps in cultivating his vineyard
 - e. step 1, it was placed in a most favourable locality
 - (A) not just on any hill, but a horn or spur out from a peak that the sun would shine on it all day long

- (B) with soil known for its fatness or fertility; good loam
- (C) living on the moraine we have clay soil and as well as doing our own composting, we buy compost to add to it; so we expect flowers and vegetables to thrive
- (D) God put Israel into Canaan: a land flowing with milk and honey, a fertile land, a land so fruitful that it took two men to bear a cluster of grapes to Moses
- (E) and, above all, God was present Himself with them
- f. step 2, the owner promoted the fertility of the vineyard
 - (A) he dug it – some translations say he fenced it, taking that meaning from the Greek OT – removed its stones
 - (B) the Lord Jesus told a parable of a fig tree that had not borne fruit for three years, and the vineyard-keeper asked for another year to dig it and put in fertilizer (just as we have to keep adding compost to ours)
 - (C) so, the beloved himself worked the vineyard; digging it by hand – on the steep side of such a hill he couldn't plough it – removing stones which would be used to build a protective wall; a back-breaking job
 - (D) so God laboured to make Israel fertile
 - (1) He gave them judges and kings to lead them
 - (2) He removed the wicked Amorites from the land
 - (3) He put walls of protection around them
- g. step 3, the owner used the choicest of vines
 - (A) the soreq vine, as it is called here, is said to be the finest of eastern vines, bearing small grapes of bluish-red colour, its seeds scarcely noticeable when eaten.
 - (B) God took as the root of this house of Israel, Abraham, His own friend, and then, by His grace, from his descendants, Jacob who became a prince with God
 - (C) and to prune that vine, God gave them instruction through the law of Moses, through priest and prophet
- h. step 4, he built a tower in its midst
 - (A) not the watchman's hut of Isaiah1; but a proper tower
 - (B) a tower where a watch could be kept against those who would break in and rob or destroy the vineyard

- (C) a tower where the owner-Beloved Himself could sit and look out upon His vineyard, enjoying it, savouring it
- (D) in the midst of Canaan, God set Jerusalem and Zion as the place of His abode, His temple; where He and His vineyard could find mutual enjoyment

3. But the owner-Beloved had expectations of his vineyard

- a. he made – literally, he hewed out of the rock – a wine press, vat and trough – also labourious work
- b. because he had a rightful expectation that with all that he had done for his vineyard that he would reap his reward from it, a return for his labour and investment of time
- c. we are told, he expected – he waited patiently but eagerly – for the fruit of his endeavours

4. then comes the 'hurting' part of the song

- a. 'But it brought forth wild grapes' or 'worthless ones'
- b. 'wild' or 'worthless' comes from a word, 'to have a bad smell, to stink' – the results stank!
- c. what a disappointment to the vineyard owner – what a disappointment to the Beloved Jehovah God of Israel!

C. The second stanza, verses 3 to 6: what will the owner-Beloved do?

- 1. First the people of Jerusalem and Judah are challenged to assess this case between the owner and his vineyard – the song shifts to a courtroom with the owner himself bearing testimony, a suit against the vineyard: *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?* (Isaiah 5: 3-4 NKJV)
 - a. what more? what more? ... the people can answer in only one way ... there was nothing more that he could have done for the vineyard.
 - b. why then? why then? ... was the result only stinking, bad, wild grapes ... to this the people can give no answer; with all that the owner's effort the result cannot be explained
 - c. so, the owner himself will now tell how he will respond to the vineyard's lack of response to his care:
- 2. *'And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be*

burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it.' (Isaiah 5:5-6 NKJV)

- a. all the good things that had been done for the vineyard are now removed, cast aside, destroyed, and trampled down
- b. is this just ill-considered anger? No; the patience and the waiting has taken place. If there is any fault, it is not on the part of the Beloved who cultivated the vineyard, but on the part of the vineyard itself.
- c. and, the final words of this stanza begin the revelation that more than the Beloved, the owner of the vineyard is speaking here – for those words go beyond mortal man; only God can command the clouds this way
- d. so, in case the lesson of the song has been lost on the dull ears of his audience, Isaiah paints the parable's purpose in

D. The third stanza, Isaiah 5:7

1. **For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.** (Isaiah 5:7 NKJV)
 - a. these words are clear; just as Jesus would instruct those of his disciples who would listen, so Isaiah explains the figure
 - b. all of Israel – both the northern and southern tribes – are portrayed in the unproductive vineyard of God
 - c. Judah – whom God had especially favoured in heritage, in the kings given to it, in the placement of the temple – he is part of that vineyard
 - d. these are the disappointments to Jehovah God
 - e. and God is going to tear this vineyard up as a result
2. why? God gives the reason through Isaiah's words
 - a. in the original there is a play on words in the second half of this verse, one that leaps out and stuns the listener
 - b. **He waited for justice (mishpat) and lo bloodshed (mispach); for righteousness (tsedaqah), and lo a distressed shriek (tse'aqah)** – these are the fruit God expected and what he got – they looked like grapes

but the tasted rotten – these words sound the same but there is a world of difference

- c. God will not be deceived by, nor will he be tolerant of, any thing less than the fruit that he expects from his people

E. and, herein lies the lesson for us this morning

1. God's expectation of His people in the OT were not onerous

- a. fulfilling the Law of Moses (or all that the Pharisees added to it) was never intended as a way of salvation, as Paul makes very clear, especially in the book of Romans
- b. but for those who had a love relationship with God, who had the righteousness that comes by faith as did Abraham and those who were his descendants by faith the law was a delight, a guide, an assurance – you only have to read a few sections of Psalm 119 to realize that fact
- c. so the prophet Micah was able to summarize what God really wanted from His people: "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

2. God's expectation of His people in the NT are not onerous

- a. we are told in 1 John 5:3, For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.
- b. the NT gives many passages telling what God expects of us
 - (A) the sermon on the mount, Christ's manifesto of his kingdom, the marching orders of the church
 - (B) the practical sections of the NT epistles
 - (C) the last words of Jesus in instructing His disciples
 - (D) the new commandment given to His disciples, '... that you love one another, even as I have loved you ...'
- c. and God has these as His purpose for the Christian's life: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14)

3. living to please God ... but I cannot do it by my own strength
 - a. God has done everything so that we might not only be saved – made ready for the heavenly Canaan land – but also that we should be equipped to serve, to live as a witness to the transforming power in Jesus Christ
 - b. He places His Holy Spirit in those who believe to empower them to live to the glory of God
 - c. it is only as a man, woman or child rests in Jesus Christ that they are able to avoid being an unfruitful vineyard, and to live that life well-pleasing to the Saviour.

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