

What Else Could We Have Done?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 January 2021

Preacher: Luca Sueri

[0:00] Good evening, everyone. Thank you for joining us tonight as we go through this chapter 5 in the book of Isaiah. Thank you to those who read the chapter. My name is Luca for anyone who does not know me.

I'm going to open tonight by telling you about a rule that we have in our house. The rule is that Mickey Mouse doesn't sit on the table.

He has his little chair and he can sit on the little chair by the table, but he's not allowed on the table. Mickey Mouse being our two-year-old's favourite soft toy at the moment, the soft toy that he has to have in his bed at night.

And we don't want Mickey Mouse to get dirty with food. For Elliot's sake, it's best if Mickey Mouse stays clean and doesn't end up in the washing machine with some pesto stain on it.

So every day he asks us, can Mickey Mouse be on the table with me today while I eat? And every day we explain, no, he cannot. We explain why, we pull the little chair next to his high chair and we sit Mickey Mouse on it.

[1:11] We do everything we can to keep Mickey Mouse clean and to ensure that Elliot has his beloved toy in his bed every night. That is, of course, until the day that Elliot thought it would be clever to actually fling Mickey Mouse onto the table, right on top of the pizza dough that Simona was lavishly spreading some olive oil on.

And I do know how stereotypically Italian all of that sounds, but it is the truth. So Mickey Mouse ended up in the washing machine and Elliot had to sleep without him, which wasn't easy for anyone involved.

I think he settled on Bambi as a replacement for the night. What else is the question that we ask ourselves? What else could we have done as parents?

Because we explained what would happen and we put things in place so that it wouldn't happen. We gave rules and we helped him stick to the rules every day.

But what else could we have done when he decided to disobey? Now, I know what you're thinking. Of course, I know that too.

[2:17] A two-year-old can barely understand the difference between clean and dirty, let alone all the cause and effect steps that you have between Mickey Mouse sitting on the table and Mickey Mouse not being with you at night.

But don't we all think sometimes, what more could I have done? Maybe not when you're interacting with your toddler child, but with a grown-up child, or maybe a parent, maybe a colleague, or maybe a friend.

You know, someone who's able to think, supposedly, and understand for themselves the consequences of their actions, and yet has willingly decided to make the wrong choice.

People are the architects of their own demise, we like to say. Okay. So now if you think, maybe you have a picture in your head of something that happened recently. So if you think about that, what more could I have done frustration?

You might find the words that Isaiah attributes to God in verse 4 quite relatable. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?

[3 : 25] So let's look more closely. Let's see where God is coming from as he utters these words. You might have noticed that this chapter 5 of the book of Isaiah has a parable at the start, from verses 1 to 7.

So this is going to be our first section tonight. We're going to call it Sinning Against a Caring God. And then we'll look at verses 8 to 25, 8 to 25, Sinning Against a Holy God.

And then 26 through 30, Sinning Against a Sovereign God. So in case you're taking notes, Sinning Against a Caring, a Holy, and a Sovereign God.

So let's look at the parable in the first seven verses of the passage. Isaiah sings for the one he loves. What a beautiful description of God, way of addressing God.

And he sings about God's own vineyard. Look at the description at the start of the parable of all the love and care that God is putting into his vineyard. Even the location is ideal.

[4 : 27] It's on a fertile hillside. He digs it up. He clears it off stones. He plants the vines. And not any vines. The choicest vines. He builds a watchtower and winepress.

The whole deal. And then he waits. Imagine the trepidation of this grapes grower as he waits for the vines to yield fruit.

And planting a vine is no small endeavor. The people of Israel would have been aware of that. We don't see many vines in Scotland, of course.

But in Mediterranean countries like Israel, then grapes, olives, and figs would have been the most common fruits to grow. The agricultural pride of a nation. And so God has lovely tended to his vineyard.

And now he's excitedly, excitedly waiting for the fruit. But instead of beautiful, juicy, sweet grapes, what he finds in his hands is sour grapes.

[5 : 32] And he knows it's not down to him. Unlike me raising a child, he knows that he didn't make any mistakes. He knows that nothing more could have been done.

So he's bringing the people of Jerusalem to this imaginary trial as witnesses and judges. And he says, look at this. I have nothing to hide. You all see I did do all that could be done.

And so what's the point in keeping a vineyard that won't produce fruit? So verses 5 and 6 describe the ruin of this vineyard.

They're sad verses. He's not taking any pleasure in destroying it. He puts so much effort into it. But now he removes its protections and the vineyard is devoured and trampled down.

It will become just an abandoned wasteland. And no rain will fall on it. It's a beautifully written but a very tragic parable.

