

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 5:1-7

The Vineyard of the Lord Destroyed

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 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; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 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? 5 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. 6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

5:1–30 The prophet breaks out in a song to the one he loves, who is no one else than the Lord of hosts. It is one of the most beautiful and rich images in Isaiah’s prophecy, but its beauty and richness cannot be duplicated in translation. This song and the thoughts connected to it are a kind of musical coda bringing this section of the prophecy to a conclusion (PBC)

I HAVE said that this passage concerning the pavilion and the shade should be commended to us since in these figures Christ is symbolized and set forth as our Mediator and Preserver. Then I said also that the prophets offer words of comfort after threats, the latter for the sake of the ungodly, the former for the sake of the godly, fainthearted, and troubled. Now, the promises and consolations concerning Christ are repeated so often for this reason, that the flesh cannot believe that anyone is justified by another person’s righteousness. (Luther)

5:1–7 This skillful parable was likely proclaimed at the Feast of Booths (Lv 23:34–43; Dt 16:13–15), when Israel celebrated God’s blessings of the harvest. It begins in the style of a joyful love song, filled with harvest imagery, but soon turns into an indictment (v 3). Parables of this type are designed to get listeners to pass judgment upon themselves. The narrator elicits his listeners’ outrage at a hypothetical injustice. Their response is then applied to a real situation involving the audience. Only then do they realize that the story is about them (cf Mt 21:33–46). (TLSB)

5:1 *let me sing* – It is a characteristic of the ungodly that no matter how much Scripture is set before them they do not fear God, they are not frightened by His threats nor stirred by His promises. And what is worse, the ungodly, that is, the self-righteous, insist that the promises apply to them, but the threats to the heretics, that is, the truly godly. Thus that word of the psalm is altogether true: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” And even when they experience some suffering in their body, there still is no fear but boasting that they are being punished for righteousness’ sake, not for the sake of their sins. Therefore when the prophet saw that neither threats helped them nor promises stirred them, he said: “Well then, we shall sing; maybe they will take my song to heart.” (Luther)

loved one. God. (CSB)

It was the Lord who inspired the prophet to sing this song. The prophet read the song right out of God’s mind. (Stoekhardt)

vineyard. Israel (see v. 7; 3:14; Ps 80:8–16). Jesus’ parable of the tenants (Mt 21:33–44; Mk 12:1–11; Lk 20:9–18) is probably based on this song. See Jn 15:1–17. (CSB)

Israel, whom the Lord “planted” in the Promised Land (Ex 15:17; Ps 80:8–18; Jer 2:21; Mk 12:1–9). (TLSB)

God had made Israel His people, had separated it from other peoples. God then had also purged this planning and driven out the heathen. Ps. 44:2. Israel’s land and inheritance, Canaan, was a fertile headland. Because of its rocky heights and mountain strongholds it was a secure, well-protected country and a very fertile land flowing with milk and honey. (Stoekhardt)

fertile hillside – Vineyards were usually located on hills and mountains where they could obtain a lot of sunshine. Every mountain peak had fertile soil. It was the nature of mountain soil to be fertile and productive. (Stoekhardt)

Lit, “on a horn, a son of oil.” This phrase, used only here in the OT, describes a geological formation that is superabundant in fertility. The vineyard is positioned for maximum productivity. (TLSB)

They call an elevated and protected place a “horn.” Horn is understood to mean the power and kingdom and dominion of the Jews, which under divine protection was sound and strong enough to crush all nations, a land commanding and victorious, a hill towering over all other realms. This hill is also a “son of oil.” This is an expression like son of one year, that is, one year old. The hill is given this name because it is rich with oil. A son of perdition, or son of death, is one who has damnation and death; a son of oil, one who has oil and is rich with oil; a son of the right hand, that is, of what your right hand is or has. In Hebrew, a son of oil is one who is described, as to origin or makeup, rather than merely referred to by demonstrative pronoun; thus a son of death, namely, he who belongs to death. A hill of oil is one that has olive oil, that is, one that is fertile. It is as if he were saying: “God gave this land complete fertility, wealth, fatness, etc., but He gave them for a good use and for His own glory.” (Luther)

5:2 *dug it up and cleared it of stones* – He grubbed out the rocks, he cleaned it up. All this is said allegorically. In this clause he wants to say: He took good care of the vineyard. Some interpret the fence to refer to the protection of the angels, which is not unacceptable to me. However, it is more satisfactory to construe the fence as being the Law, which Paul explains thus in Eph. 2:14: He has destroyed the wall of hatred through the Law, so that without the Law we might grow together into one body. By the Law the Jews were isolated from all other nations, and this, I say, was their prerogative, that from the Law they were informed regarding the will of God. (Luther)

Tilled the ground. This may have been done by hand instead of with an animal-drawn plow because vineyards were sometimes planted on steep hills. (TLSB)

choice vines. Cultivated vines known to produce excellent fruit. The varieties are unknown. (TLSB)

watchtower. Contrast the more modest “shelter” of 1:8. God’s vineyard had every advantage (see Mt 21:33). (CSB)

To protect the vineyard from animals or thieves. (TLSB)

A watchtower is centrally located to enable the watchman to guard against theft at the time when the grapes ripen – a piece of standard equipment for a good vineyard. (Leupold)

The tower, Israel's defense system, is the royal citadel in Jerusalem, the government of David and the house of David. (Stoeckhardt)

