

## **Warning to a Nation in Crisis, Part 1**

Isaiah 5

90-162

I want you to open your Bible to the 5th chapter of Isaiah. As you know, in the times that I've been with you through the summer months, we have looked at some of the great portions of Scripture. Lastly, at the 17th chapter of John's Gospel. And, as I said earlier, we're gonna be looking again in the future at the 8th chapter of Romans, a monumental portion of Scripture. And for today, both this morning and this evening, I wanna draw you to Isaiah chapter 5 and chapter 6.

Someone has well said, "If men have learned anything from history, it is that men never learn anything from history." And so history inexorably repeats itself. The cynicism of the preacher in Ecclesiastes is justified. He said, "There is nothing new under the sun. History...he was saying...is an endless cycle of repetition." And he saw it that way and said, "That which has been is now, and that which is to be has already been." Men and nations basically follow the same inexorable cycles. They go in paths from glory to destruction. Their beginnings are bright and hopeful and filled with promise, and they fall into sin and spiral into degradation and end in destruction. In fact, that reality can be seen metaphorically in the life of a baby, and really in the life of a baby. Every baby born is a living illustration of the inevitable course of men and nations, beginning in the loveliness of infancy and innocence. It then moves into the sinfulness of adulthood and spirals in iniquity down to death and judgment in hell.

And certainly our own nation is on that very path. America is caught in the doomsday cycle: a dying nation in a dying world. A dying nation populated by dying people. And I suppose, in our case, we could say that it all began with a kind of primitive beauty. People came here seeking freedom to express their love to Christ in a community of brotherhood. The Bible was held high as the source of all truth, and the divine authority for life, both privately and publicly. God was the center of activity. Worship was a way of living, and churches were the hub of every community...

Great preachers, wonderful schools for teaching Scripture, all had a central focus, and it was on the revealed standard, the norm, the absolute for living, the Word of God. But that was the time of America's infancy. And as maturity came, the drift to a degraded adulthood was evident. Yes, God had His voices, Edwards, Whitfield, Moody, and others. But evil has prevailed, and we face the inevitable judgment of God upon our degraded condition. What has happened? And why is this cycle inevitable? And what is to be done about it?

I think the answer to that question comes most notably in this portion of Scripture, Isaiah 5 and 6. I want us to look back in history to see if we can't break the cycle, at least, and, for a moment, learn some things that can help us understand where we are and make a contribution to changing it. And to go back in history might be a very challenging thing if we were just to go back into general secular history, because we might not be dealing with reality. We might only be dealing with somebody's spin on reality, or some revisionist approach to history. History is systematically, little by little, being

redefined in terms that accommodate the goals and agendas of modern historians, and it may not be too long before we can't find reality anymore.

So if we're gonna go back in history to learn from history, we're gonna go...have to go back to where history is absolutely exact in its accuracy, and we find out on the pages of holy Scripture inspired by God. So let's go there. Let's learn from the past as recorded in the Scripture.

After all, 1 Corinthians 10 says that what is written in the Old Testament was written for us, as examples to us, so that we might learn the profound lessons of history. Not just history, but history as authored by God Himself, who has it down right. Biblical history, then, gives us the truest picture. It gives us the divine perspective. Biblical history provides for us a series of accurate billboards, standing in our path and informing us about the present and the inevitable future.

One of those great billboards is Isaiah 5 and 6. It is a clear insight. It is a model of deadly sins that destroy a nation. It is readily applicable to America. And it is a model of how a godly man reacted to a nation in crisis and put himself, though in the midst of the throes of death, in a place of usefulness to God.

So we want to understand our times in the light of Biblical history, and we on...we wanna understand our responsibility in those times. The drama begins to unfold in chapter 5 with a parable in the first seven verses. The parable of the Lord. Let me read the first six to you. "Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard...Here's the song...My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill, and He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and hewed out a wine vat in it; the He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only booashim."...in Hebrew, referring to sour, inedible berries. That's the song.