[6 : 35] And I think the whole chapter is really. Such poetic, beautifully crafted language. But what a heartbreaking message God has given to his people through his prophet.

So verse 7 decodes the parable for us. Of course, the grapes grower is the Lord Almighty. And the vineyard and the vines are Israel and Judah not producing the fruit that are expected.

Because God expected justice from them. But he found bloodshed instead. He expected righteousness. But what heard instead was cries of distress.

He expected good grapes. But he got bad grapes. So what does this mean? It means that his people were doing the exact opposite of what they were expected to do.

They were everything they should have not been. God was looking for obedience. God was looking for lives in keeping with the law of God.

[7 : 36] And not because he's just, you know, a big-headed, capricious boss who likes to see people run around to please him. It's because God knows that not keeping his law disobedience will result in bloodshed and distress.

Because when we, when people stray away from God, they produce evil. And evil has an impact on everything and everyone around it.

A caring God. This is the God that the people of Israel were sinning against. A God who always took care of his people. He chose them among the nations.

He freed them from their enemies. He led them in battle time and time again. God could have not shown his love for his people any better than he had.

Just like the parable of the vineyard describes. Because all that love intending to in the vineyard is an illustration of everything that we read about in the Old Testament.

[8 : 40] Be it freeing Israel from Egypt. Or conquering Canaan for them. Or leading David in his many triumphs.

What else could have God done to show Israel his love and power? To put them in a position to produce good grapes. Obedience. Justice and righteousness as verse 7 says.

Now, we're not the people of Israel. This message of Isaiah was not written with us as 21st century British residents in mind.

But that doesn't make it any less relevant to us. Because guess what? God cares about us too. And he's proven it to us as well.

Because when he freed Israel from Egypt. When he gave them Canaan. When he led David in victory and so forth. He was fulfilling all the promises made not only to the people of Israel but to the whole of humanity.

[9 : 40] Promises that we see all over the Old Testament. And particularly in this very same book of Isaiah. Promises to do with the Messiah.

His son Jesus whom he sent to the cross to die for our sins. To take our place at the receiving end of God's holy wrath. So if we're ever tempted to read verses like this vineyard parable and think.

What an ungrateful bunch. These Israelites were. I would have never turned my back on the God who led my people in a pillar of fire and cloud.

It was so clear that they had a powerful God with them. And we want to stop and rethink. Because isn't it all the clearer to us on this side of history.

Where we can witness that yes, God did fulfill his messianic promise. God did free us from eternal death. Every time we sin.

[10 : 41] And we do too. We're sinning against the God who cares. Just like the Israelites were. We have no excuse. He could have done nothing more than tending to us his vineyard.

As well as he did by sacrificing his only son on that cross. So my challenge for us tonight. Is do we ever feel like we're justified for what we do?

Do we ever feel like we have a valid excuse for some sin? Which would have not happened had God not put us in that situation. Had God done more.

Ensured we wouldn't be there. Tempted that way. Because if that's what we think. Then we're lying to ourselves. Because everything that could have been done for us. Was done.

If we yield bad grapes rather than good. If we yield disobedience rather than obedience. It's on us.

- [11 : 43] Yes, resisting temptation is hard. God never said it wouldn't. But it is because we live in a broken world. And we live in a broken world. Because of our own sinfulness.
- So whatever the circumstances are that we're sinning. We are sinning against the God who cares perfectly. The God who doesn't deserve our disobedience.
- Let alone be complicit in it. After narrating the parable and explaining it. Isaiah goes on from verse 8.
- To paint a picture which is at the same time bleak and grim. Of what the sour grapes look like. How the people of Israel disobeyed to God. And how he punished them. But also a glorious and majestic.
- A terrifying even picture. Of God's holiness. Of his wrath. And his complete sovereignty over his people. There are six woes.
- [12 : 43] From verses 8 to 25. And they describe the sinfulness of the people. And the punishment that they receive from God in return. And we will not stop and consider them all one by one in detail.
- I think they are intended to paint a picture together. But we're going to have a quick look at them just now. Starting with verse 8. Where we have the woe to those who join house to house.
- Those who are not administering the land that God had given them. As he intended. Who have let wealth go to their heads. And are not taking care of each other.
- They're not sharing with their neighbours as they've been commanded to. But instead the rich are robbing their fellow Israelites. Of God's blessing in the form of the land that he'd given them.
- And so God will punish them by making these estates worthless. Second woe is to those who devote themselves to the pleasures of life. Whose life is but a big alcohol-fuelled party.
- [13 : 44] Verse 11. And the problem of course is not the alcohol in itself. Or the musical instruments that you see mentioned there. But verse 12 tells us what the problem is. It's that they do not regard the deeds of the Lord.
- Or see the work of his hands. Because they drank and were merry. With no consideration for God's work. And so they'll be parched and hungry.
- Is God's very appropriate punishment for them. 18 and 19. We have the woe to those who challenge God. Those who treat him like a genie. Tell him to rush and fulfil his promises already.
- Because what else would be the point of being the people of God. If not that you get him to do things for you. Verse 20. Woe to those who have fun playing God.
- The thing that they can decide what's good and what's evil. They can mix it up. So that what God forbids is what they do. And what God commands them to do is what they won't do. Similarly verse 21.
- [14 : 42] Woe to the arrogant. And finally in verses 22 and 23. Woe to those who take advantage of their position. To create injustice. It's this.
- All of this sin. Described here. That sparks the anger of the holy God. Isaiah says. Not only are the people of Israel sinning against the God who cares so much for them.
- That he did everything that he could. So that they would choose to glorify him with their obedience. They're also sinning against the holy God. And holy means that he cannot.
- He cannot tolerate sin. Unlike us. God will not put up with sin. He's not being unfair in all the distraction that we see described here.

He is being holy. He can't tolerate some sin. You know close an eye on the minor stuff. You're either holy or you aren't. And we aren't. And God is.

[15 : 44] Let's read verse 24 together. They have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty. And spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore.

The Lord's anger burns against his people. With that therefore. Isaiah is saying. This is what you get. When you sin against the holy God in the old covenant.

His wrath is unavoidable. Let's read verses 15 and 16. So people will be brought low. And everyone humbled.

The eyes of the arrogant humbled. Do you see the downward direction? But the Lord Almighty. He will be exalted. By his justice. And the holy God.

Will be proved. Holy. By his righteous acts. God's punishment to his people. His righteous act. Is what actually proves him.

[16 : 40] Holy. So again. God is not being unfair. Or unreasonable here. He's just being holy. And if God wasn't holy. Would he even be God? So Isaiah is bringing in front of the people of Israel.

Their own sin. In the form of these six woes. Look at what you've been doing. All the different ways. That you have been rejecting. And desecrating God's love and commitment to you.

He's a holy God. And this will be. This will have to be. The result of your actions. And the thing about prophets. Is that. They often focused on.

They. Especially. Here I guess. On passing on God's words. Of judgment. To God's own people. How I wish. That these woes.

Were not addressed. To the people of Israel. But to some. Pagan people. Who'd. Not been saved. Time after time. After time. By the powerful God. What a relief. That would be.

[17 : 42] But it is. The very. People. That God chose. That he's describing here. How shameful. And we mustn't think. That Isaiah.

Is putting himself. Above everyone else. Because there's a seventh woe. In the next chapter. In verse five. Where he will say. That he's a sinner. Like everyone else. He's just being a messenger here.

So all of this. Must beg. The question. What is the difference. Between. Those who go after idols. The other nations. The pagan nations. And those who are.

Supposedly. Following God. Where is that visible. That distinct. Difference. In the way that they conduct. Their lives. And you might have guessed.

Where I'm going next. If we think back to those woes. As much as it's true. That those verses. Were the description. Of a specific people. The people of Israel. At a specific time. Don't they really describe.

[18 : 39] The whole of humanity. I think it's rather humbling. How parts of the bible. Written thousands of years ago. Can describe the human nature. And remain so relevant. Over time.

And across cultures. In a way that these woes. Still act in the 21st century. As a very powerful mirror. Which shows us our own flaws.

So assuming that we all see ourselves. In these woes too. I'm sure to different extents. When different sins are mentioned. But if someone doesn't recognize themselves.

In any of these woes. Then come and talk to me. I want to know what your secret is. If we see ourselves called out. If we feel like Isaiah. Is exposing our own sinfulness.

As he lists those sins. Then these two. Begs a question. Of where is the difference. Between me. And my non-Christian friends and family.

[19 : 34] When it comes to the way. That I conduct my life. We too. Are sinning against. The same holy God. And he expects more.

Than seeing his people conformed. To the world around them. He showed us through Christ's life. On this earth. What we are to conform to. A life. Lived for his glory.

So another challenge for us. Do we have a problem. With unrepented sin. Like the people of Israel did. Do we appear to have mixed up.

In our head. What is good. And what is wrong. Because if we do. It must be a sign. That we have lost our passion. As followers of God. Which should make us ask ourselves.

Do I really. Know him. Because if I did. I would appreciate more fully than that. What it means to be a child. Of a holy God.

[20 : 36] I would appreciate more. The extent of the work. That he wants to do. And expect to. To let. Expect me to let him do. In me.

Brothers and sisters. We mustn't. Underestimate. The seriousness of our sins. Against the holy God. Because something. Has gone wrong. And we need to address it.

If we have become desensitized. To our sins. And finally. Our third point. And I won't. Spent more than just a few words.

On this third point. Which is that the people of Israel. Have sinned against. The sovereign God. Look at verses 25. Through 30.

It's the God. Who is sovereign. On nature itself. And makes the mountains shake. Who is bringing judgment. Over his people. The same God.

[21 : 36] Who would beat their enemies. For them. Is now calling the other nations. To destroy the Israelites. Do you see the irony. When you compare.

Those people joining house to house. Thinking that they. Owned the land. That God had given them. When you compare them to the God. Who can now command. Other nations.

To come and destroy. Those very same. Grand house. Ground. Sorry. Grand houses. That they had. So pathetically. Amassed together. While trying to make a name.

For themselves. In verse 29. We see the distant nations. They come roaring. Like lions. They seize their prey. And carry it off.

And that's it. That's the end of it. Let God hurry. Let him hasten his work. So we may see it. They said in verse 19.

[22 : 29] Well now they've seen it. The end of verse 30 reads. And if one looks at the land. There is only darkness and distress. Even the sun. Will be darkened by clouds.

God is sovereign. Over the whole earth. No one. That he's going to bring his judgment on. Can escape. He's not a holy.

But powerless God. Whose judgment cannot be carried out. Because Israel just went and hid somewhere. Just while waiting for him to calm down. He is sovereign.

And he will act on his judgment. In whichever way he sees fit. What a passage to end our week with.

I'm sure we would have rather dwelled on a psalm. God's judgment on his enemies. Rather than on his own people. But as we conclude. I want to try and shift our focus.

[23 : 28] From judgment to love. In fact. I'd like to help us see judgment. As an expression of love. Let me take you quickly to. Proverbs chapter 3.

Verses 11 and 12. My son. Do not make light of the Lord's discipline. And do not lose heart. When he rebukes you. Because the Lord disciplines.

The one he loves. I'll read it again. Because the Lord disciplines. The one he loves. And he chastens. Everyone he accepts. As his son. And the letter to the Hebrews.

In chapter 4. It quotes this. Verses from Proverbs. And then it carries on. In verses 10 and 11. God disciplines us.

For our good. In order. That we may share. In his holiness. No discipline. Seems pleasant at the time. But painful. Later on.

[24 : 24] However. It produces a harvest. Of righteousness. And peace. For those. Who have been trained by it. We've talked about sinning against a caring. A holy.

And a sovereign God. Let me conclude by going back. To the caring God. God's holiness. The unavoidability. Of his disappointment.

At our sins. And his wrath. And his sovereignty. With which he will bring. His final judgment on the world. At the end. Of times. All of this must be seen in the light.

Of his unfailing. His eternal. His unconditional. Love. And we again. On this side of history. We see the completeness. Of God's judgment.

In Christ. For God so loved the world. That he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him. Shall not. Perish. But have eternal life. So yes.

[25 : 22] We have. A holy. And sovereign God. Who will bring judgment. On those who refuse him. But only. Only after having shown them.

The kind of love. Of a God. Who sacrifices his son. For them. Let's pray. Father.

We thank you for this. Chapter. We thank you. That you are holy. And. Sovereign. Because that makes you.

God. That's the God we believe in. A powerful God. God. Who despises sin. And God. Tonight we want to.

Leave. Not feeling. Just inadequate. Like. Being children of yours. Is not possible. But feeling. Loved.

[26 : 20] Because we know. God. That despite our sinfulness. And your holiness. We are. We are. Accepted by you.

Because you love us so much. That you took. Jesus's. Sacrifice. That you made it happen.

So that. We could be reconciled. And so father. We. We thank you. For your love. Which we do not deserve.

Father. And we do pray father. That we will. Take up these challenges. To take our sins. Seriously.

To make sure that. There is a. Difference in the way. That we conduct our lives. Between us. And those who don't believe in you. Father. So that we can show. To them. What your.

[27 : 14] Teachings are. So that they can see. Your love. In action. Through us. Father. We know we can't do it. By ourselves. And that's why we pray. That the Holy Spirit.

Will work in us. Father. To change us. To. Make us more and more. Similar to Jesus. Father. While. Working us. As we.

Think. As we keep thinking. Maybe. Over the next week. Through these. Verses. Father. May. We. See. Change.

In. In our lives. As a result. Of. Of Isaiah's words. For us. Tonight. Father. We pray all of this. In Jesus's name. Amen. Thank you.