

on the law", a wrongly-founded source of confidence; with believing in Christ and knowing his new life and new nature in Christ which is like Abram whose belief and trust in God "was credited to him as righteousness", Genesis 15:6.

• **For further study**, read Romans 5:17; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:21, 3:21.

10-11 **I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

"I want to know Christ" — not knowledge, but relationally, including His sufferings and "becoming like Him in His death", 2 Cor. 4:7-12, 12:9-10.

**SUMMARY** Paul explains how he set aside as worthless who he was in the flesh — his 'seven marks of a good Jew' were more like a liability in the kingdom of God. The less of ourselves we proudly carry, the more we rely on Jesus and the righteousness that comes from our believing relationship with Him. And Paul would go further — Christ gave His life and reputation for us, and to share in that suffering would honour Him.

**APPLICATION** If we imagine anything has qualified us for Christ's kingdom, we are misled — yet the institutional kind of Christianity has its titles and formalities, its orders of seniority, and its sense of self-protection. The danger is that we lose our passion for simply knowing Jesus and "being found in Him" because we have got caught up in other forms of affirmation. The world and the flesh tempt us to put our focus in the wrong place. Paul looks to heaven and eternity, even if the journey will take him through some painful places.

**QUESTION** *How much thought do we give to really discerning what God is doing? Do our activities produce the kingdom kind of fruit, and how do we tell?*

**PRAYER** O Lord our God, we have all been guilty of treating what is Yours as our own domain. We have been too busy creating our little empires, to grasp the greater vision of Your kingdom. Forgive us for making You too small, and raising ourselves up to more stature than we possess. Show us how to be heavenly minded, and honest stewards of what is Yours — keeping our focus on Your rule, reign and eternal purposes, under the lordship of Jesus. Amen.

• **For further study** on believers already spiritually sharing in Christ's death and resurrection: Rom. 6:2-13; Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14; Eph. 2:6; Col.2:12-13; 3:1.

12-13 **Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do [is] forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead.**

"Already arrived at my goal" — not sinless perfection but mission accomplished. Paul's whole argument from v.4 is that it cannot be achieved by any efforts on our part.

# The Living Word

Bible readings for Sunday, October 4, 2020, with explanatory notes

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Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **October 4**  
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand — read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: **Getting the focus on God's kingdom**

Isaiah 5:1-7 — The song of the vineyard that the Lord prepared

Matthew 21:33-46 — This vineyard is occupied by the tenants from hell

Philippians 3:4-13 — Paul is a model Jew, not that it counts for anything

And also read: Psalm 80:7-16

## Isaiah 5:1-7 — The song of the vineyard that the Lord prepared

*The nation 'planted' in a fertile place failed to produce the right kind of fruit*

**1 I will sing for the one I love a song about His vineyard: "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.**

"A vineyard" — Israel is described as a vineyard in Isaiah 3:14 and Psalm 80:7-16. Isaiah's hearers would relate to this — it was the most common livelihood in Judah. Jesus' parable of the tenants, Matthew 21:33-46 below, reflects this passage.

• **For further study**, see Matthew 21:33-44, also Mark 12:1-11 and Luke 20:9-18.

**2 "He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.**

"Dug it...cleared it... planted it... looked for a crop" — this describes the three years of work to create a vineyard out of rocky terrain.

**3-4 "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done for My vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?**

"What more could have been done" — like creating a vineyard, God had provided everything

**SUMMARY** Isaiah's 'song of the vineyard' is a well-known OT passage, partly because Jesus picked up the parable as a background to His own story about the vineyard and tenants. It was a very familiar picture to first-century hearers, especially in and around Judea where vineyard work was a common occupation.

for His people to be a blessing to the wider world — as He promised Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3.

**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. 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."**

"Destroyed...trampled...wasteland" — imagery that anticipates foreign invasion and then anarchy in the land, Isaiah 3:4-5.

"Command the clouds not to rain" — a curse on the land. The blessings of obeying the covenant included seasonal rain, and drought was a curse from ignoring it, Deuteronomy 28:12, 23-24.

**7 The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines He delighted in. And He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.**

"The vineyard... is the nation of Israel" — the riddle of the preceding verses is resolved.

"He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed" — a wordplay in this poem: *mispakh*, oppression or bloodshed sounds like *mishpat*, justice. Our poetic rendering might be "He sought justice, but found injustice; looked for equity but beheld iniquity."