In response to the song, the prophet says, "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done it in? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. And I will lay it waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."

And we'll stop there. Here is a song. But a sad song. In fact, it's a exquisite elegy. It is a funeral song. It is a dirge. It is a plaintiff, wailing, weeping song. It is a song about my beloved and His vineyard. It is a tragic song about a...an investment that was made in a vineyard that was intended to produce good grapes and produced only worthless, sour berries. And then the tragic judgment that was pronounced upon that vineyard and executed concludes the song.

In the days of Isaiah, as well as throughout most of the history of the land of Israel, the hillsides, the stony hills, I might add, of Judah have been the place of the planting of vineyards. Typically, the stones are taken out of the ground and piled into walls that frame off the vineyards, marking off both property lines, as well as becoming barriers of protection to the precious grapes growing inside the walls. The hillsides are terraced all across Israel, and that's no easy task, because the hillsides are very often steep and rocky. Anybody in Israel would understand the tragedy of this song, because they understand the immense investment of labor and money that is put into producing such a

vineyard, and to have these kinds of results would be a great tragedy, an immense one among those who are used to agrarian life. They were familiar with the beautiful vineyards which produced very luscious grapes frequently in the land of Israel. They knew how much toil, how much care had gone into making the vineyards productive. How hard the husbandmen and those in his family and others might have worked and how great was his hope for a rich reward. And how immense was his investment.

Every Judean could understand the frustration, then, and the pain and the heartache and the disappointment to find out that what was produced was inedible, and the whole thing was a loss and worthy only of complete destruction. That's the song. And it's parabolic. And the meaning is made clear in verse 7 where the parable is explained. "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant or delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress."

God wanted Israel to produce justice and righteousness, and they produced bloodshed and distress. That's a play on words, by the way, in Hebrew. He looked for mishpoth, but behold, mispock. He looked for cedekah, but behold, ce'ekah. This is the story of Israel. This is the story, both of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. Both of Israel as the north was known, and Judah as the south was known. This is the sad story of God planting a vineyard. It even is likely an inter-Trinitarian song, where the Father and the Son are mutually expressing this. "Let Me sing now for My well-beloved a song of My beloved." May be the Son. The Son writing and singing a eulogy for the Father's tragedy.

In the 80th Psalm, Israel is likened to a vine...owned, protected, cared for by the Lord of hosts. Brought out of Egypt, planted in Canaan, cherished and nurtured by the Lord's constant goodness. The vine took root in the land of Canaan and filled the land. Psalm 80 depicts Israel as a vine extending, do that the mountains are covered with its shadow. Its boughs are like massive cedars stretching out in every direction. It sends its branches westward to the great Mediterranean Sea, and its shoots eastward toward the Euphrates...

This is Israel...and God expected that, after such immense commitment to this people and such great preparation, they would produce justice and righteousness. But they did not. There were no good grapes, even though an immense effort had been made. Go back with me for a moment to verse 1. When God established Israel, it says He had a...a vineyard...the end of the verse, "On a fertile hill." The land of Canaan was so fertile, it was known as the land of milk and honey. The Jordan Valley is one of the most fertile valleys in the world, always has been. Very much in its topography like the San Joaquin Valley that runs up through the state of California. The coastal valley, the Sharon Valley was also a wonderfully productive area, still is. The mountains were eminently useful for groves of trees, olive trees, as well as vineyards. This is a marvelously rich land.

God put them on a fertile hill, and He dug it all around. One of the things that was necessary in building a vineyard was to protect it. And very often they would protect it with a moat...so that animals couldn't come in and destroy it. And that's what happened when God planted His people in Israel. What was the moat? What was the hedge as He later refers to it? What was the wall of protection? It was all of the strange social laws. All of those strange dietary laws. All of those strange cooking codes that they had to follow. Those matter of how they made their garments and what fabrics could be mixed. There were so many strictures put upon them that really don't have any theological definition and aren't particularly symbolic of some deeper mystery, but merely were to so

isolate them that they were insulated from the encroachment of pagan idolatrous people...

