



RESTORING... God's Vineyard

Day 1—"Prone to Wander, Lord, I Feel It"

In the 1700s Robert Robinson wrote lyrics which speak of God's rich blessings and our aptness to wander from God's love and grace. Read our theme texts, Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46, then ponder Robinson's lyrics: "Come, thou Fount of ev'ry blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace; Streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise. ..O, to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be! Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter, bind my wand'ring heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart; Lord, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above." In humility and with gratitude, offer the Lord your heart.

Day 2—The Problem Is Not with the Owner of the Vineyard!

Do we serve God with full devotion and grateful hearts, or do we expect God to serve us and cater to our desires? Prayerfully, read Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46. Pay close attention to word pictures of the landowner's (God's) deep love and tender care for his vineyard (people). Did you notice the protection the landowner provides? Ponder the reference to the vineyard as God's "pleasant planting" (*NRSV*) or "garden of his delight" (*NIV*). Have you ever been betrayed by someone you cherished and into whom you had poured your heart? Imagine the Lord's grief at being spurned by those he loves. Spend time telling the Lord you love him.

Day 3—Truth for God's People of All Generations

We cannot trifle with God! God is God! Read Deuteronomy 6:1 -15; 7:6-11; 8:11-19. Did you notice God's heart of love and God's desire to bless? Did you also hear the warnings? God is love! But God is also holy, and God deserves our worship, love, and obedience. God's words in Deuteronomy were spoken to God's people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land; centuries later, prophets were still bringing God's messages to God's people. Read Isaiah 5:1-7 and notice the similarities to God's message in Deuteronomy. How is Jesus' message in Matthew 21 similar to the earlier passages? Pray for the Spirit's insight about what these messages say to us today.

Day 4—Tender Love and Tough Love

Ponder the depth of our holy God's love for us and patience toward us, as you read John 3:16; Romans 2:4; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Peter 3:8-9; and 1 John 4:9-10. Do you struggle with the judgment aspects of our Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46 texts, or do you accept that, sometimes, we so strain against the cords of grace and love with which God binds us to himself that God allows us to break free and suffer for it? How might the judgment pictured in our theme texts lead, ultimately, to restoration? Use Robinson's lyrics (Day 1) to again form your prayer.

Day 5—Learning from the History of God's People

Isaiah prophesied to people distracted from whole-hearted devotion to God and captivated by sins including idolatry, materialism, greed, complacency, and injustice. For generations, God sent prophets to warn the people that, if they did not repent, judgment would come through history (foreign invaders, exile). Jeremiah wrote Lamentations after the judgment had happened. Listen to the messages of judgment and hope as you read Lamentations 1:4-5, 18; 2:5-6a; 3:19-26. Now read Matthew 21:33-46 (note: the servants are the prophets); Romans 15:4; and 2 Peter 1:19-21. Are we, God's people today, heeding these lessons from Scripture? Pray it is so.

Day 6—Just What Is 'Fruit'?

Read Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46 again. Isaiah speaks about bad fruit or wild grapes. The Matthew parable pictures tenants who disrespect/disregard the landowner (God) and exhibit a sense of entitlement; they attempt to usurp the landowner's right to that which is his. The parable is an attempt to awaken the Jews (especially the religious leaders) to God's love and grace, made manifest in the Son/heir, Jesus. And once awakened, all are called to bear fruit. But what is the good fruit or harvest that the vineyard (God's people) should be producing for the master? Read John 15:1-12; Galatians 5:22-23; and James 3:17-18. Ask the Spirit to bear fruit in and through you.

Day 7—Repentance and Restoration

Ponder again the messages of Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46. God's people face judgment because they are not honoring God as God and bearing fruit for God's glory. They have become self-focused and have missed their servant mission/call. Have we as individuals and churches also failed to remember our identity—who we are and whose we are (*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*)? Are there consequences (*John 15:1-12 and Revelation 2:4-5*)? What does Scripture say about restoration (*2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 51:1-12; 1 John 1:5-9*)? Pray what is on your heart.