

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 5

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER 5

Theme: “my people are gone into captivity, because *they have* no knowledge!”

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 5:20 (KJV) “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

INTRODUCTION

The indictment against Israel and Judah is that severe judgement, including the removal from the Promised Land, will certainly come if they do not repent. The problem with sinners and sinning saints is that we do not learn from the mistakes of others or our own. By the time we realise it, it is very often too late. Lives would have been hurt and our own lives ruined or perhaps, irreparably damaged with precious years wasted by immorality and shameful sins.

The hurt would be extra deep when the one getting hurt is the one we love dearly. The pain and turmoil in the soul, experienced by parents seeing their son behaving like the

prodigal son is unimaginable. Parents love their children more than life itself. They live and die for their children. They work hard day in and day out and even overtime for their children. They want the best for their children. When parents witness their children’s life becoming a spiritual and moral wreck, and them living in sin and worshipping idols, they would feel as though a knife has been plunged deep into their hearts. With their aspirations dashed and grounded into fine powder and blown away by the wind, the parents would feel lost and hopeless. The best years of their lives are gone and what else do they have left in this life?

Israel was like the rebellious and ungrateful child. The LORD had wanted the very best for Israel and Judah. Now Israel was divided into two nations, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. But both of them were living the idolatrous lives. The LORD has revealed again His heart’s desire for both of them. He has expected proper and godly conduct and witness from Israel and Judah as He had blessed them with a place of worship, priests to guide them in worship, His Word to help them lead a life of righteousness and His very presence in the midst of His people to protect and encourage them. Israel and Judah threw everything away and turned to idols. Their lives had borne the fruits of idolatry and sin.

The LORD will deal with all of their many sins. Should God’s beloved people still refuse to repent, exile awaits them. May we learn from the mistakes of Israel and Judah and take

heed of the warnings of God to live holy lives.

OUTLINE

1. The Vineyard Analogical Song (vv.1-7);
2. First Woe – Landlords Beware! (vv. 8-10);
3. Second Woe – Merrymakers Beware! (vv. 11-17);
4. Third Woe – Sinners Beware! (vv. 18-19);
5. Fourth Woe – Moral Perverts Beware! (v. 20);
6. Fifth Woe – Proud Men Beware! (v. 21);
7. Sixth Woe – Powerful Men Beware! (vv. 22-25);
8. Darkening of the Light in Heaven! (vv. 26-30)

COMMENTARY

The Vineyard Analogical Song — 5:1-7

Isaiah was singing a song to the LORD concerning his vineyard, identified to be Israel and Judah (revealed in verse 7). This song is a report card on the spiritual condition of God's people. It describes the heart and desire of Isaiah for Israel and how Israel has disappointed him by the manner in which she lived. Isaiah began by saying that the vineyard was placed in a very fruitful hill. There was absolutely no reason why the vineyard should not bear good fruit. The

problem was not with the ground in which this vineyard was planted.

The problem was also not with outsiders that might destroy or hinder the vineyard from growing and bearing good fruit. The vineyard was well-protected and properly fenced in to keep wild animals out. It was planted with the choicest vine. A tower was built in the midst of it for protection. A watchman would be in the tower all night to ensure that the vineyard was looked after and there was no opportunity for an enemy to sow weeds. The winepress was made and located in the midst of the vineyard for the pressing of grapes for storage and drinking. The description of these items is a structured poly-syndeton where every item is emphasised. This means that the LORD carefully prepared everything for the vineyard to bear good grapes. However, when harvest time came for the grapes, there were only wild grapes. These wild grapes were poisonous berries that had a bad smell.

Isaiah turned his attention to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah asking them to be their own judge. The contention was between the LORD and the vineyard. The use of the first person pronoun in verse 3 for "my vineyard" as opposed to the third person pronoun, "his vineyard" in verse 1 demonstrates a shift from Isaiah to the LORD. It is not Isaiah versus Judah but more the LORD versus Judah! The LORD asked two rhetorical questions vindicating Him from the sad spiritual state that His vineyard had come to be in. The LORD had done all that was

needed to be done to ensure that the vineyard bear good fruit. Verse 2b and verse 4b speak of what the LORD found when He went to collect grapes from His vineyard. He had put in every effort to ensure that His vineyard bear good grapes but found only wild grapes.