It also says that He removed the stones. The first thing He told 'em to do when they went in was to get rid of the Canaanites. The Canaanites were the stones that were retard their growth and inhibit their productivity. They were to wipe out the Canaanites. They were act as the executioners of Almighty God and remove the Canaanites from the land. They did it only in part...He then planted the choicest vine. Few would argue that, of all of those among mankind, there are hardly any more noble than the sons of Israel. The Jewish people have through the ages made immense contributions in every field of human endeavor. They are a noble strain of genetics among humankind.

And then He put a tower in the middle of it, probably a reference to the parapet. The great mountain, the plateau of Jerusalem where the kings and the prophets and the priests oversaw the whole of the land. When building a vineyard, a tower was commonly placed there. The bottom part to store the implements to care for the vineyard, and the top part to put a lookout to watch for those who might encroach. Furthermore, God provided a wine vat. A wine vat in a vineyard was where the grapes...grapes were pressed, and the wine was produced. The wine vat is most likely a reference to the sacrificial system. The blood shedding system which God provided for the purpose of reconciliation, offerings, worship, and praise.

God did everything possible for productivity and asks the rhetorical question in verse 3, "Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard." You decide. Was it Me or was it them? What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Who's at fault here? This rhetorical question demands the answer that God is not at fault. Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? The only answer to that is there was something wrong with the vine. There was something wrong with Israel.

Could God have done anymore? Absolutely not. He did everything He could have done. Failure was with the vine. The failure was with Israel. Because of this terrible, tragic failure, after God had placed them in the land of Canaan, by the time they come to Isaiah's day, the prophets are all beginning to gang up on them and pronounce the impending judgment. And judgment will come on the northern kingdom from the rapacious forces of Assyria, who will come and destroy and take them captivity, and they'll never return. And then judgment will come later to the southern kingdom at the hands of the Caldeon Empire, the Babylonians, and with it, the destruction, the sacking, the smashing of the city of Jerusalem in the following 70 years of captivity.

This judgment is described then in the metaphor of the vineyard here in verses 5 and 6. "So...says the Lord...now let Me tell you what I'm gonna do to My vineyard...here comes judgment...I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I'll break down it's wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will char...charge the clouds or command the clouds to rain no rain on it." This is a curse pronounced on Israel. A curse which resulted in the Assyrian deportation of the northern kingdom, the Babylonian destruction and deportation of the southern kingdom. And the dissolution of the nation of Israel as it was known in Isaiah's time in a horrible, deadly overflowing of judgment. Spiritual privilege, spiritual opportunity wasted ends in frightening judgment...You would have thinked they would've learned. They didn't learn, even when their Messiah finally came. They had been restored to their nation, reconstituted as a people. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not...

Here we are in this country. We have a great Christian heritage. Not covenantal. God made no

covenant with this nation. We are not a covenant people. We don't have the insulation and protection and special mercies that Israel enjoyed. And if God, in spite of those special mercies and that covenant which brought some protection to them, if God still destroyed them, what hope do we have to evade His judgment? We have produced nothing but the same sour berries.

Now Isaiah may have seemed a little bit foolish to the people when he proclaimed this message, because on the surface, there was prosperity. I mean, frankly, they'd had the same king for 52 years, and that brought a measure of satisfaction. Oziah had been around a long time. That was a long reign for a king. He was very popular. God had helped him early in his career in war. The defenses of Judah and Jerusalem were as strong as they had been since the time of Solomon. There was a large and well-disciplined army furnished with the very best weapons, according to 2 Chronicles 26. The people thought they had a great leader. There was a façade, a superficial façade of religious devotion and attendance to the temple. But what the people didn't realize, the prophet knew because God revealed it to him, was that the cancer of iniquity was eating at the heart of the nation, though it was not apparent on the surface.