Some refer it to the temple. But I would prefer to interpret it of the entire worship that was held either in the temple or in the tabernacle or wherever they came together to the Word of God. This is the tower, that the name of the Lord was there, the promises, the mercy seat, the Word of God. Solomon also has this in mind: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower" (Prov. 18:10). This was the place of refuge for the Jews, because God dwelt there. Concerning this we read in Deuteronomy (12:5): "You shall seek the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there." (Luther)

wine vat. A trough into which the grape juice flowed (see 16:10). (CSB)

Anticipating a good harvest, the owner hollowed out a rock that would serve as a winepress. Aphrahat: "*I surrounded it with a fence of heavenly Watchers and I built its tower, the holy Temple. And I dug out its winepress, the baptism of the priests. And I brought down rain upon it, the words of My Prophets. And I pruned it and trimmed it, from the works of the Amorites*" (NPNF 2 13:360). (TLSB)

The wine-vat is hewed out in advance in anticipation of the harvest, this vat being strictly speaking, the lower container cut in solid rock into which the juice after it had been trodden out in the upper and larger container flowed through a small opening. (Leupold)

The winepress is the temple. There flows the delicious wine of the Word of God. (Stoeckhardt)

If you want to refer this to the altar of burnt offerings, I have no objection. But I myself think it refers to the mortification of the old man, of whom Rom. 12 speaks. Here also our body becomes an altar of burnt offerings, on which we bring the sacrifice of a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). *Tower* is for the sake of the use of faith, *winepress* for the sake of the use of mortification. (Luther)

he looked for ... but. The interpretation (v. 7) uses the same expression. (CSB)

Inferior fruit that does not reflect the effort of the beloved. (TLSB)

It produced sour grapes. The term used is a bit stronger: "stinking grapes." (Leupold)

The grapes are wild, of sour taste. "Are grapes gathered from thorns?" asks Christ (Matt. 7:16). Therefore the grapes represent works, good grapes are good works, bad ones are evil works, the kind the Jews did, who killed not only the prophets but also Christ, and were adulterers, robbers, etc. This song reproves the Jews, who were well built up from the beginning and yet did not produce good fruits. So we turn Christ's best bounties to bad use, while one preaches Christ for his own glory, another for his belly, another to gain many followers, as Paul says (Phil. 3:19). Such acts are not grapes but wild grapes. (Luther)

In Matthew 21:43 Christ refers the parable of the vineyard to the kingdom of God which was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. Thus with the words of this song we have a right to portray the Christian Church. What is stated here of the Lord's vineyard applies in a marked degree to the New Testament church. Christ's church is a planting of the Lord. The Lord Himself has prepared His church, sanctified and separated it from the world. The church has been planted upon a fertile mountain citadel. It is firmly established upon Christ, the everlasting Rock. It is endowed with all manner of blessing. Christ, its Lord and King, is its guardian. Here in the church of Christ flows the delicious wine of the Gospel. The Lord has given His church leaders, apostles, evangelists, teachers, and pastors. And there the Lord has a right to expect good fruit. (Stoeckhardt)

5:3 *now* – God Himself takes up the conversation. The parable of the vineyard, the lament of the Beloved, had applies to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the men of Judah. They themselves now should be arbiters in this problem the Lord is having with His vineyard. They should themselves pronounce sentence. They must, if they want to deal justly, agree with God’s judgment. (Stoekhardt)

The Lord begins to speak. The hearers are asked to pass judgment on the fate of the vineyard that yielded sour fruit. (TLSB)

5:4 *what more was there to do* – The inhabitants of Judah-Jerusalem must admit that the Lord has shown them every possible grace, goodness, and faithfulness, that He has, as it were, exhausted His love on them. (Stoekhardt)

why did it yield wild grapes – The inhabitants of Judah-Jerusalem must, if they wish to follow the voice of conscience, confess that they alone are at fault, that they disappointed the hopes of their God, had repaid His rich goodness with ingratitude. That is always the case when God remonstrates with sinners, with the rebellious. Sinners must, if they are honest, acknowledge that God has been good to them, that He has meant it well with them, that He has left no stone unturned, that they are the ones at fault, that they have despised God’s goodness and repaid God’s goodness with evil. (Stoekhardt)

5:5 *My vineyard*. Common description of God’s relationship to His people. (TLSB)

I will remove its hedge...break down its wall – Vineyards were often encircled by thorn-hedges, which then were surrounded by a low stone wall. After the removal of this double defense system the vineyard will become a pasture and be trampled underfoot. Animals will graze on it and eventually tread it underfoot. See Psalm 80:13. The meaning is given in Psalm 80:6. God will withdraw His protection from the sinful people. And the result will be that the heathen will invade the Lord’s inheritance and plunder Israel and ultimately trample it completely and ruin it. The fulfillment of this prophecy began already during the days of Isaiah. Assyria, the world empire, invaded Judah. Then followed Babylon, the Greek. Finally came the Romans to take away land and people. Yes, God will complete the ruin of His people. (Stoekhardt)

hedge ... wall. Protective barriers around the vineyard. *trampled*. Lacking a wall, the vineyard becomes an open field to be grazed by animals or damaged by people. (TLSB)

