

What More Could God Do? Grace, Injustice, and the Gift of Jesus (Isaiah 5)

Isaiah: Trusting the God who Judges, Saves, and Renews

Zionsville Fellowship | October 4, 2026 | Drew Hunter

[Read Isaiah 5:1–7]

We've all poured everything we could into something, but it didn't work out as we expected.

For example, I learned this after buying an off-brand Lego set for my son. We followed the instructions. We put every piece where it was supposed to go. And it just kept falling apart. We did everything we could. It was never going to work no matter how hard we tried.

We weren't the problem; the off-brand Legos were. So we put it together as best as we could. Then we gently set it on the shelf. You can't even walk past it too quickly or the air displacement will make it fall apart.

This happens with more serious issues, too. Not just Legos, but people. You pour your time and energy and heart into someone—maybe your daughter, or your friend, or your brother. And no matter what you did. No matter how much you help you gave. Nothing works. Their life never straightens out. They make a mess of their relationships.

These kinds of situations teach us something about God's relationship with his people in Isaiah.

Isaiah begins with a love song about God and his people. There are different kinds of love songs. Some are about the longing of love, some about the enjoyment of love. Some about the betrayal or loss. That's what this song is.

This is the song of a vineyard owner and a vineyard. The owner gave his vineyard everything it needed, so he expected good grapes. But he found rotten fruit. This leads to the haunting question: "What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?"

That's the question we'll ask through the chapter: What more could God have done?

He gave them everything, so he expects good fruit. He gave them everything, but they produced rotten fruit. He gave them everything, so judgment remove everything he gave.

In the end, the question remains: What more could God have done for them, and what more could he have done for us? Isaiah 5 doesn't answer it. But the rest of the Bible does. God still gives something more—and it's more than we could have ever imagined.

We'll move through this in four parts: 1) The righteous fruit God expects, 2) the rotten fruit God finds, 3) the sobering judgment God brings, and 4) the true vine God provides.

1. The Righteous Fruit God Expects (v1–7)

First, the righteous fruit God expects. The first section—verses 1–7—begins as a love song.

Verse 1, “Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.” Who is the beloved, and what is his vineyard? Isaiah waits to tell us—but we already have an idea. The beloved one is God, and his vineyard is Israel.

And what did this beloved one do for his vineyard? Everything needed and more. Verse 2, “He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it.”

Vineyards were central to life in the ancient world. They produced the grapes that were used for wine, which was a staple of life. Drinking wine in moderation was a gift from God—wine itself was a symbol of joy. They were a prized fruit.

This vineyard owner started from scratch. He prepared the field by hand. He planted the best vines in it. He built a watchtower to look over it. And he prepared a wine vat to produce the joy-giving results. He was expecting the best grapes, to produce the best wine.

But what did he get? The rest of verse 2: “he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.” What are wild grapes? The Hebrew word Isaiah uses is almost always translated a stinky or foul-smelling. These are rotten, worthless, nasty grapes.

Have you ever had this happen when you bring home fruit from the store? You open the strawberries, and you’re expecting vibrant red, but you get a lot of fuzzy green and white.

That’s the end of the song. Now the vine owner speaks to the vineyard. God speaks to his people.

He asks the question at the heart of the chapter in verse 4: “What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” God gave them everything they needed, and yet they gave him rotten fruit.

This is the heartbreak of parenting sometimes. You pour your life into your child. You give them every advantage. You give them your time, your energy, your wealth, your wisdom, and your heart. And sometimes they seem to throw it all away.

So, what will God do?

Verses 5–6 tells them the judgment he will bring. The hedge will be removed, the wall broken down, the vineyard trampled. This may sound harsh, but it amounts to simply removing the blessings he gave. They are deprived of the gifts they abused. God removes his care, so enemies are allowed to attack and plunder them.

But why? Verse 7 gives the clearest statement of the problem. What were the rotten grapes he found? Here it is: “he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!” He looked for the good fruit of goodness and justice. But they produced the rotten fruit of bloodshed and an outcry from the oppressed.

The power of the poetry doesn’t always carry over from Hebrew to English. But this rhymed in Hebrew. Clint is a songwriter, so I asked him for help capturing this in English. Here’s what verse 7 would sound like to Israel: “God looked for justness, but behold, injustice.”

Israel’s rotten fruit was a culture of social injustice and oppression. Those terms are often misused today. Because of the influence of Critical Theory, people view everything through the lens of oppressor and oppressed. And they call certain things social justice that are not actually just. So we need to think clearly, and not go along with whatever people call injustice or oppression. But there is real social injustice and oppression, and God cares about it; and so should we.

Let’s return to that question God asks in verse 4: What more could God have done?

He gave them everything they needed. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He gave them his good and wise law to guide them in justice and love. He cared for them through the wilderness and brought them into the good land of Canaan. He protected them from invasions. But they squandered his grace. They rejected his love. They cultivated injustice.