I suppose in terms today, we could say the gross national product was up, interest rates were down, everything was profitable, employment were low, unemployment rates were low, and people were basically happy with life. There weren't any wars. There were no border flare-ups. There were no natural disasters. It all seemed just fine. But the prophet saw with the eyes of the Spirit what others couldn't see, and he saw the looming judgment of God...

Now, it is typical of the prophets, when they pronounce judgment not just to make sweeping generic statements. When God indicts people, He indicts them on specific charges. And when you come to verse 8, you come a transition in this 5th chapter, and you go from the parable of the Lord in verses 1 to 7 to the penetration of the Lord, and the Lord penetrates behind the parable. Penetrates behind the general scene to the specific issues. He goes right to the heart of the matter. This is the sin, and you are the man...

There are six sins singled out here. Six sins that were characteristic of Israel. They're identified by the word woe. You see it in verse 8, verse 11, verse 18, verse 20, verse 21, and verse 22. Six times, the word woe appears. Now, just a little bit about that word. It basically means damnation, condemnation, judgment, or cursing. It is a divine pronouncement of doom. That's what it is. And six woes are given because each pronouncement of doom is connected to a specific category of iniquity. And with this, the prophet goes right to the specific indictments that God wants to bring against Israel. And I want you to mark how they parallel our own time.

The first woe appears as noted in verse 8. "Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there's no more room, so that you have to live alone in the midst of the land! In my ears the Lord of hosts has sworn, 'Surely, many houses shall become desolate, even great and fine ones, without occupants. For ten acres of vineyard will yield only one bath of wine, and a homer of seed will yield but an ephah of grain.'"

Now let me describe what He's talking about here. Back to verse 8, He's referring to those who add house to house and join field to field, until they've consumed everything in sight. We can call this the sin of grasping materialism. The sin of grasping materialism. Avarice. The sin that corrupted Judas was true of Israel. The insatiable greed of landowners who oppressed others to increase their riches, accumulated, accumulate, accumulated, and then abused the poor by rending back to them at

exorbitant rates. Amos, the prophet, Hosea, the prophet, Micah, the prophet, who are Isaiah's contemporaries, also denounced this very same evil. Wealthy men ruthlessly acquiring property, squeezing out the poor and the helpless and making them buy, not only housing, but everything else at inflated prices...

A single illustration of it would be the...the mindset of Ahab who, though he had everything a man could ever want, coveted Naboth's vineyard, even to the degree of murder. God never wanted people to stockpile and stockpile and stockpile. That's why there is Sabbath rest for the land every seven years, and that's why there's the 50th year of jubilee when everything owned returns to its original owner...God had hedged against those kinds of expressions of unrelenting greed. But it was a time when no one was paying attention to God. And so He says, "There's gonna come a time when these great houses, these fine houses, these fair houses are gonna be emptied, desolate, without occupants. And these great fields to produce all this grain aren't gonna produce it. And the vineyards aren't gonna produce either. In fact, ten acres of vineyard is gonna produce four gallons of juice, and 48 gallons of seed will only yield 4.8 gallons of crop." Those are famine conditions...famine conditions...What one such invasion did in the days of Ahaz is described in 2 Chronicles 28. "In one day, 120,000 men...men were killed by Pekah of Samaria, and 200,000 men, women, and children were carried off into captivity." God is speaking about sweeping, devastating judgment...

Sin of grasping materialism is certainly characteristic of our day and our time. One writer said, "America's like an unloved child with an ice cream cone: fat, full of pimples, and screaming for more."...We are materialistic, grasping, greedy, indulgent, possessive. We've even got some theologians who add to the problem by telling us Jesus wants us rich. We worship our own golden calf. We seek worldly status. The church is prostituted for gain. The nation is being engulfed in wholesale materialism, with the church assisting in the push...Grasping materialism is a...is a sin that brings the judgment of God.

