

Text: Isaiah 5:1-30

Title: "Bad fruit from a good vineyard"

Time: 4/27/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Gloucester, MA is America's oldest seaport. In the center of town stands an 8-foot-tall bronze fisherman steering the wheel of his boat. The base of the statue lists the names of 3000 seamen and labels them "They that go down to the sea in ships, 1623-1923."

In 1991, the six-member crew of the Andrea Gail joined that list. The boat had sailed 900 miles north to Newfoundland's Grand Banks to catch swordfish. For some reason, the crew decided to make their return through the heart of what has been called "the perfect storm," an unnamed nor'easter that tossed the sea with 120 mph winds after clashing with a weather front from the north. Their tragic deaths are remembered in print and film.

In our passage, the prophet Isaiah warns Jerusalem and Judah about a coming perfect storm (v. 30). The nor'easter of a holy God's wrath and the cold front of the sin of a nation were on schedule to clash leaving no survivors.

But before this final warning of the chapter, the prophet begins with a less threatening metaphor, not the roaring of a hurricane, but the melody of a love song, the love of a farmer for his vineyard (v. 1). That metaphor served as the source material for much of the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels.

Matthew 20 tells us that God's vineyard is the kingdom of heaven. There the owner of the vineyard hires laborers at different times of day but pays them the same at the end of

the day. Because entrance into the kingdom of God is by grace through faith, it matters not how much work we have done, we all are equally blessed with eternal life.

In Matthew 21, a father sends two sons into his vineyard. One says he will go but does not. The other says he will not go, but afterward he does. Jesus points out that it is the second son who did the will of his father.

That same chapter, with Mark 12 and Luke 20, describes God's well-cared-for vineyard as lent out to farmers as the owner goes away to a far country. When harvest time came, the owner sent first his servants to obtain the fruit, but they were beaten and killed by the farmers. Finally, the owner sends his own son, whom they also kill. Jesus then asks His future crucifiers, "What will the lord of the vineyard do to these farmers?" They knew the answer threatened them.

In Isaiah 5, God's vineyard produces what the text calls *wild grapes* (vv. 2, 4). When we think of wild fruit, we sometimes think of delicious fruit produce like the blueberries the Hendersons used to glean from the wild plants at the Space Force station. But that is not what we have here. The word translated *wild grape* comes from a verb meaning *to stink*. One commentary called these grapes *stink-fruit*. Our passage describes what life is like when God's vineyard produces bad fruit. It says three things about this fruit:

I. The bad fruit came from a cared-for vineyard (vv. 1-6).

Illustration: The final reference our Lord made to God's vineyard was on the night of His betrayal and arrest. Celebrating the Passover with His disciples in the upper room, Jesus told them about God's vine and its branches (John 15). He explained that His Father is the husbandman, that He is

the vine, and that His disciples were the branches of the vine. As Jesus's disciples, we need to abide in Him to bear fruit. We abide in Him when His words abide in us, and when we pray. The fruit that is born is that we love one another rather than just ourselves.

Application: In this Isaiah parable the metaphor is the same, but the symbolism is somewhat different. Here, the vine is Jerusalem and Judah. The husbandman is a Loved One, the *Beloved*. Because Isaiah is the human author of these words, many see here Isaiah's love for Jehovah, that Isaiah is composing a love song for his God.

I interpret the symbolism of this passage a bit differently. Because of the times in the New Testament that the Father says of Jesus, "This is My Beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17 – at Jesus's baptism; Matt. 17:5 – at Jesus's transfiguration), I see here God the Father's referring to His Son as "My Beloved" through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Referring to Christ, Matthew 12 quotes Isaiah 42 this way: "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles" (12:18). Matthew's quotation replaces Isaiah 42's *mine elect* with Isaiah 5's *my beloved*, indicating that Matthew understood this singular reference in Isaiah to *my beloved* as a reference to God the Son, the Messiah, His chosen one.

So, Judah and Jerusalem were a vineyard that God the Father gave to God the Son out of His great love for His Son (vv. 1, 7). God the Father sings this song about this vineyard. It should have been a love song, but instead it becomes a song of lament. The vineyard was placed on a productive hillside. The Beloved Son hoed it, took the stones

out of it, planted the best vintage of grapevine, constructed a watch-tower and a winepress for it (v. 2). He put a protective hedge of thorns He put around it, along with a stone wall for its double protection (v. 5). Nothing more could have been done by the Beloved for His vineyard (v. 4).

And still, in spite of all this love from the Beloved, the vineyard produced bad fruit that stank. The Beloved asks “why?” but no answer is given (v. 4). This inexplicable outcome requires a response (v. 3). The just response is the withdrawal of the Beloved’s blessing (vv. 5-6).

And just as the ancient prophet predicted, today we can look back on the history of Judah and Jerusalem and see that this is exactly what the Beloved did. In their rejection of Him, He no longer expects good fruit from them. Today’s nation of Israel is still the spiritually destitute place Isaiah said it would be, for they have brought God’s Beloved only bad fruit.