5:6 *not be pruned or hoed* – *To prune* is to rebuke, convict, and condemn the unbelieving and to revive faith, namely, to trim off what is unneeded and useless. *To hoe* is to plow the land so that it may receive the seed and the rain and not be hindered in bearing fruit either by stones or by the native hardness of the earth. This, then, is the preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins, namely, through the Law and the Gospel. The heretics, Turks, and many nations teach many things, but they do not clear the ground and do not plow, but they trample the ground and burn it up. They appear to be cultivating the land, but in reality they are laying it waste. (Luther)

briers and thorns. This pair occurs five more times (7:23–25; 9:18; 27:4). (CSB)

Cultivated land, once neglected, grows the worst kinds of weeds. (TLSB)

Where the Law is not truly preached, unrecognized sins cannot be reprovved. Because of the force of the Law, sins are of necessity disregarded, and whatever is thorns and hides sins is of necessity overlooked; thus the cure cannot be applied, and grace cannot be preached. If one preaches man’s own merits, when will he preach repentance and grace? What is not evil does not need the Gospel and therefore neither the

revealing of sin nor the revealing of the cure. Therefore the thorns are certain excellent men and such as reason calls saints, yet they are without the Spirit and faith, they know neither works nor the goal of faith, and they vex wretched souls. Thereafter they will be deprived not only of prophets and priests of their own nation but also of apostles and their successors, who are the clouds sailing around the world. Paul says, “Behold, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). The wholesome rain is the Gospel. The matter is self-explanatory. (Luther)

The result will be that thorns and thistles will thrive. No longer is fruit able to develop. (Stoekhardt)

not rain upon it. The withholding of rain constituted a curse on the land. See Dt 28:23–24; 2Sa 1:21; 1Ki 17:1. (CSB)

God withholds rain, a sign of judgment. Cf 1Ki 17–18. (TLSB)

Then God denies rain, commands the clouds to send no more rain upon the vineyard. (Stoekhardt)

God will have nothing more to do with the sinful people that has frustrated all His former work of love. He will withhold rain and blessing. He will let the wicked people to its own devices. And thus the unrighteousness will take over completely. Thus will wickedness ripen to maturity. Thus will it ripen to wrath and judgment. This pictures the further development of Israel’s history to the final catastrophe which occurred in the year 70 A.D. (Stoekhardt)

Thus God heals with sinners, with the rebellious, with those who have scorned all of God’s goodness, patience, and long-suffering and have absolutely refused to repent and bring forth fruits of repentance. He withdraws His hand from them. He discontinues His work in them. He withdraws His protection, His blessing, Spirit, and grace from them. He gives them over to their obdurate mind. And so they pile sin upon sin and heap up for themselves wrath unto the day of wrath and the revelation of God’s righteous judgment. Cf. Romans 2:3-4. (Stoekhardt)

5:7 *Israel ... Judah.* Though Isaiah’s audience is the Southern Kingdom, these words apply to all of God’s people. (TLSB)

The song of the vineyard (vv. 1–6) is now interpreted. A powerful play on words makes the point: The words for “justice” and “bloodshed” (*mishpat* and *mišpaḥ*) sound alike, as do those for “righteousness” (*šedaqah*) and “distress” (*še‘aqah*). (CSB)

The Lord had embraced this people as a mother her son. Therefore he calls it a branch and pleasant planting, attractive and delightful. This is justice, that the Law takes its course, that the innocent are not mistreated and the criminals do not escape punishment. “Gold and silver make the straightest things crooked.” “Power, partiality, and money prevent just verdicts.” Righteousness is what imparts benefits and renders good to the deserving. (Luther)

behold an outcry – Instead of justice and righteousness we find there confiscation. The higher-ups among the people are robbing and plundering. And the cry of the distressed rises up to heaven. (Stoekhardt)

Pleas for help. Israel is not hearing the cry of the oppressed. (TLSB)

5:1–7 The Lord describes Israel’s unfaithfulness and unfruitfulness. Consider what care and instruction the Lord has permitted for your life. Does the fruit of your service match the generosity of His nurture? Purge the wild fruit! Through the Spirit’s work, the Lord brings forth in our lives fruit worthy of

repentance (Gal 5:22–23). • Though the world goes wild, O Lord, make me a garden in which You delight, secure in Your righteousness. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Philippians 3:4b-14

Righteousness Through Faith in Christ

4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

3:4–14 Paul’s personal testimony, a model for every believer; one of the most significant autobiographical sections in his letters (see Gal 1:13–24; 1Ti 1:12–16; cf. Ac 22:1–21; 26:1–23). (CSB)

3:4–6 Paul’s pre-Christian confidence, rooted in his Jewish pedigree, privileges and attainments.

3:4 *confidence* – Paul is speaking of his physical and cultural heritage as an Israelite. (TLSB)

Paul says that outwardly as a Jew he will stand favorable comparison with any other Jew, and even come out on top. (Stoeckhardt)

3:5 *eighth day*. See Ge 17:12. (CSB)

Such infant circumcision points to God’s inclusion of His people in the covenant promise even at a tender age. It also anticipated when circumcision would end and Baptism would become the sign of the new covenant (Col 2:11–12). God finished the work of the original creation on the sixth day, and on the seventh He rested. The eighth day represented a new beginning. Christ finished the work of the new creation by redeeming us with His blood on the sixth day, Good Friday. On the Sabbath, He rested in the tomb. On Easter Sunday, Christ arose, starting the new creation on what may be referred to as the “eighth day.” (TLSB – Note from Gen. 17:12)

of the people of Israel. Paul was born a Jew and was not a proselyte. (CSB)