Second sin that is noted by the prophet comes in verse 11. "Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may pursue strong drink, who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; but they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of His hands." This is a fascinating description of a second sin, drunken pleasure seeking. Drunken pleasure seeking. This is what is clearly being described here. The people were consumed with being entertained. The Prophet Amos says they wanted to recline on beds of ivory, sprawl on their couches, eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall. They wanted the sound of their harp. They composed music for themselves. Instead of just drinking wine out of the normal skins, they were drinking it from sacrificial bowls. In other words, they were gorging themselves with it. They were anointing themselves with the finest of oils, but they were never grieving over the ruin of their nation.

Drunken pleasure seeking. They had the wild parties. They were a nation of goodtime Charlies. They were early drinkers. The dead sign of a...of an alcoholic. Alcoholics drink in the morning. They drink all day, enflamed in the evening, as well. The end of verse 12, "They don't pay attention to the deeds of the Lord," meaning they don't consider the work of His hands is to say they disregard their bodies, which are the work of God. They have no regard for the...the creation of God. Their physical creation, they dissipate. Much like what Paul said, that they give themselves, in Ephesians 5, over to dissipation. They're engaged in shameful dissipation. They work at getting drunk by night, and letting their lust run wild. They seem to function without conscience, without guilt, and with no sense of God

and no fear of judgment...The sin of drunken pleasure seeking.

Verse 13, "Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge or their lack of understanding." This kind of foolish living leads to judgment. "Their honorable men are famished. Their multitude is parched with thirst." They think they have everything. They're gonna have nothing. In fact, Sheol is pictured like some massive beast with a gaping mouth, who enlarges its throat and swallows them whole. Death swallowing the mindless merry-makers. "And Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry and the jubilant within her, descend into it." And, of course, we know when the Babylonians came, they just destroyed the city of Jerusalem in a massacre and a burning. "Common man...verse 15...will be humbled, and the man of importance will be abased, and the eyes of the proud also will be abased. But the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, and the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness. Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy."

The whole northern kingdom taken into captivity by the Assyrians. The whole southern kingdom taken into captivity by the Babylonians. And the land was left to strangers to graze their lambs. Arabs today are still grazing their flocks on what was once the territory of Israel. The once beautiful land became ravaged. It became an uncultivated heap. Good only for pasture and roaming and scavenging strangers.

Grasping materialism and a drunken pleasure seeking brought the judgment of God. There's a third iniquity indicated in verses 18 and 19, as the penetrating vision of God indicts Israel. "Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, and sin as if with cart ropes." It's vivid imagery. It simply pictures the sinner as a beast of burden attached to a cart, hauling around a wagonload of iniquity. Encumbered by it. Pulling it around...as if he were nothing more than a beast of burden carrying around a pile of filth and garbage. Iniquity was like some filthy burden being dragged as they with great effort engaged themselves in sinning against God.

Verse 19 adds another component to this iniquity. This is what they say, and this is a direct mockery of God. "Who say, 'Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near.'" In other words, if God doesn't like it, let's see Him do something about it. So let's call this third sin defiant sinfulness. Defiant sinfulness. It shakes its fist in the face of Almighty God. It taunts God. You hear that so much in our society today. Open, flagrant, defiant, mocking, taunting, cursing God. Blatant mockery of God.

I remember reading some years ago when I was a student of the terrible death of Ernest Hemingway, the brilliant writer. And I was amazed at how the scenario of his life unfolded, so I read more about it. I sought out some information to understand something of this brilliant man, this gifted writer, this great adventurer who was something of a mercenary soldier, who said that he had proven that you can sin and get away with it. That was sort of his life motto. Nobody could hold him to any Victorian morality. No fundamentalist could impinge upon his lifestyle. He had fought his wars. He had killed his men. He had quote tumbled his women, and lived to tell about it all. And the articles about him concluded with the fact that one day in his home he put a shotgun in his mouth and blew the back of his head off. And God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap.

