

# God's Heartbreaking Song

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[ 0 : 00 ] You can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful. Please do keep your Bibles open at Isaiah 5 there, page 690. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

Let's pray together. Mighty Creator God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks, who has made yourself known to us.

We pray that this morning, by your spirit of truth and life, you'll give us eyes to see who you are, a spirit of understanding, and hearts that are willing to trust and follow you.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this morning we're in the genre, really, of breakup songs. The songs about lost love.

We're more used to the happy songs about love, aren't we? The kind of schmaltzy love songs. The power ballad. But we do have songs in our culture about relationships going wrong.

[ 1 : 04 ] I don't know whether you can think of examples of those. How many of you were listening to songs in the 60s? There was the... Nobody, it turns out.

Yeah, okay. There was the Beatles on the Revolver album. The song For No One. Remember that? For No One, written by Paul McCartney. In her eyes you see nothing. No sign of love behind the tears.

Cried for no one. A love that should have lasted years. Or if the 70s are your era. There was the police. Were the police in the 70s? I think so. Every breath you take.

Quite a bitter song. Since you've been gone. Since you're gone, I've been lost without a trace. I dream at night. I can only see your face. I look around, but it's you. I can't replace. I feel so cold. Now long for your embrace.

Or the 90s? Take that. Whatever I said, whatever I did, I didn't mean it. I just want you back for good.

[ 2 : 01 ] Agony. More recently than all that, sometimes they get a bit bitter, don't they? Justin Bieber's breakup song, Love Yourself, with the immortal line in it, My mama don't like you, and she likes everyone.

Brilliant. Brilliant. Well, why do we have songs like that? The music's helpful, isn't it? The music goes with the emotion.

The words, how someone's feeling, it helps us express that feeling. And in the Bible, there is a very common form of song in the Bible, the lament, the sad song.

It's liberating as Christians to see that, to spend time in the laments in the Bible. It shows us that when we do have negative emotions in our life, in the Christian faith, we're not to deny that, and we're not to bury those emotions.

We can bring them to God. God's Word recognizes negative emotion as something we can bring to God. He knows all about that. Now here in chapter 5, we've got a lament song.

[ 3 : 06 ] I don't know whether you noticed, that's kind of the way it's written in this. You can sort of tell by verse 1 that it's a song that Isaiah is singing. But it's a really extraordinary chapter of the Bible, because this song is not a person expressing feeling towards God.

This is God expressing his feelings about his people. It's extraordinary. So in verse 1, Isaiah says that it's about his loved one.

That's God. He says, my loved one had a vineyard. But by verse 3, you see that it's clearly God speaking through Isaiah. Judge between me and my vineyard.

We're going to think about three things as we look at it together. Three R's. And the first is the wrongness. Sorry, an R. The wrongness. The wrongness of God being rejected. The song is a parable.

It's about God's people. They're living in the land God had promised them. And he describes them as like this great project that he devoted himself to. He says, picture a man who wants a vineyard. [ 4 : 14 ] He picks the right spot for it. End of verse 1. A fertile hillside. So the conditions are just right. And he gets to work digging up the hillside by the sweat of his brow.

Clearing away the stones. And then he very carefully picks the best vines to grow in his vineyard. He builds a protective hedge all around it.

He even builds a watchtower. He builds a wine press. Digs a wine press. Everything's ready. Everything's ready to go for a great crop. And then the sting comes at the end of verse 2.

Then he looked for a crop of good grapes. But it yielded only bad fruit. And the key for us understanding the parable is in verse 7. Have a look.

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel. And the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. It's a lament song. It's a heartbreaking song.

[ 5 : 16 ] About the people of God turning their backs on him. Rejecting him. And he describes them like a vine that bears bad fruit. And as we think of the wrongness of how they treated God.

The key questions come in verse 4. And they're chilling questions aren't they? As you have a look. Verse 4. When this is God asking this. Verse 4. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?

When I looked for grapes. For good grapes. Why did it yield only bad? God says. What more could have been done? What more could I have done? Because of course there is nothing more.

He was the perfect vineyard owner. And he got bad grapes. As I was looking at this. I was thinking about my own vine project.

I brought with me today. In that back garden this year. We've got a vine. And I put up a trellis. To help the vine grow. And I got grapes. I just cut these this morning. And they look okay don't they?

[ 6 : 23 ] They are absolutely horrible. They're just disgusting. Now why is that? Why did I get bad fruit from my vineyard? Talks going everywhere.