Very probably these Judaistic false teachers had originally been Jewish proselytes, with whom the Apostle contrasts himself as a native Jew. That is why he also stresses his circumcision on the eighth day. (Stoeckhardt)

tribe of Benjamin. His Jewish roots are deep and unambiguous. Jerusalem, the Holy City, lay on the border of the tribal territory of Benjamin. (CSB)

Hebrew of Hebrews. In language, attitudes and life-style (see Ac 22:2–3; Gal 1:14). (CSB)

There are only Hebrews in Paul's known ancestry. He was fiercely loyal to his race as a Hebrew. (TLSB)

Pharisee. See Ac 22:3; 23:6; 26:5. (CSB)

A most earnest sect of Judaism. (TLSB)

3:6 *as to zeal* – There could be no doubt that Paul had been perfectly sincere, absolutely conscientious as a keeper of the Law, that he had a clean record before the Jews, though he had acted in moral blindness. (Kretzmann)

persecutor of the church – Because Paul had been convinced that Jesus Christ intended to undermine Jewish law, he persecuted the followers of Jesus and the apostles and tried to destroy them (Ac 9:1-2). (TLSB)

righteousness under the law. Righteousness produced by using the law as an attempt to merit God's approval and blessing (cf. v. 9)—a use of the law strongly opposed by Paul as contrary to the gospel itself (see Ro 3:27–28; 4:1–5; Gal 2:16; 3:10–12). (CSB)

blameless. In terms of legalistic standards of scrupulous external conformity to the law. (CSB)

The Pharisees developed their own system of laws based on the Law of Moses. Paul claimed to keep these laws perfectly (Jesus denounced the; Mt 23:23) (TLSB)

A Jew by birth, and a Pharisee by choice, he had particularly obligated himself to keep the Law. In this he was animated with such zeal that he persecuted the Church, the Christians. So he could lay claim to righteousness, though this was all only of an outward nature. Yet as far as it went, he was without blame. All this he can truthfully say of his past. Yet now he can see and say that all this was no ground for boasting, rather he considers it a tremendous loss. Therefore now he turns from playful irony to a solemn seriousness. Therefore he now describes what he possesses as a Christian and what he has found in Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

3:7–14 Paul's confidence in Christ. (CSB)

3:7 *but* – “Alla” indicates that he was not in earnest when he boasted about his past. His supposed gain was in reality a great loss. He came to see that all his righteousness had no value in the sight of God whatsoever. (Stoeckhardt)

whatever. The things mentioned in vv. 5–6. (CSB)

gain ... loss. The great reversal in Paul—begun on the road to Damascus (see Ac 9:3–16)—from being self-centered to being centered in Christ. (CSB)

The Greek word is *zemia* which means damage or disadvantage. Paul realized that confidence in his heritage and works actually interfered with knowing God. The Formula of Concord says, “If anyone wants to drag good works into the article of Justification, rest his righteousness or trust for salvation on them, and merit God's grace and be saved by them, St Paul himself answers, not us. He says and repeats it three times (Phil 3:7-8) – such a person's works are not only useless and a hindrance, but are also harmful. This is not the fault of the good works themselves, but of the false confidence placed in the works, contrary to God's clear Word FC SD IV 37). (TLSB)

3:8 *count* – ageomai – To weigh the options thoughtfully. Paul no longer considers his past training and positions of any value. (QV)

surpassing worth – hperechon – He saw the complete divine grace and splendor of Christ. (QV)

knowing Christ Jesus. Not only a knowledge of facts but a knowledge gained through experience that, in its surpassing greatness, transforms the entire person. The following verses spell this out. (CSB)

Simply knowing Jesus exceeded all else. (TLSB)

all – The emphasis is on “all.” Not only what the Apostle has just mentioned, but also other fine things on which the world prides itself, he deems worthless trash. (Stoeckhardt)

rubbish. What Paul now has as a Christian is not merely preferable or a better alternative; in contrast, his former way of life was worthless and despicable. (CSB)

Human waste or dung (TLSB)

gain Christ – Clinging only to Christ, one enjoys all the benefits of Christ. (TLSB)

3:9 *be found in him*. Union with Christ —not simply an experience in the past, but a present, continuing relationship. (CSB)

In contrast to what we gain by our own labor or effort. (TLSB)

righteousness ... from the law. The righteousness gained by one’s keeping of the Law fails and ceases. And to come to realize that is a gain. (Stoeckhardt)

righteousness ... by faith. A principal benefit of union with Christ (see Ro 3:21–22; 1Co 1:30; Gal 2:16). (CSB)

Same Greek root as “justify.” The Formula of Concord states, “The word “justify” here means to declare righteous and free from sins and to absolve a person from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ’s righteousness, which is credited by God to faith (FC SD III 17). (TLSB)

The righteousness gained through faith in Christ, rather, is the only true righteousness. This righteousness is “from God.” It is recognized as righteousness by God. As one believes in Jesus Christ as one’s Savior and Lord, so one has part in His redemption, and so one appropriates His merits, and receives a perfect righteousness, which is approved of God. (Stoeckhardt)

3:10-11 Paul is talking about living a real life of faith rooted in the death and resurrection wrought for us in Baptism. See note, Rm 6:4. Luth: “Everywhere he teaches about the slaying of the old man and the renewing of the inner man” (AE 29:225). (TLSB)

