



Isaiah 5:1-7 - I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

³ “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵ Now I will tell you what I am 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. ⁶ I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” ⁷ The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

The Saddest Love Song



*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
(1 John 3:1)*

Music moves people. When the mood and the tune are right, music is so much more than just background noise. Music moves people. Put your ear to a locker room door before the boys of fall take their place under the Friday night lights and you'll probably hear some jock jams blasting from the speakers. Looking to concentrate on something intellectually challenging? Push play on the classical Pandora station and let the gentle, rolling chords and harmonies of the middle ages stir your mind to action. Stand outside the teenage girl's room after she's had her heart broken by the boy she thought was going to be "the one," and listen to that sappy song about love and loss get played on repeat for the better part of a week. Music moves people – sometimes it moves them to action, sometimes it moves them to think, sometimes it moves them to feel something.

In our Old Testament lesson for today, from the pages of the prophet Isaiah, we get to hear a song sung by God himself. God used this song to move his people to action. It was a love song, but a love song with a sad twist. Today, through the prophet Isaiah, God invites his people to pop in the prophetic ear buds and press play. **I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.** The vineyard owner set this thing up for success. He took great time and care and spared no expense to ensure a good crop. He tilled the soil, he removed all the stones, he built a tower and a winepress; all the pieces were in place. The vineyard owner had poured himself into this vineyard project with back-breaking work, great personal sacrifice, and lavish love. There was nothing more the vines could need. The vineyard owner did all of this with one, simple expectation – that grape vines would go ahead and do the only thing that grape vines do: produce good fruit.

Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. He did everything right, so what happened? The vineyard owner asked himself the question that many aspiring green-thumb gardeners have muttered to themselves, **What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?** It doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense until you find out whom the prophet is talking about. Did you notice in this Song of the Vineyard, Isaiah doesn't tell us right away about whom he's speaking? That way, the people who are listening are drawn in and get to feel the complete injustice at what's going on...but then the hammer drops. **The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.** This isn't just a song of lament at a less than stellar grape harvest. This is song about how God's heart was broken because his people wouldn't love him back.

What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? After all that God's grace had done for the people of Judah and Jerusalem, how could they? Think of all that God's undeserved love had done for them, even in the face of their bold and stunning faithlessness. He led them by the hand out of slavery in Egypt. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so his people could pass through on dry ground. He provided for their needs for 40 years as they wandered in the wilderness – their stomachs were filled with food and their clothing and shoes didn't wear out. The Lord parked his promised people in the Promised Land. He gave them fields they didn't cultivate, crops they didn't plant, and cities they didn't build. Through the work of faithful prophets, he called the people away from sin to trust in him. Through the work of faithful kings like David and Solomon, God prospered the nation of Israel in their new home. He had done absolutely everything for them. They were set up for success. They were like a vineyard – prepared with care,



planted with the finest vines, and guarded from invaders by a beautiful hedge and mighty watchtower. God had done everything for Israel. More than everything God had done for Israel, he promised to send through their nation a Savior for all humankind. God loved the unlovable, but they didn't love him back.

Sure, the Israelites claimed to love God, but their heartless worship of the true God and their shelves filled with idols proved the contrary. Even though God had set them up for success, the Israelites failed to produce good fruit. God wasn't looking for literal fruit. He was looking for good fruits of faith like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness; instead he received the rotten apples of hate, strife, short tempers, rejection of his Word, and downright wickedness. A song of God's faithfulness and love takes a sad, sour turn when his beloved's affection turns suddenly cold. So, how does God respond to such an unfruitful vineyard like Judah and Jerusalem? **I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.** What would God's response be? In one word – destruction. The fruitless vines of Judah and Jerusalem would be ripped out of their homeland and sent into exile in Babylon.

