

SONG OF THE VINEYARD

Isaiah 5:1-7

In these verses the prophet imitates a secular song. In his song he likens the vineyard to Israel and God to its owner. The owner spared no effort and expense in creating the perfect vineyard. But in spite of his best efforts, the vineyard yielded only sour grapes. In verses 3 and 4, the prophet, speaking for God, the owner, asks the citizens of Jerusalem and Judah what he should do with this vineyard which yields only sour grapes. He declares that he will utterly destroy it. Nothing but briars and thorns will grow on it.

In verse 7, Isaiah interprets the song. The vineyard stands for the nations of Israel and Judah. Even as the vineyard was to produce delicious grapes, Israel and Judah were to bring forth justice and righteousness. And even as the vineyard produced only sour grapes, the people brought forth only bloodshed and mourning.

This parable is a condemnation of Israel for its social sins. The people should have been concerned with establishing justice and righteousness. But they did not live up to their calling. Instead of justice and righteousness, they were involved in exploiting the poor and needy. We can see this in chapter 1 verse 23 where the Israelites exploited widows rather than defending them. Or in chapter 5 verse 8, where the landowners were only interested in enlarging their estates and building bigger houses, squeezing out those less wealthy than themselves.

These verses have profound implications for us today. As God's people, we should be concerned with establishing justice and righteousness. We should treat people fairly in our private dealings. But we should also try to ensure that the whole society we live in, both national and international, works for justice and righteousness. The poor and the oppressed must be treated both fairly and mercifully. When God drinks our wine, will it refresh him or will he spit it out?