3:10 *know him*.† As in v. 8, this knowledge is not merely factual; it includes the experience of the power of his resurrection (see Eph 1:17–20), of fellowship in his sufferings (cf. Ac 9:16) and of being like him in his death (see 2Co 4:7–12; 12:9–10). Believers already share in Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. Ro 6:2–13; Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12–13; 3:1). In v. 10, however, Paul speaks of the actual experience of Christ’s resurrection power and of suffering with and for him, even to the point of death. (CSB)

power of his resurrection – Christ’s resurrection makes our faith and resurrection possible. God has given you an eternal, living soul and will raise your body from the dead. (TLSB)

share his sufferings – He who believes in Christ also enters into “the fellowship of His sufferings.” He who believes must also suffer with Christ. Yet also that is gain. (Stoeckhardt)

The greatest of all honors: to share in the suffering that is required to accomplish tasks of the most fundamental and eternal importance. (TLSB)

like him in his death – A Christian, as the name is meant to indicate, will follow the pattern of Jesus, laying down his or her life for others. (TLSB)

3:11 *by any means*. Not an indication of doubt or uncertainty, but of intense concern and involvement. (CSB)

resurrection. The great personal anticipation of every believer (see Da 12:2; Jn 5:29; Ac 24:15; 1Co 15:23; 1Th 4:16). (CSB)

To be included with those who are raised to life everlasting in a perfected state (1Jn 3:1–3). (TLSB)

The resurrection of the dead is the hope of every Christian. Whoever believes has now already that new life. And in and with Christ he passes through suffering and death on to the resurrection of the dead, which means for him the beginning of eternal life. (Stoeckhardt)

3:1–11 Paul reflects on his heritage and contrasts its value with the blessing of knowing Jesus, who sets us free to invest our lives in the lives of others. Only the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has the power to truly set us free to experience life to the fullest. • Dear Lord Jesus, by Your grace You set me free to live in Your righteousness and in Your image. Loosen my grip on earthly advantage, and take my hand in Yours. Amen. (TLSB)

Straining Toward the Goal

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3:12 -21 By his own example the Apostle would incite Christians to strive for holiness, that heavenly jewel, and warns against certain ways which lead to destruction. (Stoeckhardt)

3:12–14 The Christian life is like a race; elsewhere Paul uses athletic imagery in a similar way (1Co 9:24–27; 1Ti 6:12; 2Ti 4:7–8; cf. Mt 24:13; Heb 12:1). (CSB)

3:12 *already obtained* – Just before the Apostle spoke of the resurrection, including its end and aim: eternal life. That is very obviously the object of “obtain.” When one comes to faith he is immediately and completely justified, and so eternal life becomes his own. (Stoeckhardt)

When believers are brought to faith, they become possessors of eternal life. As long as they are in the world, they are like people who hold title to property in a distant land. The title makes the property theirs, but the owners are not yet physically in possession of what rightfully belongs to them. Similarly believers, though they are possessors of eternal life by faith and have the righteousness of Christ, are still

also sinners living in a sinful world. They have not yet arrived at the full, physical possession of the perfection of eternal life. So, perhaps in response to the boastful claims of the Judaizers or others who taught that believers by their works could achieve perfection already here on earth, Paul in this section vividly describes the Christian life as a constant straining forward toward the great goal and prize of eternal life that God's grace holds out to believers in Christ. (PBC)

I have already obtained. Paul's goal is Christ's goal for him, and Christ supplies the resources for him to "press on toward the goal" (v. 14; cf. 2:12–13). (CSB)

Same Gk term. Christ "obtained" Paul so that Paul might also obtain the life of Christ as his own (v 10). (TLSB)

made perfect – It can also mean complete, having realized the purpose for which he was created. (TLSB)

press on – dioko – To hasten towards the goal. (QV)

When Paul wrote these verses, he had been a Christian for many years. During those years he had grown in knowledge of Christ and in conformity to Christ. He had become a revered apostle and had experienced the fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings. Most recently he had suffered the loss of his personal freedom for the sake of Christ, but that did not mean that he had "arrived" spiritually or reached the goal of perfection. Paul was still living in a sinful world. He was still a sinner, still troubled by the weaknesses and failings of his sinful nature. Though he was a child of God by faith, he had not yet arrived at the point where he could perfectly and uninterruptedly serve God or enjoy the fullness of the blessings God had in store for him. That would have to wait until he entered heaven. Meanwhile he lived his life as a Christian in a constant striving for holiness. He pressed on toward perfection. (PBC)

What Paul says of his own life here is an important key to viewing our own. As long as we are here on earth, we sinners will not reach perfection. That will come only in heaven's glory. Nevertheless, our Christian lives of growing in Christ and living for him ought to be a constant striving for perfection, with the goal and prize of eternal life kept ever before our eyes of faith. (PBC)

to make my own – Refers to the life that shares in Christ's suffering and resurrection. (TLSB)

3:13-14 We strain against our own sinful nature and against the world and the devil, even while our soul is at peace under God's promises and grace. (TLSB)

3:13 *do not consider* – He has but one goal to strive for and only one direction to turn to, as he "presses on." (Stoekhardt)

Forgetting. Not losing all memory of his sinful past (see vv. 4–6), but leaving it behind him as done with and settled. (CSB)