The LORD would now follow up with any necessary action to ensure that the vineyard bear good grapes considering all the effort that had been put in. The first thing the LORD would do was to take away the hedge. The vineyard would then be opened to all kinds of attack. The result would be, “it shall be eaten up.” The second thing the LORD would do was that He would break down the wall. The result of this would be the vineyard “shall be trodden down.” Destruction of cities, homes and lives would be the ultimate result should the LORD stop protecting His people.

The third thing the LORD would do was to lay it waste. He would not lift a finger to restore Judah after her destruction. Briers and thorns would be allowed to grow indiscriminately all over the vineyard and to choke her life away! To keep the vineyard in this state of barrenness, the LORD would keep the cloud at bay so that the vineyard would not receive any rain! The ground would harden and the nutrients in the soil would disappear. The identity of the vineyard of the LORD is the house of Israel and the men of Judah, His pleasant plant. This refers to the combined northern and southern kingdoms. He looked for judgement (same verb as in verses 2, 4) but found

oppression. If the people of God, who had the perfect Word of God to guide them, would not practise justice in the Land of Promise, no other nations would or could! Israel and Judah were great failures. The LORD went to look for righteousness but instead, found a cry i.e. a shriek. This is a good example of homophone. The word for “judgement” in Hebrew is “*mish-path*” and the word for “oppression” is “*mish-pach*.” The Hebrew word for “righteousness” is “*tse-da-qah*” and the word for “cry” is “*tse-‘a-qah*.” This is very common in prophetic writing. The purpose is for emphasis. The emphasis here is that the LORD has a sense of humour when He highlights the grievous sins of Israel and Judah.

First Woe – Landlords Beware — 5:8-10

The word “woe” sounds like the meaning of the word. The technical term for this phenomenon is “onomatopoeia.” This is also very common in prophetic writing. A series of six woes were uttered by the LORD against Israel and Judah.

The first woe focused on landlords. These landlords joined house to house and lay field to field. This means that they kept on enlarging their properties till there was no space for any small property to exist. Landlords were swallowing up smaller properties, a situation similar to what we find in many countries today, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. In Gentile nations, this might appear very common and acceptable as a way of life. However, Israel and Judah were spiritual nations with a

spiritual responsibility given to them by the LORD to be a light in the world that was in darkness. Land was to remain in perpetuity within their respective tribes since the day of Joshua when he divided the Land for them by lot. They did not own the land; the LORD did. They were told specifically that they were only stewards not owners.

The LORD knew everything that had happened in the Land of Promise. He would make desolate those many houses. No matter how great and fair, they would become without any inhabitant. The power and might of these landlords with all their houses would not stop the LORD from reducing them to nothing. What is the point of possessing many houses and land when it is void of people? Their farmland would not be able to produce any substantial amount of fruit. Ten acres of vineyard would yield only one bath i.e. 9 gallons. The seed of one homer i.e. 720 pints would yield only an ephah i.e. 72 pints. The LORD would smite Israel and Judah and turn their land into fruitlessness.

It is not how much we own or how hard working we are that gives the increase. It is always the LORD who gives the increase. Fruitfulness or fruitlessness is in the hand of the LORD!

Second Woe – Merrymakers Beware! — 5:11-17

The second woe targets the ones who would care only for merrymaking! “They eat and they drink for tomorrow they die” was their philosophy of life! They believed that they could drink their troubles and sins

away! They rose early to take strong drinks. They continued drinking into the night. They would drink until they were inflamed by it. They drank till they were drunk stupid. They accompanied their drinking with music. Drunken revelry is the world’s way of solving problems. The strong drink numbs their mind from all the problems of the world. Music provides an external facade of happiness that they do not and cannot find in the real world of the living. They hide behind the world of make-believe. The door to this world is strong drink! Many fools have entered this door and had not returned. They died in there!

They became useless for they could do no work. Their lives were ruined and they probably ruined other lives in the process by their drunken stupor. They became good for nothing! They did not care at all for the work of the LORD! The people of the LORD were totally not interested in the word of the LORD! It is like a professing Christian boasting that he is not interested in theology!