Sin is worse when it’s against so much grace.

The puritans used to have a term for this that they often used. They called this *the aggravation of sin*. To aggravate something is to make it worse and more intense. *Sin is worse when it’s against so much grace*. The more kindness God shows us, the more aggravated sin becomes. John Calvin put it this way: “the greater the benefits which we have received from God, the more disgraceful will be our ingratitude if we abuse them.”ⁱ

Many parents have experienced this. It’s one thing for your child to sin, even multiple times in the same way. But what about when you’ve instructed them on it. You’ve coached them. You’ve set up protections. You’ve bailed them out of hard consequences. But then they still do it—and even lie to you about it. And then they do it again. Yes, you are aggravated. But it’s because the sin is aggravated.

One of the most arresting poems I’ve read is by George Herbert. It’s called *Sin*. Here it is:

Lord, with what care have you [enclosed] us around!
Parents first season us; then schoolmasters
Deliver us to laws; they send us bound
To rules of reason, holy messengers,

Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,
Afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes,
Fine nets and strategies to catch us in,
Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,
Blessings beforehand, ties of gratefulness,
The sound of glory ringing in our ears;
Outside, our shame; within, our consciences;
Angels and grace, eternal hopes and fears.
Yet all these fences and their whole array
One cunning bosom-sin blows quite away.ⁱⁱ

The term he uses at the end is “bosom-sin.” By that he means a sin we cherish. A well-loved sin. The point is: God has done so much for us. And yet one sin can blow all these gracious protections away. Have you done that? We all have.

Think about how kind God has been to you.

He gives you every breath you’ve taken. He keeps your heart beating. He has provided every meal, every good gift. He gave you the Bible to know him and to receive his wisdom. Maybe you have several copies of the Bible in your home. You have heard sermons for years. You have had someone in your life who gave you an example to follow. You have a conscience that guides you and warns you. You have friends who encouraged you.

And yet you’ve stilled sinned. *Sin is worse when it’s against so much grace.*

Why are we dwelling on this?

Because we don’t take sin seriously enough. And one of the purposes of the Bible is to help us see reality as God sees it—which is reality as it really is. We may say we see our sins, but we don’t see the *sinfulness* of sin.

In Romans 7 Paul said one of the reasons God gave the law was to help us see our sin. He gives us his good commands, and we still reject them. Paul said, “*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure*” (Rom. 7:13). We don’t just need to see our sin; we need to see the sinfulness of sin. And the offense it is when it is against so much grace.

Because he gave them everything, this is the righteous fruit he expects.

2. The Rotten Fruit God Finds (v8–23)

But what did he get? That’s explained in the second section—the rotten fruit God finds.

Verses 8–23 give us a closer look at Israel’s culture of injustice and oppression.

This section has six parts—each one of them begins with the word “woe.” Do you see that as you scan the section? Each one of them gives an example of Israel’s rotten fruit.

This whole section is strikingly contemporary.

Isaiah is addressing the individual, cultural, and national sins of Israel. And these map onto individual, cultural, and national sins today. Because while nations and culture rise and fall; human nature remains the same.

There are two dangers in hearing a list of cultural sins like this.

1. The first is finger-pointing. We only see these problems out there in the culture, and we don’t consider our own lives.
2. The second is a false humility that over-individualizes this. You only see how this applies to you—and you don’t realize that Isaiah is addressing a whole culture. We shouldn’t overlook the prevalent sins of our time.

So we listen to this with humility and honesty. Humility considers where we each need to repent. Honestly considers the reality of the problems of our culture.

So, here are the six examples of rotten fruit:

First, the greed that says, “I gain more at your expense.”

It’s the selfish pursuit of endless prosperity.

Verse 8 describes it: “Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.” People were grabbing more and more land, and building bigger and bigger houses. Buying land and building a big home is not itself wrong. But it *can* be wrong.

Here’s the background: God originally gave each family in Israel a particular plot of land. In Leviticus, God set up a plan for the land to always remain in the family’s possession. So, if someone fell into poverty, they could sell their home and land. But only for a while. Every 50 years was a year of jubilee when land was returned to original owners. This was intended to protect people from permanent poverty.

But now the wealthy were taking all the land and keeping it. They were squeezing the poor out. They gained more at the expense of the poor.

This is self-centered covetousness. It's the heart that needs more, wants bigger, and wants better. And you start deceiving, or cheating, or cutting corners to get what you want. Or you don't pay your employees well. Or you rip off your customers.

This is not a blanket statement condemning the rich. Many people use their wealth to start businesses, hire employees, create products and services that help people. This condemns those who are unjustly gaining at the expense of others.

Second, is the hedonism that says, "I pursue pleasure, and I don't need God."