Looking back while running ahead is a dangerous procedure for the athlete in a race. It can only result in a loss of speed and direction. (tug of war and straight rope) It can only result in a loss of speed and direction. In the race of his Christian life the apostle did not look back either. He did not look back with pride on past accomplishments which he knew could not earn him anything in God's sight. Nor did he look back in regretful brooding over past sins which had been washed away by Jesus' blood. With each new day he put forth every effort to press ahead, to grow in his Christian living and service to Christ. The long distance runner strains and stretches every muscle, expanding even more energy, if at all possible, as he draws closer to the finish line. Similarly, Paul was expanding all the energy he possessed as a

Christian, straining with all his spiritual might as he drew ever closer to the goal and the prize of eternal life. (PBC)

Luke 9:62, “Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

What the Apostle does forget is the old, sinful way of life, which dominated him up till the point of his conversion. This old way of life he must forget in such a way that he denies the way of his sinful flesh daily and continually. One must press forward, goal-ward, looking toward the distant mark. (Stoeckhardt)

straining – It means “giving it his utmost.” TEV (Good News for Modern Man) reads: “I do my best to reach etc.” Like the Olympic runner who gives it his all. Some think that Paul is forgetting the items mentioned in vs. 4-7. Others think that it is more than this, like Romans 7:14-24. It is both. A Christian forgets all his sins and imperfections because Christ has forgiven them. He looks ahead only. A runner who constantly looks back is in danger of losing the race. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

The Greek and Roman worlds of the apostle’s day shared our American fascination for sports. Archaeologists have unearthed ancient stadia as well equipped as many of our own. Paul uses the picture of the determined runner/athlete here in these verses to illustrate the intense yearning and striving for spiritual perfection that should characterize all believers as they “run the race” of their Christian lives. Success in athletic competition depends not only on ability and conditioning, but also on an athlete’s mental state. Concentration is the key. Overconfidence, lack of mental alertness or “mental toughness” can cost an athlete dearly. (GBP – 15-1 & qb comment – Few champions repeat) (PBC)

Spiritual dullness, overconfidence and lack of concentration can likewise cost Christians. Recall how Paul urged the Philippians in chapter 2:12 never to stop working at their salvation. The apostle is saying basically the same thing here in a slightly different way. The Christian who does not concentrate on living the kind of life to which God calls him may, like the overconfident athlete, be eliminated from the race and in the end lose the blessings God has in store for him. A believer’s sanctification, that is, his life as a Christian in this world, will be perfect. The struggle against sin and the devil must be carried on as long as the Christian is in this world. Neither Paul nor any other Christian can ever afford a lack of concentration of think that the race is as good as run and won. (PBC)

3:14 *I press on* – The prize of victory is everlasting life. It is described as the prize “of the calling of God in Christ Jesus from above.” Already when Christians were called this prize was set before them. This calling is described as being from above. It comes from above, from God, and it calls upward. The prize, this wreath of victory, lies there all ready and complete, won by Christ for all Christians. (Stoeckhardt)

Jesus said that those who believed in Him were begotten from above (Jn 1:12–13). Paul commands us to set our minds on things above (Col 3:1). God draws us through His Word toward the way of life that He intends for us, a life with purpose and meaning that endures. (TLSB)

prize. The winner of the Greek races received a wreath of leaves and sometimes a cash award; the Christian receives an award of everlasting glory. (CSB)

The prize is awarded the winner at the games. The point of comparison is the strenuous effort both for the athlete and for the Christian. At Romans 8:37 Paul said: “we are more than conquerors.” In athletics only one person or one team wins. In Christianity all win. By the way, the root word for “prize” is derived, means “umpire.” In Christianity all win. [Special Olympics – leader went back and helped

someone who had fallen] God has already judged in Paul's favor. That is a wonderful thought. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

upward. Paul's ultimate aspirations are found not in this life but in heaven, because Christ is there (see Col 3:1–2). (CSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 21:33-46

The Parable of the Tenants

33 “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” 42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. 44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. 46 And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Jesus begins by describing a vineyard that is totally equipped, a place in which workers would enjoy working. God's old covenant kingdom was likewise very well endowed. However, the workers entrusted to produce fruit refuse to acknowledge their responsibility to God, their proprietor. They mishandle the servants (prophets) sent to collect the rightful portion owed the owner. Finally, to cap it off, they kill the s(S)on of the owner. Jesus heightens the dramatic tension at this point in the story by turning to his audience and asking, “What would you do to tenants who acted that way?” Their twofold answer is: “Punish the perpetrators and rent the vineyard to truly productive workers!” When that second idea is mentioned, namely to open the Kingdom to Gentiles, the hearers in the parallel account (Lk 20:16) explode with emotion: “May this never be!” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

This is the second of three parables spoken by Jesus shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (cf. last week's Gospel, 21:23–27 [28–32]; and next week's, 22:1–14). All three parables are spoken, in succession, after the chief priests and elders of the people had questioned Jesus' authority (21:23). By this late point in Jesus' ministry, the division between him and the leaders of the Jewish people is sharply drawn. Our Lord's imminent death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (“When . . . the owner of the vineyard comes,” v 40) are important for understanding Jesus' words to the Jewish leaders. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:33–41 Parable in vv 28–32 was quite critical of Jesus' accusers. He continues with a parable that is even more devastating, borrowing imagery the prophets repeatedly used to depict Israel's relationship to God (e.g., Is 5:1–5). (TLSB)