I was strongly influenced also when I was reading in my younger years the writings of Sinclair Lewis who was the toast of the literary world at his time. He wrote a...a most notable piece of literature that later became a film called Elmer Gantry. Some of you may remember it. It was the story of...an

evangelist from the vantage point of a mocker of God. Sinclair Lewis had written, and he wrote about this evangelist who was a drunken sot and a womanizer and a thief and a crook and a charlatan and a fake and everything despicable, and he portrayed him as the representative of the Christian faith. And Elmer Gantry was his blast at God. It was his mockery of God. And few people who gave him accolades know that Sinclair Lewis died a drunk in a third-rate clinic outside of Rome in absolute obscurity from sclerosis of the liver.

Through the years, a lot of people have shaken their fist in the face of God, and God knows who they are...You can taunt God, but it's a foolish thing to do...

There's a fourth sin added to defiant sinfulness, drunken pleasure seeking, and grasping materialism. And it's in verse 20, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" Let's call this moral perversion. What happened in Israel is unimaginable because they had the Word of the Living God. No more unimaginable in our society since we, too, have had the Word of the Living God in its completion, including all the Old Testament and the New, as well. But what happened in Israel has certainly happened here, and that is the reversing of all morality. Complete perversion, twisting. "To forsake the Lord is evil...said Jeremiah...but the people said it was good. To draw near to God is good...said the Psalmist in Psalm 73...but the people said it was evil."

The inverting and the perverting of all standards, this is a sin that brings the condemnation of God. When you exalt adultery, when you promote fornication, when you exalt homosexuality, lust, and you mock faithfulness and purity and integrity, and you exalt divorce and mock marriage, you have perverted morality. I remember the PBS presentation of the MTV series on the seven deadly sins. I'll never forget it. I watched two hours of it...They were asking the MTV generation if they could define...the seven deadly sins of our time. And if they agreed with them. There were seven deadly sins put together by some medieval monks: lust, greed, covetousness, laziness, things like that. Sort of motivational sins behind all other iniquities.

And they went around and asked the contemporary culture in which we live if they agreed that these were sins. And, of course, they all disagreed. They thought pride was a virtue. Lust was a virtue. Greed was a virtue. Covetousness was a virtue. Indicating how perverted the minds are. It's sort of Romans 1, isn't it? First you sink to the level of sexual sin. Then you sink to the level of homosexual sin. Then you sink to the level of reprobate mind. And then you're really in the bottom, because when the mind is gone, there's no recovery...

And so now morality is up for grabs. It's only a matter of anybody's opinion. That's a deadly sin which calls forth the judgment of God who hates all violations of His law.

The fifth iniquity in verse 21 is so pertinent, as well. God pronounces damnation, condemnation on Israel. "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!" You see, once you have no longer a fixed moral law, then everybody's opinion is equal to everybody else's opinion. And you get the...the reigning sin, let's call it arrogant conceit. Arrogant conceit. Rejection of God's Word, subversion of all morality, leads to establishing oneself as the sole authority, and every man does what is right in his own eyes.

And so men in that society, men in our society go around with a silly smirk of self-congratulation on

their conceited faces...thinking themselves to have the answer to everything when, in fact, they know nothing about it at all. Sometimes I think if I see another talk show or hear another opinion, I'll be ill. You ever feel like that?...

If you wanna get a finger on the lostness of our culture, just listen to all the people speaking their foolish opinions about everything. And try to inject in that a standard from the Word of God and watch the reaction...Everyone is his own god. Everyone is his own authority. Everyone has a right to call his own life, to determine what he will or will not do, to make all his own choices. And nobody has a right to lay on him any retribution for that chosen behavior...That was Israel. They knew more than God. They rejected His Word and became arrogantly conceited.