I hear the Song of the Vineyard, the Saddest Love Song, and I'm tempted to throw up my hands with the vineyard owner and say, *"What's going on? How could those vines **not** do the one thing they were completely enabled and empowered to do?"* At first glance, I'm tempted to wring my hands and tell those unfaithful, disobedient Old Testament Israelites, *"You got what you had coming!"* But then I'm confronted by the "elephant in the vineyard" and have to ask myself, *"Has this week, this month, this year, this life brought forth a bumper crop of fruits of faith in my own life?"* After all, what hasn't God done for me that he didn't do for the Israelites? Nothing! His love, his grace, his providence, his care – all of it – richly and lavishly poured out on you and me every day of our lives, but we find ways around acknowledging it. If you listen closely to his Word, you can hear God's song about each of us: *"I planted the good seed of my Word in your heart, dear child. I watered that seed in the waters of Holy Baptism, rescuing you from the devil's domain and adopting you into my family. I've nourished that seed with my Son's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. I've given you everything – you truly lack nothing. Your eternal life is safe and secure in my hands, through absolutely no work on your part. Now, go and show the world that I'm gracious and you're saved by my grace with a life filled with good fruit!"*

But instead of responding to God's gift of full and free forgiveness with a life filled with good fruits of faith, I complain about all the ways God hasn't taken care of me...at least, in the way I think he should. *I'll love my neighbor when they're a little more lovable. I'll be joyful when things turn around for me a little bit. I'll forgive from the heart when, and only when, I've made that person who hurt me feel the full weight of that terrible thing they did to me. I'll support the work of spreading the gospel here and abroad when God actually gives me what I think I need.* Do you see how backwards that way of thinking really is? In response to a God who spared nothing, not even his own Son, to make us his own, our natural way of operating is to live and give from a philosophy of scarcity, as though there's not enough to go around. When I hear the Song of the Vineyard, I need to be honest with myself and cry out, Lord have mercy! And he has, and he does.

Because this Song of the Vineyard, this Saddest Love Song, has another verse. It's the Song of Salvation, sung by our Savior Jesus. Our gracious God is the one who calls the tune, so he sent his one and only Son into the world to take our every sin, our bad fruit, our lack of fruit, our lust, our lies, our selfishness upon himself. Jesus sang the Song of Salvation all the way to the cross of Calvary where he died to pay for our every sin. Then he cranked up the volume on Easter morning when he walked out of his tomb alive, assuring you and me that because he lives, we live.



And now? Now he sends us back out into the world as fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, daughters, sons, and calls on us to do the thing that he's enabled, equipped, and empowered us to do – bear fruits of faith. Bearing good fruit isn't rocket science or some vague religious mystery. It's living to God's glory in every walk of your life. As a citizen of this country, how can I bear good fruit? Pay your taxes, pray for your leaders, obey the laws of the land – not to somehow earn God's favor, but because you already have God's undeserved love in Christ. As a member of your family, how can you bear good fruit? Husband, love your wife as Christ loved the church; wife, submit to your husband as the church submits to Christ; kids listen to mom and dad and respect them as God's representative to you – not to somehow earn God's favor, but because you have been forgiven in Christ. As a student or worker – you do your faithful best, not to glorify yourself, but to give glory to God. As a member of this congregation – you make ample and faithful use of the means of grace (regular worship attendance, Bible study, remembering your Baptism, coming to the Lord's Supper), you pray for your gospel servants, pray for each other, reach out with an encouraging word, you support the ministry of the gospel with your prayers and offerings. Bear good fruit, not to try to save yourself (because you never could), bear good fruit because you are forgiven freely in Christ and have heaven waiting as your home. The beautiful truth about fruits of faith is that you're not the one actually doing the work – God is. It sounds counterintuitive, but it's true. God initiates. God acts. God works, and when God acts, results follow. The gospel-good-news of Christ crucified and risen for you works and produces fruits of faith in your life.

And grace upon grace, God rejoices in the fruit you bear. He praises that which he's created in you. Think about that! Through Christ, our God sings another song over you and me, his blood-bought children. Not a dirge of sorrow or a lament of pain, but one of joy and rejoicing. As God said through another one of his prophets, **The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.** God rejoices in saving you. His plan from all eternity, his Song of Salvation, is fulfilled in Christ, just for you. God bless you as his gospel message produces fruit in your life!

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

(Jude 24-25)