21:33 *listen to another parable*. In this context of hostile confrontation, Jesus' brief introduction has the force of a plea at the least and more likely a warning. The command to "hear" Jesus' teaching occurs repeatedly in Matthew, and it seems always to carry some urgency, mostly because Jesus' teaching (as so often) contradicts normal assumptions or expectations about the reign of God. (CC)

master of the house – The landowner who leases out his land symbolizes God. (TLSB)

vineyard. What follows are the TLSB notes from Isaiah 5:1-5 – "**5:1** *beloved*. God. *vineyard*. Israel, whom the Lord "planted" in the Promised Land (Ex 15:17; Ps 80:8-18; Jer 2:21; Mk 12:1-9). *fertile hill*. Lit, "on a horn, a son of oil." This phrase, used only here in the OT, describes a geological formation that is superabundant in fertility. The vineyard is positioned for maximum productivity. **5:2** *dug it*. Tilled the ground. This may have been done by hand instead of with an animal-drawn plow because vineyards were sometimes planted on steep hills. *choice vines*. Cultivated vines known to produce excellent fruit. The varieties are unknown. *watchtower*. To protect the vineyard from animals or thieves. See note, 21:6-12. *wine vat*. Anticipating a good harvest, the owner hollowed out a rock that would serve as a winepress. Aph: "*I surrounded it with a fence of heavenly Watchers and I built its tower, the holy Temple. And I dug out its winepress, the baptism of the priests. And I brought down rain upon it, the words of My Prophets. And I pruned it and trimmed it, from the works of the Amorites*" (NPNF 2 13:360). *wild grapes*. Inferior fruit that does not reflect the effort of the beloved. **5:3** The Lord begins to speak. The hearers are asked to pass judgment on the fate of the vineyard that yielded sour fruit. **5:4** *wild grapes?* See note, v 2. **5:5** *My vineyard*. Common description of God's relationship to His people (see note, v 1). *hedge ... wall*. Protective barriers around the vineyard. *trampled*. Lacking a wall, the vineyard becomes an open field to be grazed by animals or damaged by people.

"Vineyard . . . dug . . . winepress . . . tower." The details are unmistakably drawn from Is 5:1-2. Besides being one of three parables in a row, this is also one of three vineyard parables in the Gospel of Matthew (20:1-16; 21:28-32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

put a fence around it – The hedges is the Law with its precepts which surrounded Israel and separated between the Jew and the Gentile. (Ylvisaker)

winepress – This is the temple with its ritualism and the sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. (Ylvisaker)

watchtower. For guarding the vineyard, especially when the grapes ripened, and for shelter. The rabbis specified that it was to be a raised wooden platform, 15 feet high and 6 feet square. (CSB)

This is variously explained as the civic order and, more properly as the prophecy in Israel. Therefore the prophets are frequently called "watchmen" (Mic 7:4; Is 52:8; 62:6). (Ylvisaker)

tenants. Sharecroppers who represent the unbelieving religious leaders opposing Jesus. (TLSB)

Craig Evans has argued that we should perhaps envision the tenant farmers as relatively well-to-do and prominent figures rather than simple peasants who somehow rebel against the vineyard's owner. (CC)

21:34 *his servants* - A reference to the Old Testament prophets. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

If the groups of slaves in the parable represent the OT prophets, then the parable severely telescopes many centuries of biblical history. In doing so, it makes the current religious leaders responsible for the abuse and death of the OT prophets. (CC)

his fruit – This was the previously agreed upon portion of the harvest for payment. (TLSB)

The fruits which the Householder expects and which He has a right to count upon are the fruits meet for repentance, holiness, and righteousness. The servants who came to receive the fruits are the prophets from Moses to John the Baptist. (Ylvisaker)

21:35–37 The tenants are the Jews, or their leaders. The servants represent the OT prophets, many of whom were killed. The son represents Christ, who was condemned to death by the religious leaders.

21:35 *killed...stoned* – The servant killed by stoning represents the OT prophets. Stoning was the punishment for a variety of religious infractions in ancient Israel, including defiling holy space (Ex 19:13), idolatry (Lv 20:2), practicing satanic arts (Lv 20:27), and blasphemy (Lv 24:14-16, 23). This underlines that the rebellious tenants and their master held different religious beliefs and practices. (TLSB)

Note the progressively harsher treatment of the servants. Death by stoning was an even more shameful way to be killed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:36 *other servants* – God sent many prophets to wayward Israel. Many of them were rejected and many were treated violently. (TLSB)

Again, a progression from the first group of servants, now to more servants, then finally to the son of the vineyard owner. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:37 *my son* – This was an emissary par excellence. As God’s own Son, Jesus deserves the highest respect. (TLSB)

Likely the son brought and could exercise legal authority that the first servants could not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:38 *have his inheritance* – According to Jewish law, the tenants stood a good chance of inheriting the land when the owner died, if there was no heir. (TLSB)

21:39 *out of the vineyard* – Jesus was similarly put to death outside of the wall of Jerusalem, as was the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Ac 7:54-60) (TLSB)

So, too, Jesus was killed “outside the gate” (Heb 13:12–13). (See also Lev 24:14, 23; Num 15:36; Deut 17:5.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:41 *wretches to a miserable death* – Jesus’ rhetorical question about the fate of the wicked tenants forces His opponents to pronounce their own sentence. The harsh punishment perfectly fits such wicked crime. Even at that, forgiveness is repeatedly offered to those who condemned Jesus (Ac 3:17-26; 5:29-32). (TLSB)