I got bad fruit because I'm trying to grow grapes in Scotland. Okay. And it's just the wrong climate isn't it? I can't blame the vine. I'm in the wrong place.

Okay. But you can look. You think why did the grapes not grow? When we look at God's story. Why did he get bad grapes? It's literally stink fruit. Why did the fruit stink in my vineyard?

It wasn't that it was in the wrong place. It was on a fertile hillside. Where the sun beat down. And the rain came down. What went wrong?

Totally useless. Well what was the fruit God was looking for? He says at the end of verse 7. He wanted justice. And he wanted righteousness.

[ 7 : 21 ] That is. He wanted his people to look like him. Justice is a term in the Old Testament that includes fairness. Social justice. Doing things the way God does them.

We might use the term godliness. Being godly. God wants his people to live like that because that's what he is like. In verse 16 he lists justice and righteousness as the way that he lives.

So what's the stink fruit that he gets instead from his people? Verse 7. He looked for justice but saw bloodshed. For righteousness but heard cries of distress.

There's a powerful play on words in the original language. I don't know Hebrew well but there is this play on words. When it says justice it sounds very similar to the word bloodshed.

So he looked for mishat and he got mishpak. The next verse. He looked for sedaka. Righteousness. He looked for sedaka but heard sedaka.

[ 8 : 25 ] Now why do we have that kind of... It's not just rhetorical power. David Jackman the writer says maybe that's because the people don't even realize that what they're doing is not good enough for God.

They think it looks fine. And it's radically different. Things about it look okay. The temple's busy. God is disgusted. And so he lists six wars in the rest of chapter 5.

And the wars are descriptions of how his people Judah were living at that time. It's a picture of self-centeredness. And there are different dimensions to it. He talks about failing to look after the poor in verses 8 and 9.

He talks about them building great houses and fine mansions and expanding their farms. And the needy can't get justice. People are trapped in debt. He sees it in their lifestyle.

There's hedonism. So just look at verse 11 for the hedonism. War to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks. Who stay up late at night till they're inflamed with wine.

[ 9 : 29 ] He talks in verse 22 about their drinking games. War to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks. It's so contemporary, isn't it?

We think that we invented big nights out, don't we? Isaiah in Jerusalem, 700 BC. Calling them out for their drinking games. It's like a fresh as wheat bar crawl in Jerusalem.

And if you just look at those verses, we might think that, oh, well, God just doesn't want people to have fun. But that's not the problem. The problem is how they treat God in the midst of it.

It's their heart attitude to God that's the problem. And we see that in two ways. First, we see it in rejection of God's works. So look at verse 12. They have harps and lyres at their banquets.

Nothing wrong with that. Pipes and tambourines and wine. Nothing wrong with that. But they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord. No respect for the works of his hands.

[ 10 : 32 ] They've rejected the Lord's works. And what are the works of the Lord? Well, it's his saving work. It's what he's done for them. The work he's described in the metaphor of the song of the vineyard owner who lovingly, expertly built a vineyard, the way God established his people in history.

They started as one elderly man, Abraham, a pagan man. And God chose him and he called him and he blessed him and his wife Sarah with children. And he made them into a great nation through generations.

And they were in slavery in Egypt, brutally treated. Their boys were being thrown into the river, killed. And he rescued them powerfully. Through miracles. To get them into a land that he gave them and established them.

And he gave them peace and rest from every enemy around them. So that he can ask, what more could have been done for my vineyard? And now they enjoy the prosperity that he's given them in the land that he gave them and they've forgotten him.

In their hearts, in their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations, their everyday conversations. God is not on the agenda anymore. They've no regard for his works. They don't teach their children his works.

[ 11 : 46 ] They don't meditate on his works. And the second problem in their attitude towards God is they've got no regard for his words. Verse 24 at the end there.

Verse 24, just at the end. For they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.

When they're still having Bible readings, presumably in the temple, what does it look like to have no regard for it? I guess they don't let God's word contradict them. They don't let God's word challenge them.

They think they know better than God's word. They interpret it in light of their culture. So in verse 20, it says, they call evil good and good evil. They put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Things that God says are bitter, they call sweet. They celebrate what goes against God's design. They ignore God's commands for life, his good word for the good life.

[ 12 : 44 ] And as God exposes his rejection, their rejection of his works and their rejection of his words, he says war to them. And that word war, it's not flying off the handle anger from God.