The final sixth sin is given in verses 22 and 23, and this sorta seals the fate. You see the word heroes in verse 22? It can be translated mighty, but it's a Hebrew word meaning men of renown, or to put it in the vernacular, famous leaders. It's what it means. "Woe to the famous leaders who drink wine...and the next one...valiant man is another term for leaders...who mix strong drink." Wine being diluted with water. Strong drink being undiluted enabling a person to become drunk faster. So what you have here is corrupt leadership. Corrupt leadership, like people, "Like priests...Josiah said...people just don't rise above their leaders. And when the leadership is corrupt, that sorta seals the fate of the people. Corrupt leadership not only drunken, dissolute, indulgent, but, verse 23, they were "justifying the wicked for a bribe and taking away the rights of the ones who are in the right!"

In other words, they were punishing the innocent and letting the guilty go, because they could be bought off. This is corruption. The men of renown, the judges, the authorities, the leaders in the land were influenced by drinking. They were unwise. You remember the mother of Lemuel in Proverbs 31 said, "It's not for kings to drink, 'cause everything they have to decide is too vital to be clouded by any influence of alcohol." But drunkenness and unbridled luxury, sure signs of decaying civilization, particularly when they characterize the leaders. The rulers and judges of the people were corrupt and rotten, perverted, and could be bought.

We all know the corruption in politics, the corruption in government. We know what a corrupt world we live in, and every aspect, business, everywhere, we can't trust leaders. We can't lift up leaders as examples...And the result of these sins comes in verse 24. Here we move from the parable to the penetration to the punishment...

"Therefore...that's a key word. That's the transition... Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble and dry grass collapses into the flame...that's the first metaphor...With the same speed and thoroughness that fire burns straw, so their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust." He uses three metaphors. "With the speed and thoroughness with which fire burns straw; to the extent that a root decays and rots; and then the same way that a blossom withers and blows away like dust, so will this people suffer judgment."

Strong language. Their grasping materialism. Their drunken pleasure seeking. Their defiant sinfulness. Their moral perversion. Their arrogant conceit. Their corrupt leadership must produce a reaction from Holy God. It must, and it will. And why?...Verse 24, the end of the verse, here's the bottom line on everything in these two chapters. Here it is: "For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." That simple.

All that sin chronicled in the 5th chapter comes about as a result of "rejecting the law of the Lord of hosts and despising the word of the Holy One of Israel," which, by the way is two ways of saying exactly the same thing. They wouldn't listen to God. They wouldn't listen to God. They turned their back on His truth. When that happens in a nation, judgment will fall.

You remember when I was over in New Zealand and I was invited to speak to the New Zealand parliament in the Parliament House. And they asked me to speak on this subject. What happens to a nation that abandons the Word of God? And I told 'em. And it'll happen in that nation, as it happening in this nation. And the judgment of God has already begun here, because it says in Romans 1, when the judgment of God begins, He will give them over to sexual sin. We've been given over to that. Then He will give them over to homosexuality, and we've already been given over to that. And He'll give them over to a reprobate mind. And our educational system, at every level, is so corrupt now, there's no hope of instructing. We hear people all the time say, "Well, our only hope is in education." Not so, because education has abandoned the truth of God. It'll happen in any nation. When they turn from the law of God, they will be left to the consequence of their own sin, under divine judgment.

The judgment's gonna look like this, starting in verse 25..."On this account the anger of the Lord has burned against His people." Boy, that is a...a penetrating verse. "The anger of the Lord has burned against His people...and if His anger burns against a covenant people granted special mercy, how His anger must burn against those who are not in His covenant...He has stretched out His hand against them, and struck them down." And Isaiah now is seeing the destruction as if it's happening.

