

PENTECOST 10

Proper 15 - Year C

This Bible study was written by Jake Schlossberg for Proper 15 (C) in 2022.

Isaiah 5:1-7

⁵ I will sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

² He dug it and cleared it of stones
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded rotten grapes.

³ And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield rotten grapes?

⁵ 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.

⁶ I will make it a wasteland;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his cherished garden;
he expected justice
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness
but heard a cry!

Commentary from Jake Schlossberg

Chapter five concludes the introductory section of the Book of Isaiah. While previous chapters have been hopeful, chapter five is one of indictment and judgment. The primary verdict is that God's people have acted unjustly; they have not acted in accordance with God's justice. Isaiah uses the metaphor of a vineyard, depicting God's activity as agricultural labor. Israel and Judah are the vineyard in which God has labored, striving for good fruit, but what his people have yielded is inedible. He will now remove them from the land promised to their forefathers and it shall become a wasteland. Saint Jerome recalls the tears that Jesus shed for Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44, weeping for the city that is the religious and political center of his people. Saint Basil the Great offers a spiritual reading of this passage, calling each of us to be vines in the vineyard, cultivating fruit in our souls and in our lives, so that we might not be thrown into the fire. One might think of Jesus cursing the fig tree in Mark 11 or the vine that is burned in John 15. Let us respond to, rather than reject, the Lord's cultivating labor.

Discussion Questions

Where do you see fruitful branches in your life?
Where do you see branches needing to be trimmed?

We do not often think of God grieving over his people. How does such an image change your perspective of Isaiah's prophetic message?

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18

- ¹ Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; *
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- ² In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, *
stir up your strength and come to help us.
- ⁸ You have brought a vine out of Egypt; *
you cast out the nations and planted it.
- ⁹ You prepared the ground for it; *
it took root and filled the land.
- ¹⁰ The mountains were covered by its shadow *
and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.
- ¹¹ You stretched out its tendrils to the Sea *
and its branches to the River.
- ¹² Why have you broken down its wall, *
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?
- ¹³ The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it, *
and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.
- ¹⁴ Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;
behold and tend this vine; *
preserve what your right hand has planted.
- ¹⁵ They burn it with fire like rubbish; *
at the rebuke of your countenance let them perish.
- ¹⁶ Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand,
*
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.
- ¹⁷ And so will we never turn away from you; *
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.
- ¹⁸ Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Commentary from Jake Schlossberg

We see here a different twist on a similar theme as Isaiah. The first verse depicts the Lord as a shepherd rather than a vinedresser, but he is the guardian of Israel. When we look at verses eight and beyond, we see the agricultural theme of Isaiah, but in the aftermath of God's judgment, executed by foreign powers. Israel is the vine that the Lord brought out of Egypt, a reference to God's saving power in the Exodus. God established his people in the land like one establishes a vineyard, with care and intentionality. In light of this care, the Psalmist asks how the Lord can let his people be subjected to these foreign powers. These foreign powers do not glorify the Lord. They are not godly. In verse sixteen, we see a prefiguration of Christ, "the man of your right hand, and son of man you have made so strong for yourself." Despite the devastation that our sins have wrought, the Lord is faithful to his people and will restore them. The vineyard will be restored to full health – a new and greater health.

Discussion Questions

If God has planted you and me in this time and place, how can each of us respond to his cultivating hand and flourish?

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

³² And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned to death; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Commentary from Jake Schlossberg

What a complex depiction of faith! We see the saving activity of God at the Red Sea and Jericho. We see the sacrificial actions of Old Testament characters who are acclaimed for their faith. Many of these characters have serious flaws; they are almost examples of deficient faith. Gideon tests God, Barak is cowardly, and Samson is licentious. What we do see is a faithfulness even to the point of death, despite lingering character flaws. At some point, even if not at all points, they risked their lives for the faith.

Yet, the conclusion that this passage draws is unexpected. Like a literary icon, this description of the imperfect faithful should redirect our gaze toward the salvific work of Christ. As in the cases of those others, our faith should make us willing to sacrifice all we have to the creator of the universe. Saint John Chrysostom sees this passage calling us to discard anything superfluous so that we might take up Christ. Jesus is leading us out of the Egypt of our sinfulness. He is tearing down our walls of pride, stripping away our idols so that we might sit with him in the throne room of God.

Discussion Questions

What is the difference between a flawed but faithful character and a flawed and faithless character?

Who in my life is an icon, pointing my gaze toward Christ?

Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹ “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they will be divided:

father against son
and son against father,
mother against daughter
and daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain,’ and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Commentary from Jake Schlossberg

The picture of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel is often seen as the friendly, loving Jesus, but here we find a hard teaching of Jesus. The one we call “the Prince of Peace” is telling us that he has not come to bring peace but division. This is not even a throwaway statement, because it is further enumerated as divisions within families. How do we receive this contradiction? We can start by looking at the fire which Jesus is bringing. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem saw this as the fire of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, coming to the apostles. This establishment of the church was a revolutionary act, a catalyst demanding individual response. Some accept and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, growing, as Saint Ambrose suggests, in virtues such as charity, faith, and justice. But others reject both the Holy Spirit and those who live in the Spirit. Love of neighbor is the result of loving God, but it must be properly ordered, the former subordinated to the latter. Some will chafe at this, and divisions are formed. These divisions can cut across nations, peoples, and even families; no human organization, however good, can determine the individual response to the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

Where have I seen the Holy Spirit demanding revolutionary love of God?

Where have I seen the Holy Spirit cultivating virtues such as charity, faith, and justice?