He never loses control in his anger. It's full of sadness. It's a heartbreaking story, Isaiah chapter 5. Here is a people God loved and he was good to them and they rejected him.

And he says, what more could have been done for my vineyard than I've done for it? So what about for us? I don't know where your heart is with God, what you think about him in your heart.

Isaiah's word here was for Old Testament Israel. It's explaining why he had to act with them. It's not directly for us. It might be that some of these things are true of us.

It might be that thankfully some of them are not true of us. But as we read chapter 5, what we're meant to do is we're meant to feel the awfulness of this.

[ 13 : 53 ] Can we feel how awful it is that God gets treated like this? That people reject God. It's awful. That we picture God as that vineyard owner, how good he is as he plans for the vineyard and he builds it and he cares for it.

It's his project. He's been planning it for years. It's taken him years. And picture him as a man at harvest time as he takes his journey from the city out to the hillside and he heads up the valley, excited to see the grapes, looking forward to savoring the wine from his wine press.

Picture him as he goes and he approaches the gate and he goes in and to his shock and horror, it stinks. It's just bad grapes.

And he looks around at this stink fruit on the vine and he asks, how did this happen? If we can feel that emotion about Israel then, then we can feel the same emotion today.

When we see this kind of thing in the church that we would feel heartbroken. If we see in the church today, places you could go Sunday after Sunday and just hear self-help messages that don't fix our eyes on the works of the Lord and the word of the Lord.

[15:15] And also maybe we need to feel it about ourselves. It's hard because we're not called to retreat from the world into a Christian ghetto. We're called to be in the world, but we're in a world that normalizes sin, aren't we?

We're in the culture around us. Having no regard for the works of the Lord is normal, isn't it? That's how everyone's living. And so it's hard not to get infected by that as we spend time in the world, as we're called to do.

And therefore, to lose that emotional sense of how awful it is that the people around us are so blessed by God and His goodness and don't have regard for Him.

It's heartbreaking that God loves people and people are rejecting Him. It's going on all around us. Maybe it's going on in our hearts.

That's our first point, the wrongness of people rejecting God. Now we come to the response back in Old Testament Judah, 700 BC, our second point, the rightness of God's response.

[16:21] It's the turning point in the parable, the song comes in the word now in verse 3 and verse 5. Did you see that? Now, verse 3, now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

And then Israel hears the prophecy and it's shocking. Verse 5, now I will tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed.

I will break down its wall and it will be trampled. Verse 6, 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. In other words, the vineyard owner, he gives up on his vineyard. He abandons it to the wild. He lets it go derelict because it was useless.

And what does that mean in reality for God's people then? Well, at that time, it meant God raising up a foreign empire to conquer his people and take them out of the land he'd given them.

[17:27] They were taken into exile. At the time this is going on, probably the threat is the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century, 7th century BC. And in verse 26, we picture God summoning them like you might summon a dog, wolf whistling, putting a finger and thumb in his mouth, whistling, and like a terrier, the Assyrian Empire comes across the land to bring devastation.

So verse 26, if you have a look down at verse 26, he lifts up a banner for the distant nations. He whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come swiftly and speedily.

And it's unstoppable. So in verse 29, it's like a lion coming to hunt down prey, taking it off in its jaws. So at the end of verse 30, we've just got darkness and distress.

It's awful. It's inevitable. It's unstoppable. Well, we get to the New Testament and Jesus arrives in Jerusalem and he tells the people a story just like this one.

A story of Israel in his time, first century AD Israel. And it's a rerun of Isaiah's song. It's in Mark chapter 10. But there are differences when Jesus tells it in Jerusalem.

[18:47] This time, he talks about the leaders of the people at that time as tenants in the vineyard of God. They had the responsibility to get the vines producing good fruit.

And he describes how the vineyard owner has sent messengers to those tenants to get the fruit off them and they've rejected them. It's a picture of the prophets like Isaiah who'd come and been badly treated through history by Israel.

And then Jesus says this in Mark 10 verse 6 about the vineyard owner. He had one left to send, a son whom he loved. He sent him last of all saying they will respect my son.

But the tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours. So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

That's what happened, isn't it? That's the elders and the chief priests of the first century people of God seeing the son of the vineyard owner, recognizing him and putting him to death on a cross.

[19:53] That's how Jesus was treated by them. And so the wrongness is worse than ever. That God could look at his people Israel and when he says, what more could I have done for my vineyard?