As a result of their drinking, the people of God would go into captivity. This is a prophetic statement. It has yet to occur but from God’s perspective, the captivity was a foregone conclusion. Israel was too far gone to repent and change. The captivity was already a completed event in God’s eyes. The charge of the LORD against His people that justified this captivity was that “*they have* no knowledge: and their honourable men *are* famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.” It was not that the Word of God had disappeared from their midst as the

LORD had sent prophets after prophets to rebuke them. They refused to obey the Word of God. The Word of God was not in their hearts even though it might be in their hands. Their honourable men and their multitude were spiritually famished and in great need of God's Word.

Hell has enlarged her mouth to welcome these wicked people of God. They welcome many that could not be counted. The ones who enter therein include "their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth." Their way of life was totally in a state of carnality and the practitioners of it will enter into Hell. The mean man i.e. the frail man will be brought down and the mighty man and the eyes of the lofty will be humbled i.e. brought low. The ones who are proud in the heart and in the head will all be humbled by the LORD!

The LORD will be exalted in judgement against His people. How can the LORD be exalted when God's people are punished for their sins? It is explained in the second part of verse 16. . . . "and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness." When the LORD chastises His people, His holiness is manifested. His dealing with the sins of the people is evidence of His righteousness and that He is no respecter of persons. His holiness is vindicated when judgement is meted out against the ungodly even if the ungodly were His own children.

The righteous would be encouraged to remain in righteousness. And the unrighteous will turn from their sin and want to be

righteous. "Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat." The lambs will be lambs and be well fed the Word of God. The waste places of the fat ones, referring to the places of evil landlords and drunkards, will be taken by strangers who are godly. These would be the Gentiles who become believers. This warned the Israelites that should they not bear the testimony of God in holiness and faith, they would be replaced by those who would!

Third Woe – Sinners Beware!

— 5:18-19

The third woe deals with sinners who indulge in sin with impunity and lead other to sin with them. They begin with little sins and then graduate to bigger sins. Their approach is to entice them using "cords of vanity." All things carnal are vanities. All earthly things are carnal things. The emphasis, therefore, would be on carnal things. Promises of larger pay and bigger cars as incentives to lure many to work in companies have been very successful tools throughout the ages. Many believers have fallen into this death trap. They would sin and be drawn in "with a cart rope." A cart rope is thicker as compared to the cord used earlier. The cord is smaller and more subtle. Once the hook has been securely attached, the seduction can be more blatant as the sinner is too far gone to dig himself out of the pit of sin!

In arrogance, they commit their sin in public without shame. They would commit them with speed and with no fear of God at all. They even

dare to challenge God to bring His counsel near them so that they may know it and they would not be bothered by it. They would mock and deride the Word of God for they believed that they know it all and what they did are not sinful.

**Fourth Woe – Moral Perverts
Beware! — 5:20**

The fourth woe most accurately describes our present age. **“Isaiah 5:20 (KJV)** Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

When evil is called good, it would lead many into acts of evil while sincerely believing that they are doing good. Their life would be destroyed by immorality but they would be under the false impression that their immoral life was in fact moral. A good example would be the sin of homosexuality. This is passed off as an alternate lifestyle. The world begins to accept this as a godly way to live, especially when pastors and churches condone and accept this as biblical. Thousands all over the world are embracing this as good even though they might not be homosexuals themselves.

When darkness is called light they twist the Word of God. The consequences of this lie have eternal consequences. There is none worse than pastors who preach a false gospel and promise their congregation that they have a place in heaven awaiting them when, in fact, they are going to Hell. God’s Word is light and the lie of Satan is darkness. The reverse is now

true. Satan’s word is called light and the Word of God is called darkness. A case in point is that some have called the doctrine of a perfect Bible a heresy and; the doctrine that the Bible has mistakes is hailed as godly and biblical. This is the upside down church that we have today!

When bitter is called sweet and sweet bitter, morality is immorality. Drinking is good as long as you can control it and it has medicinal value. It is as though what the Bible says does not matter. Divorce is considered a norm today and the shame of being a divorcee is melting away. Gambling is acceptable as long as you can control it and not be addicted to it. Fornication and adultery are acceptable as long as they involve consenting adults. The bitterness of sin has been cunningly replaced by sweetness by the evil one.