Verses 11–17 sounds like today's college & 20s cultures and Hollywood culture. These people are always drinking and live for parties and entertainment.

Isaiah says, "Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands."

They are getting drunk all the time. Today this would include not just alcohol but other mind- and mood-altering substances. They are just living for entertainment and a good time. They aren't using their life to care about others; they are just living for the moment.

Third, sin addiction that says, "I love sin, and I dare God to do something about it."

Verse 8 describes "those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes." They are attached to sin. They pull it like a horse draws a wagon; like a truck pulls a trailer. Wherever they go, you see their sins coming along with them.

And it seems in verse 19 that they are mocking the idea that God would judge. They say, "let God come and do something about it."

Fourth, moral inversion that says "I make my own ethics."

Verse 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!" They claim to have moral standards—they are calling things right and wrong. But they are morally upside down.

How does this happen? When you reject God's objective standard, then you create your own. You judge things based on your own ethical aesthetic, your feeling, or what works. Or you go with the cultural consensus. Public morality becomes personal preference.

The West has been pervasively influenced by the Christian worldview. Many of God's objective standards became our cultural standards. It influenced our view of the dignity of human life, universal human rights, and a fair justice system.

But the West is now like the flowers you get at the store. They are cut off from their roots. So they look beautiful for a while, but then they start to wilt and die. Western civilization is no longer being nourished from the roots.

We are becoming a culture that says we value caring for the vulnerable. But abortion went from evil, to "safe, legal, and rare," to now a moral good. One famous actress said recently that abortion is a mercy. Others call it reproductive justice. But it's the greatest injustice of our time.

Our culture increasingly rejects the biblical and biological reality of male and female.

We've loosened our standards of civility, respect, and honest communication. People across the political spectrum are increasingly comfortable with slander, mockery, and deception.

And we all have this tendency within us—to decide for ourselves what feels right. And to reject or overlook what God's word actually says.

Fifth, conceit that says, "I make my own rules."

Verse 21, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!" This person doesn't take advice. When someone disagrees with them, they write them off or cut them off.

We all have this tendency deep within us. And when this is given free-reign in a culture, it leads to pride-fueled conflict and division.

Sixth—and last—is judicial injustice, which says, "I use my power to advance myself."

The issue in Israel was with those responsible for judicial decisions. Verse 22, "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink"—apparently these were the heroes in the culture. And Verse 23, "who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!"

Edgar Momoh has shared with me that this is exactly what happened in his home in Africa. A leader was notorious for his drinking, and it led to all sorts of corruption.

This also happens when judges or jurors become activists. They no longer judge according to justice. They misuse their power to favor the guilty. They favor the rich, or favor a certain ethnicity, or favor a certain political cause. We've seen it happen in our own nation.

Now, what is underneath all of these six issues?

It is the neglect and rejection of God. It is sinning against his grace.

Look back at verse 12: “but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands.” And verse 24, “for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

Israel had more grace than any other nation at the time. They saw his deeds and works, and they received his good and wise laws. And they rejected him and disregarded him.

Other nations have less grace—but they are still culpable for what they have.

Our own nation has received a lot of grace. We are not in a covenant with God like Israel was. But God has been kind to us in many ways: There are something like half a billion Bibles in America. There are churches saturating the nation. God has spread revival several times. Our government and judicial system was directly influenced by Jesus’s moral vision in the Bible—with principles of human dignity and justice.

This makes our personal sins and our cultural sins all-the-worse. Because sin is worse when it’s against so much grace.

Here's the lesson of this chapter: Injustice is what happens when we forget God.

3. The Sobering Judgment God Brings (v24–30)

And what is the result?

He will judge them by removing everything he gave. This is the third section—the sobering judgment God brings.

Because he gave them everything they need, he now removes everything he gave.

Verses 25–30 show God’s rightful anger and his judgment against them. Verse 26 says he’ll whistle for nations far away to come. That’s referring first to Assyria, and then Babylon. They’ll come in and destroy his people and take them into exile. And they did.

The judgment amounts to removing the care that he gave. They didn’t deserve it in the first place. No nation deserves his kindness. No one deserves continued breath or blessing.

And this judgment came for Israel; and it swept them away. And this is a little glimpse of the coming judgment against all of humanity in the end.

The chapter ends in a sobering picture of darkness: “And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds.” The light of grace is gone. The darkness of judgment settled over the land. This is how it should end for everyone.

We’re left to return to the haunting question from verse 4: *What more could God have done?*

He gave them everything, so he rightly expected fruit. He gave them everything, but they produced rotten fruit. He gave them everything, and so his judgment will come.

What more could he have done?

4. The True Vine God Provides (Psalm 80; John 15:1–12)

Now, at this point, there are two responses to that question.