It's not just I've given you life, I've given you security, I've given you land, I've given you prosperity. It's I gave you my only son. I gave him up for you to save you from yourselves. And you treat him like you've treated me. What more could have been done? And Jesus concludes his parable saying this, what then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. And the point in Jesus' parable is the same as the point here in Isaiah 5. It's how right of God to respond like that. It's so right when people treat him like this. In verse 3 of Isaiah 5, he says, judge between me and my vineyard. Look at how they treat me. Look at how I am going to treat them.

[ 20 : 58 ] Judge between us. God is doing the right thing. He has to show that he is just and righteous. He wants to show that through saving a people and them being just and righteous. When they reject him, he rejects them to be just and righteous.

We've had that in verse 16. The Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice and the holy God will be proved holy by his righteous acts. Whether that's that he judges those who reject him or that he blesses those who trust him.

And it happened to Judah in 587 BC. It happened to the first century Israel in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed their temple. Jesus had predicted it would happen. And the Bible assures us it's going to happen again. That God has set a day when Jesus is going to judge the whole world with justice. And he will expose all rebellion against him. And he'll reject everyone who's rejected him. And it's right, isn't it? That's what the parable's there to show us. It's right that God responds like that.

[ 22 : 00 ] Remarkably, that's not the end of the story. So our final point this morning, the remedy of God's true vine.

See, when Isaiah says in chapter 5, what more could have been done for the vineyard, I suspect even he didn't realize that God did have a plan to do even more for his vineyard.

That is, he'd replaced the useless vine with a new vine. And to avoid the same kind of disappointment happening with the new vine, he would send the vine himself.

The fruitful vine would come from him. So let's turn to John chapter 15. We had it read for us by Malcolm. It's on page 1083.

John chapter 15, page 1083. John chapter 15, page 1083. Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. It's the night before he dies.

[ 22 : 59 ] Judas, who betrayed him, has just left, betraying him to the religious leaders. So he's an example of the tenants who, well, he's going to the tenants who rejected the son.

And then Jesus says this, John 15, I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. God has sent Jesus to be the fruit, the fruitful vine that Israel had failed to be.

He's lived the life of justice and righteousness that Israel has failed to live. And now when we come to him and trust him, we get joined on to be a branch. Verse 2, he cuts off every branch of me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I've spoken to you. So how do we avoid producing the stink fruit that was in Judah's vineyard?

Well, on our own, we can't avoid that. We do just the same as them. Our hearts are just like theirs. But once we're in the vine by trusting Jesus, we abide in him and we bear fruit.

[ 24 : 11 ] Verse 4, remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

So Jesus is the true vine of God. When we put our trust in him, we become branches in the vine. And so long as we depend on him and nurture our relationship with him, serving God in partnership with Jesus, there will be fruit in our lives.

Joyful obedience. Loving God, loving others. So how do we remain in Jesus? He tells us in verse 7, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. So it's Bible reading and prayer.

[ 25 : 21 ] As we let God's word remain in us and as we ask for whatever we wish in his name, he advances the gospel through us day by day and we bear fruit in his world.

And the result of that for us is joy. If you have a look at verse 9, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love. Just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love, I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. So this is the remedy that God has provided as people have failed him.

As we hear Isaiah's song, we feel the utter wrongness, the senselessness of people rejecting God. That's the biggest take-home point in Isaiah 5. We see the unarguable rightness of God rejecting people who reject him.

Judge for yourselves between me and my vineyard. And these things are written to drive us to the grace of God, that he's not done with growing a vine. He had a plan.

[ 26 : 29 ] He's given us Jesus, the true vine, so that we can be different in him. By trusting him, we get joined to him. And by living in his word day by day, we can abide with him, remain in him, and we can bear fruit and experience joy.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. Are you going to abide in the vine this week? Abide in him. Let's pray together. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for your wisdom. We praise you for your justice and righteousness that you demonstrated in history in how you treated Judah when they rejected you.

By your Spirit, write these warnings on our hearts that we might see the folly, the senselessness, the wrongness of rejecting you. Thank you that you've sent Jesus, that by trusting in him, you make us clean and make us branches in the true vine.

Help us to remain in him, bearing fruit for our joy and for your glory. Amen. We're going to sing together in response to God's word.

[ 28 : 03 ] Let's stand and the band will lead us as we sing. Amen. Amen. Amen.