By this statement the Jewish leaders condemned themselves, just as King David did with his reaction to the parable spoken by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 12:5–6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

other tenants. Gentiles, to whom Paul turned when the Jews, for the most part, rejected the gospel (Ac 13:46; 18:6). By the second century the church was composed almost entirely of Gentiles. (CSB)

21:42 *cornerstone* – This is the second time the messianic Ps 118 is quoted in this section of Mt (cf 21:9). Jesus was rejected by official Israel, is exalted by God, who builds His Church on Jesus. (TLSB)

Jesus then quotes Psalm 118, showing that those who trash God’s Anointed One will themselves be trashed. Jesus is the one to whom all people are ultimately accountable. Finally, Jesus concludes the story by saying straight out: “I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will bear its fruit.” Paul lived out the directional shift in missions on his first missionary journey, as he addressed the Jews: “Since you reject [the Word of God] and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

21:43 *taken away* – Jewish rejection will hasten the Gentile’s inclusion in the Kingdom. They are the new people who will produce fruit. (TLSB)

people - Not just Gentiles in general and all-inclusive (since this is a singular form of the noun), but rather the Church, which is comprised of Gentiles as well as Jews. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

ethnei: The rare singular form of the noun (cf. only Mt 24:7) supports the interpretation that the kingdom of God will be given, not *generally* to the Gentiles, but to a more defined, unified, and singular group, e.g., the Church. A. J. Saldarini (*Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 58–63) observes that *ethnos* often refers to a voluntary organization or small social group (cited in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary Series [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004], p. 186, note 71). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

producing its fruits – This means remaining in Jesus and obeying His commands (Jn 15:1-9). (TLSB)

21:44 *will be broken to pieces.* (As a pot dashed against a stone is broken, and as one lying beneath a falling stone is crushed, so those who reject Jesus the Messiah will be doomed (see Isa 8:14; cf. Da 2:34–35, 44; Lk 2:34). (CSB)

Jesus warns that anyone rejecting Him will face being broken and crushed by the weight of that most grievous sin. (TLSB)

Because they are rejecting him, they will be rejected and will fall short of the blessings that Jesus longs to give to them and to everyone. They will fall in unbelief upon this stone and will be crushed. This stone will fall upon them, and they will be scattered. (CC)

Some manuscripts omit this verse. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:45 *they perceived* – Jesus’ hearers understood perfectly well how and where they were represented in this parable. (TLSB)

This, along with v 23 (“the chief priests and the elders of the people”), indicates who the audience is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The two main subjects of the pericope are the master of the vineyard (i.e., the Lord) and the vineyard tenants (i.e., the chief priests and the Pharisees, vv 23, 45). The text speaks of what the Lord *has* done (established a vineyard, supplied it well, sent servants and his Son to receive its fruit) and what he *will* do (return to his vineyard, take the vineyard away from its wicked tenants and put them to death, let out the vineyard to other tenants). The parable also speaks, implicitly, of what the unbelieving leaders of the Jewish people have done and will suffer as a result of what they have done. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

However, this pericope is certainly not *only* about the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day. The application to us today is that we have been placed in the same tenant shoes as the Jewish leaders originally were. Rather than repeat their mistake, we should be warned by their error so that the kingdom is not taken from us also. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

In other words, with respect to the tenants, there is a two-sided interpretation—first, the fact of what *actually* happened to the *Jewish leaders*, and second, the continuing warning of what *could* happen to *us* if we prove unfaithful tenants. With respect to the Lord, however, there is no double interpretation. He remains “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). Both his loving acts and his just expectations remain for us today. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

In short, the Law is this: the Lord demands that the tenants of his vineyard (i.e., his kingdom) render the fruit of his vineyard. The fruit of the vineyard is repentance and faith, along with perfect love toward God and neighbor, which faith produces. The Lord also demands that those in his kingdom receive his Son and also other messengers, whom the Lord sends in his name. Just as God did with the Jewish leaders who rejected him, so will he put to a miserable death and take his kingdom away from all who reject him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The Gospel is that by his sheer grace, the Lord has established a vineyard (i.e., his kingdom) and wonderfully supplied it with gifts that will enable an abundant harvest. Though the tenants of God's vineyard/kingdom rebel against him, in love God sends his own Son to restore his vineyard and its tenants. And though the tenants reject and kill the master's own Son, the Lord raises up his Son and makes him the chief cornerstone. By God's grace, the Lord has placed *us* in his vineyard/kingdom today. And he continues to send his Son to us and to our listeners through the ministry of his Holy Christian Church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:46 Jesus was indeed a prophet, but also much more. Thus this parable (vv 33–46), as well as the following one (22:1–14), identifies Him as God's Son. (TLSB)

21:33–46 Jesus warns His opponents that rejecting Him will ultimately lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom. Judgment is based on one's reaction to Jesus. Those rejecting Him are excluded from God's kingdom and are consigned to the only other option: an eternity apart from God in hell. In His great wisdom and mercy, God used the murder of His Son to work salvation, and He used the rejection of Israel's leaders to hasten the extension of the Kingdom to Gentiles. • Heavenly Father, keep us united by faith to Christ, our source of life, lest we ever turn away, reject Him, and so lose our hope of salvation. Amen. (TLSB)