The details of this bad fruit are described in the next section of the chapter.

II. The bad fruit came in many different varieties (vv. 7-23).

Illustration: Moon drops, Concord, Pinot Noir, Lemberger, Sweet Jubilee, Valiant, Champagne, and Cotton Candy are 8 of 28 different known varieties of grapes. Each has its own distinctive color, shape, and taste.

Application: Variety is a wonderful blessing to man and a shining glory to the Creator when it is a variety of good grapes. But variety is all the more tragic when it comes to the bad grapes of stink-fruit (v. 7). Good fruit brings justice and righteousness to a land. Bad fruit brings law-breaking and the cry of suffering. The variety of bad fruit is outlined

here, and instead of Roman numerals in this outline, the Lord uses the pronouncement of "Woe." Six woes point to six varieties of Judah's bad fruit.

1. The woe against too many houses (vv. 8-10). Note that these woes are in the prophet's ears because the Lord put them there (v. 9). The law-breaking of this first woe is joining house to house, and the outcry comes when those houses are empty and the owners find themselves in the end all alone. Judah esteemed riches as more important than people. Prov. 11:4, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death."

2. The woe against too much alcohol (vv. 11-17). Substance abuse has killed thousands in our land. Ours has become a culture of sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll. The culture of Judah had embraced two of these destroyers - alcohol and the music that went along with it. Their thirst seemed unquenchable for debauchery, and the prophet warns that it is Sheol (v. 14, KJV *hell*), the grave, that keeps on swallowing with a thirst that is never quenched. Prov. 20:1, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

3. The woe against hypocritical self-righteousness (vv. 18-19). Here the sinner says one thing but does another. He claims to be interested in God's will for his life, but in truth he could not care less. God judges the hypocrisy of his sense of self-righteousness.

Illustration: The description of the burden of sin as cart-ropes being pulled by the sinner reminds me of the chains of the spirit of Joseph Marley in Dicken's Christmas Carole. Marley's hypocrisy was removed when he died, and he laments to Scrooge regarding the Christmas season: "At this

time of the rolling year I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to a poor abode!"

4. The woe against the perversion of morality, reality, and beauty (v. 20). The exchange of good for evil and evil for good happens when we define those things for ourselves in the moral realm of our lives. Light and darkness become confused when we get to define our own reality and truth. And bitter replaces sweet when we make decisions about the beauty of art forms, visual, audible, and olfactible, without reference to what God's opinions are in this realm. Prov. 3:5-6, "Lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

5. The woe against the personal sovereignty that causes the fourth woe (v. 21). When we are in charge of our lives, rather than the Lord, we fail to affirm that He is God. Prov. 3:7, "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil."

6. The woe against debilitated justice (vv. 22-23). Alcohol makes another appearance here, joining hands with bribery in the destruction of a nation's judicial system. We have seen chaotic decisions from our judges. Prov. 17:23, "A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment." Prov. 31:4-5, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."

The bad fruit of the Beloved's vineyard comes in many different varieties, each contributing to the eventual destruction of the nation.

III. The bad fruit caused lethal food-poisoning (vv. 24-30).

Illustration: The loss of the Andrea Gail was tragic in a couple of ways. According to the movie about its shipwreck, a Coast Guard rescuer lost his life trying to save the ship's crew. It also made the point that the crew could have stayed in Newfoundland without trying to sail through the bad weather, but still they set out right into the teeth of the storm that took their lives.

Application: The shipwreck of Jerusalem and Judah is also tragic. Isaiah, the rescuer of this prophetic warning, lost his life preaching this message, trying to save the Beloved's vineyard from its destruction. He was one of those servants sent by the Beloved to the vineyard, whom the farmers killed.

That Israel entered avoidable judgment is also tragic. Like the weather report that informed the fishermen to stay out of the storm, Isaiah's prophecy came in time to warn the nation. His message is grace and love from the Beloved to keep His people from the hurricane of God's judgment.

Conclusion: Verse 25 ends with a striking phrase: "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still." Even after the roaring of this storm of God's judgment on sinners, the sea is not calm. The weather conditions are not yet propitious for sailing.

It turns out that the judgment of only one person could calm this storm. When God's wrath was poured out on Jesus Christ, as He died in our place on Calvary, this storm ceased. 1 John 2:2: "And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world."

The Beloved became a man and died for His vineyard. Jesus Christ did not have to enter the storm of God's wrath on the cross of Calvary, but He did so for us. He took our place in the storm. Like the coastguard rescuer, He lost His life in the storm of the cross. Unlike the tragic events of 1991, Jesus's mission to save sinners in A.D. 31 did not fail.

The men of Gloucester should not have sailed into that perfect storm, nor should we sinners continue on our way careless about God's coming judgment, rejecting the law of the Lord of hosts and the declaration of the Holy One of Israel.

Because the storm of God's wrath is propitiated, the law of the Lord of hosts to us this morning is "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," and the declaration of the Holy One of Israel is "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Will we hear? Will we come to the calm seas of salvation from sin? Will we change our course?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching