

## The King and His Vineyard

Isaiah 5.1–30

### Sermon

This is Thx wk, a great time to reflect on G's bountiful goodness to us throughout the yr. Trad began in fall 1621 when Gov Wm Bradford invited NA friends to a feast celebrating successful harvest & divine protection/provision for the <1/2 of Pilgrims who began the journey. In view of all G had done, celebrating his goodness seemed like right response. Trad carries on today, though admittedly Thx dimmed by turkey, football, shopping. Still peo of all rels will take time Thurs to offer thanks for the good things in life. But is that enough? In view of all G has done for us, is this all he expects? A big meal, sharing a few words of gratitude, a prayer before we eat? No doubt G has been good to everyone here, & no doubt it is good that once/yr we return thanks for all he's done. But is that enough?

Isa 5 (p. 462). In some ways an unusual txt for Thx Sun. Ch has two big pts: song of vineyard (1–7), six woes on G's peo (8–30). Not the happiest txt in B. Yet quite appropriate, for in this ch we have this very q addressed: in view of all G has done for us, what does he expect from us? In the 1st pt of this ch G ids the one main thing he expected from his peo & in the 2nd pt he gives the evidence that the one main thing was missing. Look for it as I read.

Psg begins w a song/story/parable: Isa drew his listeners in, let them draw their own judgment from the story, then turned story on his hearers. In their response they'd condemn themselves. Peo of Judah would have been well familiar w agri image, some may have even experienced this very thing: planted *choicest vines* (2), cultivated best poss environment, even built *tower & winepress* (2, i.e., a place to reside & a vat for storing wine). But instead of a good crop, only *bad fruit* (4), i.e., sour grapes, good for nothing. Such a promising beginning ended in failure. What to do now? Let it go: use resources elsewhere, write off as loss.

Meaning of metaphor stated: G the planter, Judah/Jeru the vine, good fruit—main thing G expected from his peo—**justice**, but they **rejected** it (7). Two terms (definitions): *rness* = measuring up to one's obligations in every relat, *justice* = setting things in right order when obligations not being met. IOW, *rness* describes way things ought to be, *j* getting things to the right place. [Nicholas Wolterstorff](#), prof of phil at Yale, describes these as 2 sides of justice: primary & rectifying. If everyone were in right relat w everyone else, if everyone practiced primary justice, no need to set everything right, no need for rectifying justice. G says that this justice was what he expected from his peo: living in right(eous) relat w 1A & when things were not right bet peo pursuing justice for 1A. But instead of justice & righteousness, G found *bloodshed* & *cries of distress*. Instead of *justice*/setting things in right order, *bloodshed*/peo injured & killed. Instead of *righteousness*/right relats among peo, *cries of distress*/need, oppression, sorrow.

Isa had drawn his listeners inductively to this dramatic conc & no doubt it left them saying, "Who, us? What proof do you have that we're guilty of this?" & that's where six woes come in, evidence of G's charge of injustice. woe = alas! Used by mourners, ergo "as good as dead." Can't deal w these at length, so let me summarize:

- 1st woe (8): acquisition of property. Not inherently wrong, land a gift from G to his peo. But in their econ, land passed from one gen to another. Woe given bc wealthier expanded their prop holdings at expense of poorer who were in their debt.
- 2nd woe (11): partying. Not saying that drinking inherently wrong (cp. Deut 14.26). But these peo so well off they spent their days in drunken revelry w/o any concern for G or his peo.
- 3rd woe (18): deception. Lives held tog by lying to others & to themselves. Think they have G at their mercy, know him fully.
- 4th woe (20): reversing G's norms, doing opp of what G says.
- 5th woe (21): self-r, esteeming themselves highly for their cunning, craftiness, wisdom.
- 6th woe (22–23): bribery. Using party scene to make deals.

In all these instances, G's peo did not measure up to their G-given obligations to 1A, nor did they pursue setting things right. Instead guilty shown favoritism & innocent deprived of justice, wealthy increased in land/wealth & poor lost what little they had, leaders partied to their hearts content & oppressed left w nothing. & when G—the G who promised blessing to Abr, redeemed Isr from Egy, preserved them for 100s of yrs—when G looked for r & j, in its place he found injustice: bloodshed & cries of distress. & like wine made from sour grapes, peo of Judah/Jeru good for nothing. Ill of going out Thurs w Kimberly, went to Maya (Richard Sandoval) for great dinner (guac, chicken tacos, huitlacoche stuffed chicken breast, corn on cob), went to see Mockingjay pt 1, got home late, crashed, realized in am I'd left out our leftovers. Food had gone bad, unfortunately can't be eaten. In this case, no one's fault but my own. But in Jeru's case, not G's fault but peo's. What more?

& so only thing that can be done: **justice served**. Ch graphically displays judgment awaiting peo for their sin. Presents it a couple of dift ways. In one sense, coming judgment would be G giving peo what they really wanted. Let it be what it wants to be, no pruning or cultivation (6). Want to spread out your land so you can have more space? Fine, you'll be left all alone (8). But also a sense in which G's punishment is old law: what goes around comes around. Ergo peo who defraud peo of their prop will find their investments go sour (10). Drinking heroes & champions bartenders (22) will be hunted down by real warriors who will not sleep until they win the battle. & those who gobble up other peo's wealth will find one w an even bigger appetite: death itself (14).

G saying we're right to conceive of judgment in these terms. Ergo hell = getting what you really want, life wo G. Ergo sow & reap/ karma = you'll get your comeuppance. But don't be mistaken: judgment not an impersonal force in universe. Behind both sides, behind all judgment, is the G of justice. & when peo violate his law, he is rightfully angry & will avenge (25). "But even if I grant

there is a G who is just, he wouldn't be angry. That's not right." If so then why were you so angry when you heard about Adam Lanza murdering those children at Sandy Hook ES? captain of SKorean cruise ship jumping off while hundreds died? pers who abused your best friend as a child? Not all anger is righteous, but that doesn't mean that all anger is unrighteous. Sometimes the right/just response to sin is anger, & for the G of justice he is right to be angry about the plight of the powerless whom his peo have abused.

G is very serious about peo living righteously & pursuing justice, measuring up in obligations w others & getting things right when we aren't. Not just a prob for peo of Jeru in Isa's day, but a prob for us. Consider your relats: **wrt your employer**, are you meeting your obligations? giving her/him the time/effort you agreed to, or spend all day surfing web? **wrt your family**, loving wife as X loves ch? arranging life under hus as ch does to X? displaying glory of G the F to your ch? obeying parents in the L? **wrt fellow Xians**, series on ch. value & welcome 1A, or avoid some bc hard to understand, rub wrong way, just plain weird? speak to & serve 1A, or spend time only w our favs? gather reg w 1A, or just holiday Suns like today? How about more directly to this psg: **wrt poor**, are you meeting your obligations? listening for cries of distress, or trying to block them out as you go about your day? acknowledge/thank peo in low-income service jobs, or treat them like your servant? anyone you're trying to help? JE, "**Xian Charity**,": "We are very sensible of our own calamities, & when we suffer we are ready enough to think that our state requires the compassion & help of others. We are ready enough to think it hard if others will not deny themselves in order to help us when [we are] in [need]" (2.165). But when others are in need, do we ever deny ourselves for them? Do we even notice? Are we any more just than Jeru? Then what hope do we have in view of v. 25? What will stay his hand?

Ans in 1st v: *song of vineyard* (**justice satisfied**). Vine oft-repeated image in OT, reappears in NT in a most unlikely way. One pers

comes along & takes up this very metaphor, but applies it in an unusual way. Instead of saying “Isr/Judah/Jeru is the vine” he says, “I am the Vine & not just any vine but the true Vine, ultimate, the One to which Isr/Judah/Jeru pointed.” Looked at Jn 15 2x in 4 yrs I’ve been here. Not that Isr was a fake vine & J the true, but that Isr the pic & J the reality. Where Isr/Judah/Jeru fruitless, corrupt, good for nothing, J was everything G intended his peo to be: fruitful, just, a blessing to all. But even tho J was the fruitful Vine, treated as tho he were fruitless: he was *destroyed, trampled, made a wasteland* (5–6). & on that cross the last vs of this ch would be fulfilled: if one looked at the land that day, they would see only darkness & distress. Even the sun was darkened by clouds (cp. Mk 15.33). Why? To satisfy G’s justice & exalt his rness, just like v. 16 predicts.

See, none of us is just, no one is righteous, not a single one. So no one of us escapes G’s judgment: not the partier nor the worshiper, not the clever businessman nor the self-r clergyman, not the one who reverses G’s norm re sexuality to live how they want nor the one who reverses G’s norm re generosity to keep what they have. No one gets away, G’s hand is still outstretched, his anger still burns. But in J his anger has been satisfied—for the partier & the worshiper, for the businessman & the clergyman, for the sexually active & the greedy miser. The true Vine was trampled so that fruitless, unjust peo like us could be given life. Friends, this is the hope of the gos. G doesn’t just welcome peo who live by his standards, else none of us would get in. But G also welcomes all who come to him through the One who did live by his standards, through J, & lay down every attempt to get in on their own. So come. Lay down your meager attempts & come to J.

Now when you do come to J, when you have tasted of his grace, it begins to change how you live. When you truly see this G unlike any other in his rness & **justice**, you want it to be **reflected** in your own life. When you see G’s great generosity to us in our need, we want to display it in our generosity to those in need. I know this is

a controversial topic among Xians, has been since early 20th c. when some Xians decided to abandon everything that smacked of the supernatural & adopted what they called a soc gos, a gos of good works for peo in need. Other Xians rejected that model & rightly said that removing supernatural was to gut the gospel—no good news left. But in process these Xians spurned anything that smacked of soc gos. Not that they left public square entirely, but that they elevated some issues (abortion & freedom of relig) over others (poverty & ed). A very complex topic that can't be fully developed in time we have left. But for now, suffice it to say that this is a 20th c. dichotomy. J Edwards earlier. J Owen: "Chs & their members ought to think of caring for the poor as an eminent grace & excellent duty. For X is glorified & the gos is honored when we care for the poor. Many peo consider it unspir or something that should be spontaneous rather than organized. Many think it should not be central to the work of the ch. But in fact it is one of the priorities of Xian communities bc it is the main way we show the gos grace of love" (as modernized by [Chester](#), 36).

Encouraged bc in many ways our church already involved in reflecting G's generous justice to the needy: OCC, discounted rent for mins (All Souls/Apostles, CYT, Geneva Conserv), benevolence fund, indiv assistance. But there are areas we can grow in.

1. Know your flock. This wk, talked w one pers here who didn't have \$ to buy milk for his kids, another who was grateful that the one meal he had the day before filled him for whole day. On other hand, talked w someone who wanted to know what widows/elderly/sick could be visited on Thx. Great example! You're part of the body, so get to know who's here & ask qs.
2. Don't reap to the edges. OT prin: leave fruit on edge of field for poor. So for us, don't budget every penny, leave margins in your spending to be able to help. Even keep spare change in your pocket to give away when prompted to give to someone who says they're in need.

3. Give what you can. OCC needs \$7/box to ship. NYRM clothing drive to stock shelves (esp. men's L). Would love to put together homeless care packages, need someone to spearhead. Simple, practical ways you can be involved w doing what is right for the needy among us. JE: "Considering all these things [X has done], what a poor business will it be that those who hope to share these benefits yet cannot give something for the relief of a poor neighbour w/o grudging! that it should grieve them to part w a small matter to help a fellow-servant in calamity when X did not grudge to shed his own blood for them!" ("[Xian Charity](#)").

So as we approach Thx this Thurs w its turkey, football, & shopping, let's return to G what he expects from his peo for all he has given us. Yes, give thanks, but in giving thanks, don't forget to give justice to those in need. Offer praise for it is fitting, but while offering praise to G don't neglect to offer help to your neighbor. JE: "X loved & pitied us, when we were poor & he laid out himself to help & even did shed his own blood for us w/o grudging. He did not think much to deny himself & to be at great cost for us vile wretches, in order to make us rich, & to clothe us w kingly robes when we were naked, to feast us at his own table w dainties infinitely costly when we were starving, to advance us from the dunghill & set us among princes & make us to inherit the throne of his glory & so to give us the enjoyment of the greatest wealth & plenty to all eternity." So let us display his mercy, let us reflect his justice, let us showcase his righteousness that others may know our great G & S JX.