God says woe to these teachers of upside down justice and morality!

**Fifth Woe – Proud Men Beware!
— 5:21**

The fifth woe indicts those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight. No one else would think that they are wise. They are not teachable for they think that they know it all. They believe that they are better than everyone else. They can only be teachers and not students!

These people are a dime a dozen today. Anyone who rejects the Word of God falls into this category. All who rejects Christ as their Lord and Savior falls into this group. Any professing believer, who refuses chastisement or church discipline, falls

into this category. Children, who reject the guidance of their parents, also fall into this category.

Sixth Woe – Powerful Men Beware!
— 5:22-25

The sixth woe describes those who have power and display their power with impunity. Men who can afford to drink wine and mingle strong drink refers to men of wealth and influence. They are the leaders in a society who can afford this kind of luxury. They are men of might and strength which means men that can control other men. They are powerful individuals.

Their conduct is such that they can and did justify the wicked for reward. They can buy justice. Wicked people who probably do their bidding are protected by these powerful men. They control the legal system and believe that they are above the law of the land. However, they would bully the righteous. To take away righteousness from the righteous means that the righteous people are condemned. The manner in which the Pharisees treated Christ is a case in point. Wicked men are set free and protected by the law and the righteous are persecuted and punished to the letter of the law. This happened in the nation of Israel who was supposed to be called the people of God.

The certainty of the LORD's judgement against these powerful men is highlighted by two analogies. Just as fire devours the stubble and the flame consumes the chaff, their root shall be as rottenness and their blossom shall disappear like dust. This means that

the LORD will destroy the foundation of their power over men. The fruits of their labour, with all their pomp and earthly splendor, will crumble to dust. The reason given by the LORD is that "they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." The word for "cast away" is "to spurn" and the word "despised" means "to scorn or to abhor." They spurned the law of the LORD means that they spat into the face of the LORD with whom they have entered into a covenant. They had promised to obey the law of God, which refers to the commands of God, but they disobeyed them. They despised the word of the Holy One of Israel means that they abhorred the Bible, which is the word of the Holy God. The emphasis is on the covenant of God and His holiness, which the people of Israel could not care less about!

The end result will be the kindling of the anger of the LORD against His people. The hand of the LORD will be extended to punish His people. He will smite the people. The hills will tremble i.e. shake. The carcasses of His people would be trash thrown in the midst of the streets. After all these punishments have been inflicted upon His people, the hand of the LORD remains out stretched i.e. the punishment is not over yet! More punishment could still come upon His people if they do not turn from their sin and turn back to the LORD!

Darkening of the Light in Heaven!

— 5:26-30

The LORD Himself will call the nations from far to come and punish His people. The LORD will wave a flag to them and asked them to come quickly. These nations will come swiftly. These nations will not stumble or be weary. They shall not slumber or sleep means that they will sacrifice sleep to come as soon as possible to punish God's people. When they arrive, they will be ready to execute the LORD's judgement. This is symbolised by the fact that the girdle of their loins will not be loosen. The latchet of their shoes will not be broken means that they are ready to fight. They do not have time to unloose their shoes to go into their home for a rest!

When they begin their slaughter, their arrows are sharp to pierce into the hearts of God's people. Their bows are bent ready to fire. Their horses' hoofs are counted like flint i.e. no matter how far their horses have travelled, they do not need to shoe their horse because their hoofs are like hard flint and cannot be hurt by any kind of ground. They will come swiftly on their chariots which moved so fast that their wheels look like a whirlwind. The noise they made is like the roars of a lion. They will be as fierce as young lions and they shall roar and lay hold of their prey and no one shall be able to deliver them.

The Gentile nations will roar against God's people like a roaring sea destroying everything in its path. If one looked at the land, they will see darkness and sorrow. The light is

darkened in the heavens thereof. The LORD will switch off the spiritual light of Israel!

PRACTICAL VALUE

The justice of the LORD – The justice of the LORD has been put into the back burner by a distorted emphasis on the love of God today! Christians, who today cares little for the justice of God, are sinning like the unbelieving world. Christians lie and cheat as if God is dead or blind or deaf! There is no fear of God in our churches today! Christ is reshaped into a pacifist who is only love. Pastors and elders are the greatest culprits. They feel so safe and secure in their ivory towers protecting each other's back and coverings each other's sins! These are pastors and elders who have been in "business" for decades. They believe that they are untouchable. They can sin all they want and no one can touch them or discipline them.

