

October 4, 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7

“If A Song Were Sung Today,
What Would It Say?”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Old Testament lesson for this morning, the prophet Isaiah sings a song for his beloved. He loves the Lord and is interested in his work and how things turn out. He calls this section, “the song of my beloved for his vineyard.” The vineyard is the Old Testament church, the Lord’s delight and the object of his desire. This vineyard belonged to the Lord who planted it and cared for it with the utmost care. The Lord had done everything right so that it should have produced good grapes, but the fruits of the lives of his Old Testament church are strangely bitter and sour like wild grapes. All the work appears to be no different than if the vines had been simply left in the wild to produce grapes only for the birds and wildlife.

The church of the past had received everything needed from the hand of the Lord. Nevertheless, they degenerated into wild grapes, not even profitable to make the cheapest wine. Is not the Lord more than justified if he decides to remove from them his work and protection? And that is exactly what he did. As we hear in verses 5-7 of the song:

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed [violence]; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

Allow me to say that last verse again in another way. He looked at the grapes expecting to find the sweetness of justice and righteousness, the necessary ingredients for an excellent wine. Instead, he found the wild, bitter, grapes of violence and outcry. Wild grapes are only good for the winepress of wrath, for it is nothing but blood to be spilled out upon the ground, nothing but death (Rev.14:14-20). Justice and righteousness in humanity can only be derived from the work of the Lord; it is by faith in the one who is just and righteous, namely, the Savior who we know to be Jesus of Nazareth. When there is violence and outcry there is no faith in Christ, and that is the fault of humanity. Justice means to make right because people are living in a right relationship with the Lord. To live in the righteousness that comes by faith in the righteous One is to seek to do what is right and run away from what is wrong. This is what a grape should be in order to be made into a wine that is drunk by the Lord - a wine that is sweet to the taste and a delight to him.

If A Song Were Sung Today, What Would It Say? If Isaiah were here today, what do you think he would sing about us - in particular - you in the New Testament church? Anyone who is a child of God will be bothered by this question. Luther makes the observation that it is a hallmark of the ungodly that no matter what Scripture is set before them they are not frightened by his threats nor stirred by his promises. And what is worse is that the self-righteous insist that the promises apply to them but the threats apply to everyone else. In case we have forgotten, there is a wild grape (a wild vine) in all of us called the old self with our old self-centered desires. There is also a new creation in us that seeks to be nothing but good grapes (good vines) ready to be made into the sweet wine of the Lord’s choice.

Let's raise the question again. **If A Song Were Sung Today, What Would It Say?** Yes. What would it say about you? Let's begin by taking a good look at what the Lord has done for you in your life. The prophet Isaiah breaks out into a song and even he must examine himself in light of what he sees in the lives of others.

The Lord has done everything in creating a vineyard. All of it applies to you and me in the New Testament church. He chose you, removed the stones and prepared the soil, planted his seed in you, rained on you in the means of grace, and continues to care and watch over you. All of these realities are connected to the gospel of forgiveness in Christ. We are brought to Jesus who lived a righteous life for us and suffered for all of our unrighteousness that we might be declared righteous grapes who love all that is right and flees what is wrong. We meet Jesus in the preaching and teaching of his Word, in the living of our Baptisms, and in the reception of his body and blood for immortality. In these, we receive the gospel treasures that flow from the life and cross of Jesus.

What then makes a wild grape? First of all, what really is a wild grape? A wild grape is worthless because it loves and embraces the self-centered, wicked desires of the sinful heart rather than the planting that has come from the work of the Lord. They are such who claim forgiveness while embracing and loving that which is, in fact, contrary to the forgiveness in Christ. You see, those who have been touched by the forgiveness of sins bear fruits that are in keeping with forgiveness, that is, they desire to love and do what is right because they have been loved and everything has been done right for them in Christ. They even put to death the wild grape that still tortures them inwardly, for they do not want to be given over to being a wild grape, but they desire and strive to be a grape for the Lord.

What then can possibly damage us that might bring on us the same condemnation of the Old Testament church at the time of Isaiah? Two things. The prophet Jeremiah uses Isaiah's song in his day and gives us two separate passages. First, he quotes the Lord when he says in chapter two (20-21), "Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?" As you can see, the path to being a wild grape or a wild vine is when the Lord's deliverance is exchanged by our loving and pursuing sin (idolatry). To reflect what our gospel lesson says, we kill the son of the owner of the vineyard. Secondly, Jeremiah quotes the Lord again in chapter twelve (10), "Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field; they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland." Here you can see that tolerating false leaders and their lies is a path to becoming a wild grape or a wild vine.

So, **If A Song Were Sung Today, What Would It Say?** Only you really know when it comes to your own personal place in the hypothetical song. Prayerfully, our place is similar with that of the prophet Isaiah who happens to be the one singing it and calls the Lord his "beloved," and praises all that the Lord has done for his salvation, and further titles it "the song of my beloved for his vineyard." As I said earlier, Isaiah must examine himself and deal with his own sinful nature, but he is able to sing the song because he is living in repentance before the Lord. And that's the key. He is sorry for his sins and looking to the Savior. And the natural result of faith is to strive to walk in love as Jesus is love. While John the Baptist

will come many years after his death, Isaiah lived by and proclaimed the truth, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:8).” And Jesus demonstrates his great patience, but also makes it clear that he will be the judge of the world when he says these words in Luke 13:9, words in the context of the planting of a fig tree that doesn’t produce fruit, “If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down (Luke 13:9).”

In the paraphrased words of one Lutheran preacher, the Lord is asking, “What more could I have done for the New Testament church? I established her at the price of the perfect life and precious blood of my one and only Son. I gave her freedom in the forgiveness of sins and have guarded and given her strength by sending the Holy Spirit to create and preserve her faith in the means of grace. I have given her all things for life and godliness and have promised eternal life (Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola)!” So, is the New Testament church producing fruits of faith or works of desolation in our nation and throughout the world? More importantly, where do you stand in relation to the song of Isaiah?

Let us pray that in the Lord’s mercy he will restore what needs to be restored, strengthen what needs to be strengthened, and ultimately save us. As long as today is today, and we await the coming of the Son of Man, the Lord God is still offering forgiveness and the strengthening and preservation of our faith and good fruit through our connection to him. May he grant us such and keep us from becoming wild grapes and wild vines - bitter grapes and bad vines that have been made bitter by rebellion against him and his Word and Sacraments. I leave you with the words of Paul, “So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4).”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott