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Sermon Notes

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God's Lavished Grace Tragically Rendered Fruitless

Isaiah 5

2 Corinthians 6:1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

Receiving God's grace **in vain**: A very troubling concept, and easily misunderstood

God's grace comes to us in a variety of ways...

- It is by grace God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on sinners, whether they acknowledge Him or not
- It is by grace that we enjoy food, clothing, and shelter
- It is by grace that we are born into families that nurture us, love us, provide for our needs
- It is by grace that we enjoy warm human friendships
- It is by grace that we look out over natural beauty such as a rolling ocean or a field of wild flowers or a craggy mountain ravine in the fall
- It is by grace that we get an education, that we have formative experiences, that we can read, write and do arithmetic
- It is by grace that we enjoy every good and perfect gift, for they all fall down from God on people who deserve wrath

BUT ALL OF THESE FORMS OF GRACE CAN BE RECEIVED IN VAIN

If we fail to make the most of our opportunities, if we rebel and follow a lifestyle of sin, we have received God's grace in vain

We believe there is an effectual grace from God that cannot be received in vain

- It was by grace that Lazarus was raised from the dead... he could NOT receive that in vain... he had no choice but to breathe again

- It was by grace that the man born blind received his sight... he could NOT receive that grace in vain
- It was by grace that Peter understood that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God... he could NOT receive that grace in vain
- AND it was by grace that every true Christian in history has been born again by the Holy Spirit of God... by grace that the heart of stone was removed and the heart of flesh put in; by grace that we saw the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

But every spiritual advantage there is comes to us by grace

And if we waste those advantages, we have received God's grace in vain

Isaiah 5 speaks of lavish gifts of grace, bestowed from the kindness and covenant faithfulness of Almighty God on the nation of Judah... and these people perverted the good gifts of God and used them for sin

This passage speaks a word of warning to the American Evangelical church

No church in history has had as many spiritual advantages as the church in America

- As many Bibles in a variety of translations
- As many good seminaries, teaching the truths of the word of God
- As many avenues of right doctrine: publishers, book distributors, internet resources, good preaching in tapes, CDs, MP3, and streaming
- As many opportunities to serve the Lord in short and long term missions
- As many good, bible-believing churches

And yet, for all the avalanche of God's grace, it is amazing to many observers how little fruit there is here

Dr. Robert E. Coleman (travels the globe constantly and has his finger on the pulse of the church worldwide), speaking to Raymond Ortlund: "In the previous fifteen years real church growth in North America was zero percent. And yet the church in Asia and Africa and Latin America is growing by leaps and bounds!" Despite all of these lavished resources, zero net growth! A lot of activity, a lot of programs... but so little fruit

It was Coleman, in his excellent book, The Master Plan of Evangelism, who put his finger on the power of deep discipleship for the purpose of multiplication that Jesus employed:

- Preaching to 100,000 people a day with perhaps 4% response would yield 23,360,000 converts in 16 years.
- BUT taking one convert for 6 months and building a disciple who can reproduce, then each another, then the four another, etc in 16 years would reach 4,000,000,000 people.
- Multiplication begins small, but ultimately yields greater results. And these are disciples, Christians growing and maturing, not babes in the faith demanding constant nurturing

SO why hasn't it been happening? Only one answer: sin!! We are in some sense receiving the grace of God in vain, because so little growth is occurring... so much invested, so little fruit

Isaiah 5 speaks a warning to us about this precise matter

Luke 12:48 From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

I. God's Lavished Grace: What More Could Have Been Done? (vs. 1-7)

A. Isaiah's Love Song for God

Isaiah 5:1 I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

1. This song is among the most tragic ever sung
2. But the introduction shows Isaiah's love for God: "A song for the One I love...My loved one..."
3. First and greatest commandment:

Matthew 22:37-38 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

4. Essence of this love: feeling what God feels about this tragedy with Israel...
Isaiah's heart is lined up with God's, his sympathies completely with God

B. The Original Parable of the Vineyard

1. Jesus used this Parable to teach about Israel's rejection of God's messengers...
He told it to the Pharisees who were rejecting Him

Matthew 21:33-34 Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower.

*Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴
When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.*

2. God's relationship with Israel was a long-term investment in a vineyard that ended in disappointment... a failed crop

C. God's Lavished Grace

1. A well-chosen site: **"a fertile hillside"**... the Promised Land
2. Hard labor: **"dug up, cleared of stones, planted with vines, built a watchtower and a winepress"**

Illus. New England farms all surrounded with stone walls; the land up there just seems to grow boulders over the winter... they are pushed to the surface and need to be cleared every spring... HARD LABOR!!! Extracting the stones from the soil and carrying it to the edge of the field

God did all that and more... constructing a watchtower and HEWED OUT a winepress... verb implies tremendous effort... like a big vat hewed out of solid rock

3. Skillfully tended: God knew His business **"fertile hillside, choicest vines"**
4. Diligently and forcefully guarded: **"watchtower"**... always looking out for the enemy and protecting the tender vines from being trampled
5. Summed up:

Isaiah 5:3-4 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?

6. God spared no expense and left off no diligence to ensure success... The fault does not lie with Him... BUT...

D. Israel's Wretched Harvest

Isaiah 5:4 When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

1. The eternal question: WHY?????
 - a. So many times people ask God that anguished question... like when a precious little child dies tragically... "WHY, O Lord???"
 - b. But even more poignantly, God stands over the wreckage of human sinfulness, the senselessness of it, the waste, the insanity of rebellion, and asks us "Why?"

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

[Nathan, rebuking David for his sin² Samuel 12:9 Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?

[Jesus to Saul of Tarsus] Acts 22:7 “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

So it is here...

c. Despite all the skillful gardening of the Lord... still there were only BAD GRAPES

- i) God had given the Jews every external grace
- ii) National election
- iii) The example of the Patriarchs' faith: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
- iv) The events of the Exodus: the awesome display of God's power in the Ten Plagues and the Red Sea crossing
- v) The Ten Commandments and the Laws of Moses
- vi) The Sacrificial system, with all of its rich symbolism
- vii) The Promised Land... miraculously cleared of Canaanites, Hittites, Perizites, Hivites, and Jebusites... a rich land flowing with milk and honey
- viii) The lessons of national sin and restoration during the time of the Judges
- ix) The example of godly King David
- x) The incredible ministries of the prophets like Elijah
- xi) A wall of protection both physical and spiritual

Vs. 2 “he built a watchtower” vs. 5 “hedge” “wall”

- xii) YET for all of these incredible advantages, there was still overwhelming national and individual sin

God's anguished question: **WHY????**

Sin is SO IRRATIONAL, so INEXPLICABLE

God is very clear about those “Bad grapes”:

Isaiah 5:7 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.

Despite all the advantages of His skillful tending, look what He got! INJUSTICE, BLOODSHED, CRIES OF DISTRESS

AND: For the rest of the chapter He will lay out six clusters of bad grapes

- d. CENTRAL LESSON: the corruption of the human heart... short of the miraculous transformation of the New Birth, every external grace only hardens us more

^{ESV} ***Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?***

2. ONLY POSSIBLE HOPE: a New Heart... a New Nature

- a. God asks **What more could have been done?**
- b. The New Covenant is God’s own answer to His question

Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

- 3. The events of Jewish history prove this: No matter how many external blessings God lavishes on unregenerate people, they only harden our hearts more... if God does not add to them a changed heart, all that is happening is increasing Judgment on the people of God

E. God’s Shocking Judgment

Isaiah 5:5-6 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."

II. Six Clusters of Bad Grapes (vs. 8-23)

“Woe!” is a word of prophetic warning... the chapter can be arranged around the six woes the Prophet speaks

A. Woe #1: Aggressive Greed (vs. 8-10)

Isaiah 5:8-10 Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. ⁹ The LORD Almighty has declared in my

hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. ¹⁰ A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain."

1. Economic Empire builders... ruthlessly taking over the property of the poor and needy
2. Like evil King Ahab, who had Naboth murdered and took over his vineyard; or like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who used their influence to steal widow's houses and make themselves wealthy that way

B. Woe #2: Sinful Excess (vs. 11-12)

Isaiah 5:11-12 Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. ¹² They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands.

1. Israel was rife with idolatry... with living for sensual pleasures rather than God
2. They were dedicated to pursuing excess... rising early in the morning to run after drinks
 - a. Early rising = zeal, dedication
 - b. Run after = determination, sacrifice, commitment
 - c. BUT FOR WHAT??? **Drinks!!! To get drunk; for music... to enjoy a good tune... harps, lyres, tambourines**
3. The addictive lifestyle comes from trying to fill an empty hole in our hearts with something that will ease the pain of that very emptiness
4. Result: utter deadness to the glory of the Lord ALL AROUND THEM... **No regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of His hands**

C. Woe #3: Shameless Sin and Mocking of God (vs. 18-19)

Isaiah 5:18-19 Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, ¹⁹ to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it."

1. The image is powerful... as though they are beasts of burden serving sin and they cannot escape it
2. YET they mock God, question God, challenge God, defy God
3. They demand that God do what He's said on their timetable

D. Woe #4: Relativism and Redefining of Truth (vs. 20)

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

1. Long before the theory of relativity and the eventual post-modern statement that “everything is relative” people have questioned truth and sought to redefine it
2. “Naming” was a task given to Adam in the Garden of Eden... but defining “good” and “evil” is God’s task alone... and He defines it by His unbreakable word... He defined light and darkness, good and evil on the first day of creation

Genesis 1:3-5 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning-- the first day.

God alone is the absolute standard of good and evil... and the ultimate evil is to deny Him His glory... to fail to love Him with all our hearts

3. Nowadays, people have become experts at redefining good and evil

After the Supreme Court upheld a limited ban on partial birth abortion, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg called the decision “**alarming**”... the procedure itself, little more than infanticide didn’t seem to trouble her at all... but the legal limitation of abortion she viewed as evil

E. Woe #5: Arrogant False Wisdom (vs. 21)

Isaiah 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

1. Eve saw that the fruit was good for making her wise
2. This kind of wisdom is rooted in self-worship... the ultimate form of idolatry
3. Modern technology and affluence tends to make us wise in our own eyes and clever in our own sight... forgetting the infinite wisdom that created the universe to begin with

F. Woe #6: Drunken, Corrupt Justice System (vs. 22-23)

Isaiah 5:22-23 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, ²³ who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.

1. One of the fundamental functions of government is to assure justice for all its citizens

2. That neither the rich NOR the poor will get any preferential treatment, but that everyone will be judged fairly
3. The image of this in the Supreme Court building is of Justice personified, a blindfolded woman carrying scales and a sword, representing fair trial and justice meted out with authority
4. In Isaiah's day, judges loved the lush life, were heroes at drinking wine... and sold their services to the highest bidder

Six-fold woe... clearly depicting the corruption of Israel... now, with the sin clearly exposed, the judgment comes

III. Therefore... Judgment Comes (vs. 13-17, 24-30)

A. "Therefore" = The Reasonable Justice of God

Each of the woes describes a horrendous sin pattern on the part of God's people

And each of them results in a "therefore"... the reasonable justice of God

1. Therefore #1: vs. 13

Isaiah 5:13 Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding

2. Therefore #2: vs. 14-15

Isaiah 5:14 Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.

3. Therefore #3: vs. 24

Isaiah 5:24 Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust

4. Therefore #4: vs. 25

Isaiah 5:25 Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets.

B. Basic Sin: Rejecting God's Word (vs. 24)

Isaiah 5:24 they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.

1. The core issue: rejection of the word of God

2. This is the foundational sin... in fact, it is impossible to sin apart from the word of God
3. Sin nature seizes hold of the commandment as an excuse for expressing its basic state of rebellion against God... a state and nature the entire human race inherited from Adam in ORIGINAL SIN
4. An awesome thing to spurn the word of the Lord!!
 - By God's word, He created heaven and earth
 - By God's word, He filled the sea, land, and sky with living creatures
 - By God's word, He saves souls
 - And by God's word, He will condemn souls for all eternity
5. Therefore the most important thing a human being can do is tremble at God's word, and cling to it by faith

Isaiah 66:2 "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

C. Resultant Judgments

1. Exile: the people will be evicted from their land... the northern Kingdom to Assyria, the southern Kingdom a century later to Babylon

Isaiah 5:13 my people will go into exile

2. Death

Isaiah 5:13-14 their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst. ¹⁴ Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.

3. Humbling

Isaiah 5:15 So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled.

4. Decay & Dust

Isaiah 5:24 as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust

5. Invasion

- a. Again and again God threatened this central judgment: the invasion of foreign, Gentile powers
- b. Many other chastisements are available and were used by God: drought and famine (in the days of Elijah), locusts (in the days of Joel), plague (in the days of David's sinful census)...
- c. But the biggest threat of all has always been an invasion and conquest by a foreign power
- d. The use of Gentile raiders to afflict sinful Israel was established powerfully in the days of the Judges... especially the Philistines were used by God
- e. But the invasion by the Assyrians and a century and a half later, the Babylonians, was the final chastisement

D. The Invading Army Described (vs. 26-30)

Isaiah 5:26-30 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! ²⁷ Not one of them grows tired or stumbles, not one slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal thong is broken. ²⁸ Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are strung; their horses' hoofs seem like flint, their chariot wheels like a whirlwind. ²⁹ Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue. ³⁰ In that day they will roar over it like the roaring of the sea.

E. Yet for All of This... His Hand is Still Upraised (vs. 25)

Isaiah 5:25 Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

1. God still has more wrath to pour out
2. This phrase will be repeated again and again in Isaiah 9-10
3. The worst judgment God can give is not on this earth... rather, it comes on Judgment Day

Matthew 25:41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

IV. The Sweet Fruits of God's "Alien Task" of Judgment (vs. 16-17)

Isaiah 5:16-17 But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. ¹⁷ Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.

A. Judgment is God's "Alien Task"

Isaiah 28:21 The LORD will rise up ...he will rouse himself ...to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.

Lamentations 3:32-33 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. ³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.

1. Though God delights in the END RESULT, he does not delight in the process
 - a. Like Jesus' crucifixion
 - b. Done for the ultimate joy it would cause

Hebrews 12:2 for the joy set before him endured the cross

2. This chapter FULL of the judgment of God
3. Judgment is not God's home base... but He will do what He must do to cleanse His universe of evil

B. The Lord Almighty Exalted and Displayed

1. First good end to the judgment: God is exalted and glorified

Vs. 16 the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.

2. When God rouses himself and brings this withering judgment on His own chosen nation, the world will know how holy He is
3. The world will see His justice on display

C. Sheep Peacefully Grazing

Vs. 17 Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.

1. A sweet, peaceful, pastoral scene... a scene of serenity and safety
2. Perhaps it will literally be fulfilled... God cares about the land and the animals

a. When Judah was exiled to Babylon for seventy years, God showed His concern that the land get its Sabbath rests

b. So in Chronicles :

2 Chronicles 36:21 The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.

3. It is also a picture of total desolation... the evil people have been scoured from the land; the sheep are free from human destruction... they can rest there

V. The Gospel of Christ: Consummation of These Themes

A. Sovereign Grace that Produces Its Own Harvest

1. "What more could have been done" for God's vineyard?
2. He could have changed their hearts of stone and given them hearts of flesh
3. Sovereign grace is effectual... it produces the effect for which it was sent
4. The delight of the gospel is that God's grace can change us from within

B. Judgment of All Sins at the Cross

1. The six-fold woe of sins is still with us today
 - a. In America, we still struggle with all of these same sins

Aggressive Greed, Sinful Excess, Shameless Sin and Mocking of God, Relativism and Redefining of Truth, Arrogant False Wisdom, Drunken, Corrupt Justice System

- b. And it's not just "out there"... but the same idols are in OUR HEARTS as well
2. God has ordained that all this wickedness be dealt with at the cross or on Judgment Day
3. At the cross, the wrath of God of sins was poured out on Christ as our substitute

C. An Eternity of Peace in the Presence of God

1. Sheep grazing peacefully in the Promised Land is a picture of the ultimate Promised Land... the New Heavens and the New Earth
2. This is an image of the people of God finally able to dwell in their land

- a. Ultimately God's pure people will live in a cleansed land
- b. The New Heavens and New Earth will be a place of perfect peace
- c. Jesus said "The Meek will inherit the earth"
- d. God's judgment will bring this about

2 Peter 3:10-14 That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

VI. Application

A. Love God Like Isaiah Did

- 1. As Isaiah looked out over sinful Israel, Isaiah's first concern was for his "Loved One", God...
- 2. Learn to be God-centered as you look at issues of sin in society

B. Grieve Over Sin Like Isaiah Did

- 1. Isaiah clearly saw the effects of heart sins on daily life and society as a whole
- 2. He grieved over the sins that were ruining the Lord's harvest
- 3. So must we

C. Look to the Cross of Christ for Full Remedy

- 1. The destruction of sinful Israel by two exiles and by Gentile armies is only a picture of the wrath of God
- 2. God's wrath is clearly depicted at the cross and in hell
- 3. Flee to Christ!!
- 4. The cross of Christ is the only force powerful enough to conquer sin

D. Labor for Justice in America, for Revival and for Purity

- 1. Modern evangelicals have no right to withdraw from society
- 2. We are called on to act energetically for justice even as we look to God for a Kingdom He alone can bring about