Isaiah 5 debunks this notion. If man will not judge man, then the LORD will! It is more so if these men call themselves Christian pastors and elders! They have brought shame to the name of Christ by their grievous sins. They will not escape the wrath of God. He will not let them escape.

The LORD expects good fruit from His people – This expectation of the LORD is very good for professing believers. If we were honest with ourselves, we would examine our lives to see if we truly bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for a genuine believer who has accepted

Christ as Lord and Saviour not to bear any fruit at all. The bearing of fruit is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. It is true and cannot be faked by anyone.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit refers to the transformed lives of the believer. It is not about how many souls one leads to Christ. It is also not about how fruitful one's ministry is. Just because one is able to increase the number of attendees tenfold when one takes over a ministry, it does not necessarily mean that the person has borne much fruit. It does not even necessarily mean that he is saved. We must not confuse service with fruit of the Holy Spirit. A person who is saved will serve. However, a person who serves does not mean that he is saved!

All sins will be condemned – Man will continue to commit sins. The sins they commit will get from bad to worse! This is evidenced by the great degree of lewdness and immorality churned out by Hollywood. What was unthinkable in the 1960's are now openly shown and accepted in the 21st Century. Sexual immorality and grotesque gore and bloodshed sell movies. Without these ingredients in movies, the movies industry will flop. The men and woman today are like those of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The LORD is the Creator of heaven and earth. When God's people sin, they will surely be punished. There is no escape. The world will also be punished for her sins. If the LORD would punish His own people when they sinned, He will definitely punish the world when she sins. This is the

warning from the LORD. The only escape is to repent and return to God through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 5:1-10;

TUESDAY: Isaiah 5:11-22;

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 5:23-30;

THURSDAY: Isaiah 5:1-30;

FRIDAY: Isaiah 5:1-30.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Is the local church the vineyard of the LORD today or is it the invisible church? Is CPBPC part of this vineyard?

- 2. Who keeps the church healthy, sound and spiritually strong? Is it the LORD or the obedient and godly leaders in the church?

3. Is the health of the local church measured by the size and pomp of the building and its large bank account? If not, then what ought to be the biblical evaluation?

4. What is the biblical perspective and understanding of the purpose of a church building? How do you feel about the argument that we do not need a church building in this age as it is too costly? We should use the funds for mission work instead of using it on bricks and mortar?

5. Can Christians be happy? Is it biblical to attend parties and be happy? Can we enjoy listening to secular music?

6. Who has replaced Israel as the new visible testimony of God's grace and mercies? Is CPBPC part of this witness? What constitutes a good biblical witness? Does CPBPC have these qualities?

7. How important is the Word of God in your life? How has your regard for the Word of God been translated into practical steps that

have helped you grow in grace and the knowledge of God's Word?

8. Should deacons, elders and pastors have a personal system of Bible Study to increase their knowledge of God's Word before being considered as leaders of God's flock? Give reasons for your answer.

10. Are there bitter things that we call sweet in our lives or church? What about darkness for light or evil for good? What are some examples?

9. Why is it that sinners like to lead others into sin as well? Is it true that sinners like company and they do not like to sin alone? Do parents lead children into sin? In what way do they do it?

11. Are you wise in your own eyes? When you are corrected, are you quick to defend or quick to listen?

12. Are there people in the church who think that they are untouchable? If there are, where do you think they are most likely to be found? What

kind of constitution characterised such people?

13. Do we spurn and abhor the Word of God? Could a person who does not obey the Word of God, even though he agrees that obedience is what the Word of God teaches, be charged with spurning and abhorring the Word of God? Can a true believer be charged with such a serious sin?

15. Do you think that disciplining a sinner today is better than not disciplining him at all? If he is not disciplined at all on this earth, do you think he will be disciplined later by the LORD?

14. Can we conclude that a church, being overtaken by evil men, to be punishment from the LORD? Will God ever switch off the spiritual lights today the way that He did in the OT times?

16. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God and about yourself?