"And the mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. For all this, His anger is not spent." It...when God sent the Assyrians with the devastation and the death and the carnage, and then He sent the Babylonians with the same thing. It wasn't enough. "His anger was not spent. His hand is still stretched out." There needed to be 70 years of judgment and purging. How's He gonna do this? Verse 26 tells us. "He's gonna lift up a standard." He's gonna...He's gonna put up a banner. He's the commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army. It's interesting, isn't it? He's the commander-in-chief of the Caldeon or Babylonian army. "He's gonna lift up the flag to the distant nation, to the Assyrians, the Caldeons, and He's gonna whistle for it from the ends of the earth." He is the commander-in-chief. He will whistle for the armies, and they'll come like a tidal wave. "With swift speed." And, amazingly, God is gonna give them power. "Not one in it is weary or stumbles. None slumbers or sleeps. Nor is the belt at its waist undone." That's the belt to which the sword is strapped. "Nor its sandal strap broken." This army is gonna have tremendous success, because God is gonna see to it that they are the instrument of His judgment and fulfill His purpose.

"Its arrows are sharp. All its bows are bent; the hoofs of its horses seem like flint and its chariot wheels like a whirlwind. Its roaring is like a lioness, and it roars like young lions; it growls as it seizes the prey." Very vivid, graphic description of the terrible killing that will take place. And what it doesn't kill, it carries off with no one to deliver it. That's the captivity. "It'll growl over it in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land, behold, there is darkness and distress. Even the light is darkened by its clouds."

Smoke from the burning and from the dust and the dirt stirred up in the terrible holocaust...So God says judgment will come. This is the cycle of history. In the book of Acts, we learned that the history of the nations is the judgment of the nations. Do you remember in Acts, it says that God has allowed all the nations to go their own way. Paul says that in Acts 17. "All the nations have gone their own way." The cycle just keeps repeating and repeating and repeating and repeating. And here we are in

our nation, in America, watching this take place...

You say, "Well, are we on the brink of the judgment of God?" No, we're in it. I'm not talking about eschatological...logical judgment. I don't know when the time of tribulation's coming. I'm not talking about eternal judgment. I don't know when hell will be a reality for all of the individuals in this world. I'm not even talking about cataclysmic judgment like Sodom and Gomorrah, or the universal flood. But I am talking about the wrath of God described in Romans 1 where He gives them over to the unmitigated consequences of their wicked choices. And they spiral down into deeper degradation and death and hell...

And that takes us to the end of chapter 5, and we understand the issue. Chapter 6 answers this question: What kind of people is God looking for to speak to a nation in crisis? That is the question of chapter 6. Because as chapter 6 begins, Isaiah rushes into the presence of God at the temple. He's gotta check in with God in the midst of the disaster, and he has an incredible encounter with the living God in one of the most monumental chapters in all of the Bible. And in the 13 verses of the 6th chapter, we will learn what kind of person God is looking for to reach out to a nation in crisis. This is us, folks. And this is our calling, as it was the calling of this great prophet.

We are a nation in crisis. We are involved in the judgment of God. It is here. It is on us. The great lion has roared. The army has come. It is not a conquering nation as in the case of Israel. But it is a cancer eating us from the inside out. It may be a conquering nation. Who knows? But, for now, it is a...a fall like the fall of the Roman Empire, without being conquered from the outside, they disintegrated on the inside. And we're doing the same, and we have never been in such a crisis as we are now. There's never been a more important time for you to know what your role is. And how God can use you mightily in this crisis. We'll find out tonight in chapter 6.

Father, we thank You that You can use us, and as we get a little preview of chapter 6, we remember that You said, "Who will go...for us?" And Isaiah said, "Here am I, Lord, send me."...But, Lord, there's some preparation. There's some things we need to understand if we're gonna have an impact, if we're gonna understand our times, if we're going to have a right expectation...We pray, Lord, that You will show us that as we open the rest of this great text tonight...Confirm these truths to our hearts. May we understand our times. The desperate character of our times, and the compelling need to proclaim the truth and not get caught up in the iniquity of this hour...We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

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