1. One response is prideful and self-deluded. It says, “this isn’t fair. It’s not their fault. It’s not my fault. Give me a break.” No. We’ve seen not only sin, but the sinfulness of sin. It’s aggravated because it’s against so much knowledge and mercy.
2. The other response is self-oriented: I guess we better just try not to be like them. We better not take God for granted. We better see our sin and repent. We better do better.

But here’s the problem. Israel didn’t do that. They couldn’t do that. They didn’t have the moral capacity. Their sin was too deep. And so is ours.

The biblical doctrine of sin teaches us that we cannot simply decide to repent on our own. Sin gains momentum in our souls, and we can’t turn around on our own.

Which means—after God has already done everything... we need him to do more.

And he does.

God’s grace is so great that there *is* more that he could do. There is *one more* thing.

He gave them everything, and he gave us everything—and it’s not enough because of our entrenched sin and inability to even repent on our own.

So he gives something more. And it’s the one thing that can transform us and even transform cultures.

He gives us himself.

Here's what I mean.

There is a bigger story of a vine through the Bible. We see this story develop by connecting Isaiah 5 with two more texts that come later.

The first is Psalm 80. Israel is under God's judgment, and the psalmist asks God for the one more thing he can do.

God planted Israel in the land like a vine—and it spread out over the land.

Psalm 80:8 You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

9 You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.

10 The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.

11 It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.

But then God judged them and destroyed the vine:

12 Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

13 The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.

God gave them everything. But they ask for God to do more:

14 Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine.

And how does God respond?

He becomes the vine, in Jesus. In order to create a new a fruitful vine.

Jesus came to us. And in John 15 he said, "I am the true vine." Jesus came not to destroy us, but to live the fruitful life we failed to live. He came to *be* the true vine.

Then he took upon himself the destruction we all deserve for our rotten fruit. When God gave us his grace, he expected justice, but he heard an outcry. On the cross, he heard another outcry—but it was Jesus, suffering under our judgment.

And then he rose again to united us to himself—as branches in his vine. And through union with Jesus, we then become fruit-bearing branches. Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4–5).

So, the haunting question of Isaiah becomes the life-giving question in John 15.

What more could God have done? What more could God give? He gives us himself.

This is the only way to not only avoid the judgment to come; but to bear good fruit. It is to be united to Jesus as branches in a vine.

This is the doctrine of union with Christ—we are united to Jesus by faith—and the life of Jesus, by the Spirit, flows through us and transforms us.

The Bible not only teaches us *the sinfulness of sin*. It shows us *the graciousness of grace*. The *loveliness of God's love*. The *mercifulness of his mercy*. The *over-the-top-ness of his kindness*.

And this is not only how we are changed individually, but how we are changed as a community.

The church is the restored vine in Christ. Jesus is now bearing fruit in the world through you, if you are united to him. The church is to be the one place on earth where true justice is found. Where the oppressed are cared for. Where God's grace finds a return.

The church is not a building or programs or a schedule of events. It is a vine. And it is a vine united to Jesus, relying on Jesus, drawing life from Jesus. And it bears fruit in the world.

So, the question this morning has been: What more could God give?

And we have an answer. He gives us Jesus.

This is why 2 Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence."

We now *do* have everything we need to bear fruit. Because we have Jesus, and we are united to him through faith. We have new hearts, and the Holy Spirit within us.

So, a three final implications.

First, make sure you are united to Jesus.

Are you a branch in the vine? How can you tell? You can tell because you are trusting in him as the true vine—who was destroyed for you, and who rose to give you new life. And you are seeing the fruit produced in your life.

If you are not united to him, you can be. Today. He joins you to himself through faith. Repent of the sinfulness of your sin, and be united to him by faith.

Second, embrace the purpose of your life as bearing fruit for his glory.

We make all sorts of excuses for our sin, but God has given us everything we need. He has given you life, breath, friends, the Bible, books, sermons—and a new heart with the Holy Spirit to empower you to grow.

There are no excuses anymore. Embrace this as your purpose. Abide in Jesus, which means remain in him. Know him. Draw strength from him and his promises.

And remember from this text that the fruit is culture-influencing. It is relational and public fruit. It produces justice in society. It is about bearing fruit in your vocation.

Third, extend and grow the vine.

The vine spreads as we share the gospel with others and see them united to Jesus. The vine is intended to grow all over the earth. We need it to grow here in our community and nation, and also among the unreached peoples of the world. This is why we share the gospel with friends. This is why we raise up pastors to cultivate the vine to help it grow fruit. This is why we send missionaries to take the gospel of union with Christ to the nations.

What more could he have done for us? Nothing. He gave us himself.

So now we ask: What more can we do for him? We give him ourselves.

ⁱ John Calvin, Commentary on Isaiah, 165.

ⁱⁱ George Herbert, *Sin (1)*