

# The Lord Saves (Isaiah 5:1-7)

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*10:00am Holy Communion – 17<sup>th</sup> August 2025*

## **Luke 12:49-56**

‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

father against son

and son against father,

mother against daughter

and daughter against mother,

mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law

and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.’

He also said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?’

## **Isaiah 5:1-7**

Let me sing for my beloved - my love-song concerning his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines;  
he built a watch-tower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in  
it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,  
judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in  
it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed,

and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,

and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;

he expected justice but saw bloodshed;

righteousness but heard a cry!

<Prayer>

It's a bit of a history lesson this morning, and a broad sweep of the  
Old Testament times of Isaiah – one of the greatest of the prophets.  
There is quite a lot to cover, so let's get straight into it.

The book of Isaiah is very long – 66 chapters in all, with its time of  
history being 740BC to 681BC – 59 years in all, or so scholars have  
calculated.

The dark historical backdrop to many Isaiah's prophecies is the war-like approach of the nation of Assyria, the first great regional superpower. At that time, the Kingdom of Assyria expanded across much of the Middle East by conquest. The holy lands of God's people were in the sights of the Assyrian King – one Tiglath Pileser III. **The dire threat of conquest overshadowed everyone and that would have brought with it not only a fear of swords and chariots, but also the brooding presence of the Assyrian Gods.**

Although these years are so very long ago, the Old Testament tell us much about the affairs of God and his people from those days. The four historical books of the Kings and the Chronicles show a succession of Kings, with stories of their good trust in God, or **their evil conviction in mere human power and the detestable pagan God's of the surrounding nations.**

At the time Isaiah the prophet was writing, God's people where living as two Kingdoms – the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Neither was very large nor powerful – about 450,000 people in all (about the same as Brighton). After the time of King Solomon, the people split into two groups, and their best years of power and strength were behind them. Yet they shared the common memory of their ancestor Abraham, they were all still living under the same covenant promises of God.

All the while, just over the horizon, was the brooding presence of the Assyrian army.

What must it be like to live under a constant threat?

Park that thought for a moment, and let's look at the passage we have today from Isaiah 5:1-7. It's a picture of God's people as a fruitful vineyard:

Let me sing for my beloved - my love-song concerning his vineyard:  
he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield only wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.  
I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;  
I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;  
he expected justice but saw bloodshed; righteousness but heard a cry!

What a sad outcome in God's Promised Land and for his people – the fruit of his gift and care. Many times God's word will speak through Isaiah in terms of faithfulness and unfaithfulness – blessings and consequences. **What had gone wrong?**

As we have heard, the Assyrians were menacing the northern Kingdom of Israel, so the northern tribes under King Hoshea appealed for military help to their blood relatives - the southern tribes, led by King Ahaz. **But what seems to have happened is that King Ahaz saw no military or political advantage in uniting with Israel against the Assyrians.** By the limits of human strength they would surely be overrun by the much stronger Assyrians.

**Most telling is that little regard was given to the power of God to protect his people.**

All through this time was the bless'ed memory of old King David, over 200 years before. David, whilst being a man of many weaknesses yet was strong in faith, **with the apparent resulting favour of God in all he did.** Also, in the old-old story of how they were all captive in Egypt, itself a great superpower, yet by God's faithful prophet Moses they were saved because they *cried out* to God from the impossible situation in which they found themselves. **Another impossible human situation was now faced the kings of Israel and Judah, and an opportunity to call on God in faith, rather than upon human power and fragile human promises.**

What then did King Ahaz of Judah do? He *sided with the Assyrians* against the northern kingdom, resulting in the conquest of the north as a deal for the Assyrians to leave southern Judah alone.

**Breathtaking unfaithfulness to God and betrayal of their own people.** Now just imagine how God's people felt about that, and how the name God Almighty was now held. It was a decision they would come to regret, the vineyard was now fruitless and desolate. So that is the awful situation into which Isaiah spoke.

*It seems so easy to identify ourselves with regards to others. We seem to split so easily at the moment, for any reason at all.*

Eventually, justice would come the conquest of Judah by another later superpower - Babylon, with the exile of all God's people until their eventual return 70 years later, **and all this is to be understood in terms faithfulness to God. The whole of the Book of Isaiah describes these things, and it's lessons are no different for us now.**

The name Isaiah literally means '*The Lord Saves*', which is nice, but it's a name which carries **the heavy implication that: 'only the Lord saves, not man.'** Isaiah is the great prophet for speaking to a whole nation. Isaiah here is not speaking to personal everyday belief, like help for today and bright hope for tomorrow. This relationship between God and people is not a daily reward-based system in exchange for faithfulness, like good tokens for troubled times. Isaiah is speaking to the people about the very basis for their existence, their very-first definition of being God's people. The whole nation was laden with its own divisions, and worst of all they had divided themselves from their unifying Father – the Holy One of Israel. God was replaced with nothing, or the false God's of their neighbours. The sickness affected every tribe, clan and family – fathers and mothers. **So, their children learnt only the same; to deal corruptly; it's a downward spiral.**

There was the pretence of religious ceremony, but Isaiah tells of God's unacceptance of mere recital:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord;  
I have had enough of burnt-offerings. I do not delight in the blood of  
bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you stretch out your hands, I  
will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I  
will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

All this results in destruction – a self-inflicted justice. Their empty religious rituals were a performance only – like more confession for more sin, but with no underlying change. **When things go badly God gets blamed for the disasters the people made for themselves, and then they appeal to him for deliverance!**

**Yet the God of hope always offers a way out**, because of his unsatiable love and forgiveness. The grace of God is the love we do not deserve.

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

Much of Isaiah tells of this better way, that can arise if only the people together come to God in true change of heart and life – it can be a national renewal. **God is a life we live in faith at all times, he is our existence, that is when such faithfulness will be our comfort and our strength.**

It would be easy to say at this point that faith and unfaithfulness are just consequential choices with predictable outcomes, but we know that life is not like that. I've often warned you of the utility God we sometimes like to reach for – God as a handy painkiller on the shelf, reserved for when we need to cry out in pain. But God is a life lived in faith, by his grace and love, giving us a definition that cannot be attacked by the superpowers of life that menace from the borders of our minds.

So, Isaiah presents this threat and its outcomes in national terms. We may feel the same, and for nations and people who place force over faith.

A few questions for you to mull over this week (sermon online).

I wonder, if you were to write a book of what you consider the UK to be today, what would you summarise in the short prologue of your main themes?

What is the biggest threat we face? Is it found in ourselves, or have we embodied it as *‘those others’*?

Do we have any sense of sacrifice in these times, or do we all expect to win? Is personal identity and personal freedom now the only God, and where is that going to lead us as a nation?

Amen