

Isaiah 5:1-7

5 Let me sing for my loved one a song about my loved one's vineyard.
My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile ridge.
²He dug it up and gathered the stones out of it.
He planted it with the best vines.
He built a tower in the middle of it.
He also cut a winepress into it.
He expected it to produce clusters of sweet grapes,
but it produced only sour grapes.
³So now, you residents of Jerusalem and you men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard
that I have not already done for it?
When I expected it to produce clusters of sweet grapes,
why did it produce sour grapes?
⁵Now, let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard.
I will take away its hedge, and it will become a pasture.
I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled down.
⁶I will make it a wasteland.
It will not be pruned or hoed.
So briars and thorns will shoot up.
I will also command the clouds not to pour rain on it.
⁷Yes, the vineyard of the LORD of Armies is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah are the planting that was pleasing to him.
He expected justice, but instead there was oppression.
He expected righteousness, but there was an outcry.

Sour Grapes

I.

Getting a small business up and running takes a lot of effort. It takes grit and determination. It takes skill and knowledge of the industry you are entering. It takes lots of time and money. The one starting such a venture pours his all into it. It's not just the time and effort and money, it's all your drive; all your passion; all your emotion.

Soul-crushing. That's what it is when you have poured *everything* into such a venture only to see it come to nothingness. It is beyond disappointing.

“Let me sing for my loved one a song about my loved one's vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile ridge. ²He dug it up and gathered the stones out of it. He planted it with the best vines. He built a tower in the middle of it. He also cut a winepress into it” (Isaiah 5:1-2, EHV).

Today's First Lesson is an Old Testament parable about a vineyard. As you have learned from your study of Bible history, when Jesus spoke in parables, he used earthly stories with heavenly meanings to make his point. The same is true with the prophet Isaiah and this parable of the vineyard. He is speaking about God's chosen people—the people of Israel.

The parable speaks of all the effort that would go in to making a vineyard. You pick a

piece of fertile ground. Ridges and hillsides were desirable because cold air would sink down and give some frost resistance to the upper areas of the ridge. Of course, hillsides make other things difficult. There are lots of rocks in the soil in Palestine. The rocks had to be cleared away and the soil tilled. The rocks were used for the tower to watch for predators who might destroy the crop. The best vines were put into the soil and carefully cultivated.

Those who lived in wine country understood that getting a bottle of wine out of a vineyard was not something that could be accomplished in a short period of time. Lots and lots of time had to be put in—*years* of careful cultivation and pruning of the vines—before one could expect a crop that could be turned into wine.

“He expected it to produce clusters of sweet grapes, but it produced only sour grapes” (Isaiah 5:2, EHV). A person should be able to *expect* results after all the effort put in to the project—and not just *average* results, but *good* results—superior results. *Sour* grapes, not clusters of good, sweet grapes, were the result.

“What more could have been done for my vineyard that I have not already done for it?” (Isaiah 5:4, EHV). The question expects a certain answer: “nothing.” Nothing more could have been done.

Apply the parable to the nation of Israel. God gave his people every advantage. They were his chosen nation. Countless times they turned away to serve and follow other gods—gods that are no gods at all. With all the work God put in to his vineyard—the people of Israel—he should have been able to expect them to carefully follow the Ceremonial Law he gave them to help them look ahead for the Messiah he promised to come through their nation. Instead of clusters of sweet grapes, the nation was too often filled with sour grapes.

II.

Look at the way God has carefully prepared things. He planted faith in your heart in baptism. He nursed and cultivated and pruned your life of faith. The soil of his Word and Sacraments are there. He provides ongoing nutrition and water through opportunities to use the gospel—the Means of Grace—by hearing his Word in worship. He speaks his law to wound and convict hearts, and pours out the gospel to soothe and heal.

And what does he find? Sour grapes.

Despite the surpassing goodness shown by the Savior God in every area of life, his people complain that his blessings haven’t been sufficient, or the right ones, or that they have come at the wrong time. He looked for clusters of sweet grapes of his people living in peace and harmony with others, but found the sour grapes of envy and strife and jealousy. He looked for clusters of sweet grapes of forgiveness and kindness displayed among his people, but sees only the sour grapes of impatience and lack of forgiveness. He looked for clusters of sweet grapes of humility in his people, but found the sour grapes of sinful pride. He looked for clusters of sweet grapes in the attitude of joy in worship and receiving the Supper of our Lord, but found the sour grapes of willful avoidance, even a refusal among his people to use the tools of modern technology to hear his Word.

III.

God spent a great deal of time and effort planting his people and cultivating his people, both ancient and modern. He provided every advantage. He carefully planned and prepared everything. No stone was left unturned. No task left incomplete. The plan to save his people was at the same time elaborate and simple.

God knew of the sour grapes of his people. The People of Israel were a nation over whom

God carefully watched. He sent them prophet after prophet to reiterate his message of the coming Savior and elaborate on what people knew of the plan.

Yet...time after time...they failed. Time after time the people followed godless and irresponsible leaders into the chaos of unbelief. Time after time, in his love, God called them back. The people couldn't do it. They kept messing up the plan.

God knew this ahead of time. He left nothing to chance. God's gracious guiding hand worked through the prophets to continually preserve a remnant of believers in Israel—a remnant from whom, eventually, the promised Savior would come.

That promised Savior had to be something special. Even the remnant of faithful believers in Israel was filled with people who were flawed. Every one of them was flawed. Even the most faithful Christian in the New Testament era is full of flaws and faults and sin.

The Savior could not have any flaws—any sin—to accomplish the plan. Jesus was born 100% human, but was conceived by the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way so that he was born without sin. As fully human, Jesus lived under the same moral law every one of us does. But in addition to being 100% human, Jesus was also 100% fully God. He was able to remain perfect throughout his earthly life, so that he could pay for the sins of every human being on the cross.

Every part of God's plan to save sinners was perfectly fulfilled and perfectly accomplished in and by Jesus.

IV.

Much of the First Lesson is a warning. God has done so much for his people. He has given every advantage. The consequences are dire for those who reject all he has done and just act like a bunch of sour grapes.

Even in a warning there is an exhortation: don't be sour grapes; instead, be a cluster of sweet grapes.

“Let me sing for my loved one a song about my loved one's vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile ridge. ²He dug it up and gathered the stones out of it. He planted it with the best vines. He built a tower in the middle of it. He also cut a winepress into it” (Isaiah 5:1-2, EHV).

Sing a song for your loving Savior God. Tell about the great things God has done for you and for all people in the careful preparation and fulfillment of his plans to send Jesus to be the Savior of all. Live in the sweet realization that he continues to give you everything you need to grow in your faith. You are grafted in to the Vine of Jesus to receive the strength you need for the times that try men's souls.

The Apostle Paul said in today's Second Lesson: “There is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14, EHV). Certainly Paul was not forgetting *Jesus* in the things that are behind, nor do we want to forget, but we *can* set behind us all the mistakes and the sins of the past. They do not define you. They do not control you. You are forgiven and free in Jesus. Strain toward and press on to the goal—the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

When you do that, you won't live as sour grapes, but as a cluster of sweet grapes. God bless your Christian life of faith. Amen.