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The story relates the process of clearing the rocky terrain to find soil, planting vines and hewing out a winepress, building a watchtower for protection and shelter, and tending the young vines towards their first harvest in the third year. If the grapes were inedible like wild vine fruit, the owner would be distraught, after all that hard work – but to abandon it, would be an extreme act of desperation.

**APPLICATION** Here it becomes clear that the message reaches to the nation of Israel. The language of destruction and being trampled, points to God withdrawing His protection of them from the surrounding hostile nations. The curse of destruction is reinforced by the curse on the land of withholding seasonal rain.

This is like an old-world sepia picture that speaks afresh today. The focus is now on the worldwide church, although not entirely replacing the Jewish nation, which remains part of God's plan. Whether it's about church or our individual lives, what we have, we hold in trust for God. He expects us to use our lives and our possessions well, producing the fruit of His kingdom – not creating our own empires.

**QUESTION** *What would look like 'good fruit' in our lives or in our church or chapel?*

### Matthew 21:33-46 – This vineyard is occupied by tenants from hell

*Jesus tells the story of the wicked occupants who assaulted the vineyard owner's agents*

33-34 **"Listen to another parable: there was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall round it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.**

"A watchtower" — to guard the vineyard, especially when the grapes began to ripen.

35-37 **"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them in the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.**

"The tenants" — the Jewish leaders. "The servants" — the OT prophets, generally badly treated by the leaders; many were killed.

38-39 **"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.**

"The son... and... his inheritance" — Christ and

His kingdom. The tenants want to keep control. The religious leaders condemned Jesus to death.

40 **"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"**

41 **"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."**

"A wretched end" — the Jewish religious leaders unwittingly pronounce their own condemnation.

"Other tenants" — obedient followers who increasingly were Gentiles. By the second century, the church was predominantly Gentile.

42 **Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"**

"The stone... the cornerstone" — Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23, part of the prophetic refrain chanted by the crowd as He entered Jerusalem just before giving this teaching.

43-44 **"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."**

"Taken away from you" — any vineyard owner would evict wicked tenants, and so God will replace the Jewish leaders with faithful followers.

"A people who will produce its fruit" — *ethnos*, like the "disciples of all nations" e.g. Gentiles in Matthew 28:19, genuine disciples of Jesus, who themselves will make more disciples of Jesus.

"Falls on this stone" — stubs their foot on the cornerstone, v.22, or is crushed by the capstone; the word can mean either.

**SUMMARY** Jesus draws on the picture of the unfruitful vineyard that Isaiah saw, but the focus here is the wickedness and violence of the tenants to whom the vineyard was let. They had assumed ownership of what was not theirs, and refused to give the landlord's servants access and a proper share, beating them and even committing murder – with their violence resulting in the death of the owner's son and heir. So, the story continues, the vineyard will be confiscated from the wicked tenants and let again to tenants of a quite different kind, who will produce the good fruit the owner expects.

**APPLICATION** The immediate application for Jesus' hearers was the harsh and misguided attitude of the religious hierarchy, who assumed wrongly that the kingdom of God was to do with their religious system, which they controlled. Take that into the 21st century, and where is the kingdom of God growing? If any of the established and historic churches see themselves as representing God's kingdom, while excluding ministry which does not fit their particular pattern, such as evangelism or community engagement, youth ministry or church planting, the wrong tenants are again trying to control the vineyard.

**QUESTION** *Where in the world do we see the kingdom of God, God's rule and reign, growing and extending?*

### Philippians 3:4-13 – Paul is a model Jew, not that it counts for anything

*His goal is the close relationship with Jesus which even shares His pain*

4-6 **If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.**

"Confidence in the flesh" — seven 'qualifications' using these to demonstrate that relationship with God cannot be earned or achieved.

"Hebrew of Hebrews" — both parents Jews, a model of Jewish education and upbringing.

**7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.**

**45-46 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew He was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that He was a prophet.**

"Talking about them" — Matthew elsewhere brings out the theme of God's judgment on the "children of hell" and "blind guides" who had so misled the Jewish people, Matthew 23:13-16.

"Gains... I now consider loss" — Paul uses financial language; what might appear to some to be on the 'profit' side of the balance sheet should actually be entered as liabilities on the 'cost' side. The word for "loss" means damaged or of no further use, v.8 and Acts 27:10, 21.

8-9 **What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.**

"Righteousness... from God on the basis of faith" — Paul, the well-educated Jew is making a contrast with his "faultless" "righteousness based