

Program: SS Panel 2025 1 Q

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Lesson Title: #11 What More Could I Have Done?

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Lesson 11

March 8-14

What More Could I Have Done?

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: John 18:37, Rom. 3:23–26, Rom. 5:8, Isa. 5:1–4, Matt. 21:33–39, Isa. 53:4, Rom. 3:1–4.

Memory Text: "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice'" (John 18:37, NKJV).

TUESDAY

March 11

The Song of My Beloved

READ

In amazing ways, God has manifested His love and righteousness amid the cosmic conflict. Yet, some might ask, *Should God have done more than He has done to prevent and/or remove evil?* We have seen a cosmic conflict framework that indicates that God has acted in order to respect the free will necessary for the maximal flourishing of love relationships between Him and humanity. Further, He has apparently acted within moral constraints, or rules of engagement, within the context of a cosmic dispute over His character, which can be settled only by the demonstration of His love.

Read Isaiah 5:1–4. Who is speaking in these verses? Whom is Isaiah speaking about? Whom do the vineyard and vineyard owner represent? What is the significance of the actions of the vineyard owner on behalf of the vineyard? What is the result?

Isaiah 5:1–4 1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very **fruitful hill**.

2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And **planted it with the choicest vine**. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; **So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.**

3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.

4 **What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it?** Why then, when I expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?

READ

In these verses, Isaiah sings a song of his beloved, a vineyard. **The vineyard owner** is God Himself, and the vineyard represents God’s people (see, for example, *Isa. 1:8, Jer. 2:21*). But the implications here can also be expanded relative to God’s broader work in this world. According to these verses, the vineyard owner (God) did everything that reasonably could be expected to ensure the flourishing of His vineyard. The vineyard should have produced good grapes, but it produced only “wild grapes,”

which other translations refer to as “worthless.” Indeed, the Hebrew wording here literally could be translated *stink-fruit*. God’s vineyard brings forth rotten grapes.

Isaiah 5:6-7 **6** I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it.”

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is the house of Israel*, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry *for help*.

Isaiah 5:3 shifts to God Himself speaking, inviting people to “judge” between Him and His vineyard. And, in Isaiah 5:4, God Himself sets forth the all-important question: “ ‘**What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?** Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?’ ” (NKJV). What more could He do? How fascinating that He even asks others to judge what He has done.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 **1** “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.

2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:

3 “Blessed *shall you be* in the city, and blessed *shall you be* in the country.

4 “Blessed *shall be* the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.

5 “Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl.

6 “Blessed *shall you be* when you come in, and blessed *shall you be* when you go out.

7 “The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.

8 “The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

9 “The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways.

>10 Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you.

11 And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you.

12 The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

13 And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe *them*.

14 So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, *to* the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

Isaiah 63:7- 14 7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord *And* the praises of the Lord, According to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, *And* the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.

8 For He said, “Surely they *are* My people, Children *who* will not lie.” So He became their Savior.

9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, *And* the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; *And* He bore them and carried them All the days of old.

10 But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, *And* He fought against them.

11 Then he remembered the days of old, Moses *and* his people, *saying*: “Where *is* He who brought them up out of the sea With the [c]shepherd of His flock? Where *is* He who put His Holy Spirit within them,

12 Who led *them* by the right hand of Moses, With His glorious arm, Dividing the water before them To make for Himself an everlasting name,

13 Who led them through the deep, As a horse in the wilderness, *That* they might not stumble?”

14 As a beast goes down into the valley, *And* the Spirit of the Lord causes him to rest, So You lead Your people, To make Yourself a glorious name.

Deuteronomy 5:29 O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

When you look at the cross, where God offered Himself as a sacrifice for all our sin, how do His words, " 'What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?' "—take on an utterly amazing significance?

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Additional Notes

Deu 4:5 Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.

Deu 4:6 Keep therefore and do *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.

Deu 4:7 For what nation *is there* so great, who *hath* God *so* nigh unto them, as the LORD our God *is* in all *things that* we call upon him *for*?

Deu 4:8 And what nation *is there so* great, that hath statutes and judgments *so* righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

Deu 4:9 Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

Luk 13:6 He spake also this parable; A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Luk 13:7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

Luk 13:8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung *it*:

Luk 13:9 And if it bear fruit, *well*: and if not, *then* after that thou shalt cut it down.

A description of this vineyard is given by the prophet Isaiah: “Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching His vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein; and He looked that it should bring forth grapes.” Isaiah 5:1, 2. COL 284.3

The husbandman chooses a piece of land from the wilderness; he fences, clears, and tills it, and plants it with choice vines, expecting a rich harvest. This plot of ground, in its superiority to the uncultivated waste, he expects to do him honor by showing the results of his care and toil in its cultivation. So God had chosen a people from the world to be trained and educated by Christ. The prophet says, “The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant.” Isaiah 5:7. Upon this people God had bestowed great privileges, blessing them richly from His abundant goodness. He looked for them to honor Him by yielding fruit. They were to reveal the principles of His kingdom. In the midst of a fallen, wicked world they were to represent the character of God. COL 285.1

As the Lord's vineyard they were to produce fruit altogether different from that of the heathen nations. These idolatrous peoples had given themselves up to work wickedness. Violence and crime, greed, oppression, and the most corrupt practices, were indulged without restraint. Iniquity, degradation, and misery were the fruits of the corrupt tree. In marked contrast was to be the fruit borne on the vine of God's planting. COL 285.2

It was the privilege of the Jewish nation to represent the character of God as it had been revealed to Moses. In answer to the prayer of Moses, “Show me Thy glory,” the Lord promised, “I will make all My goodness pass before thee.” Exodus 33:18, 19. “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” Exodus 34:6, 7. This was the fruit that God desired from His people. In the purity of their characters, in the holiness of their lives, in their mercy and loving-kindness and compassion, they were to show that “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7. COL 285.3

Through the Jewish nation it was God's purpose to impart rich blessings to all peoples. Through Israel the way was to be prepared for the diffusion of His light to the whole world. The nations of the world, through following corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. Yet in His mercy God did not blot them out of existence. He purposed to give them opportunity for becoming acquainted with Him through His church. He designed that the principles revealed through His people should be the means of restoring the moral image of God in man. COL 286.1

It was for the accomplishment of this purpose that God called Abraham out from his idolatrous kindred and bade him dwell in the land of Canaan. “I will make of thee a

great nation,” He said, “and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.” COL 286.2

God's purpose toward His people, and the glorious possibilities before them, had been set forth in the beautiful words, “That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified,” Isaiah 61:3. The dying Jacob, under the Spirit of inspiration, had said of his best-loved son, “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.” And he said, “The God of thy Father” “shall help thee,” the Almighty “shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under.” Genesis 49:22, 25. So God had planted Israel as a goodly vine by the wells of life. He had made His vineyard “in a very fruitful hill.” He had “fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine.” Isaiah 5:1, 2. COL 214.3

“And He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.” Isaiah 5:2. The people of Christ's day made a greater show of piety than did the Jews of earlier ages, but they were even more destitute of the sweet graces of the Spirit of God. The precious fruits of character that made the life of Joseph so fragrant and beautiful, were not manifest in the Jewish nation. COL 215.1

God in His Son had been seeking fruit, and had found none. Israel was a cumberer of the ground. Its very existence was a curse; for it filled the place in the vineyard that a fruitful tree might fill. It robbed the world of the blessings that God designed to give. The Israelites had misrepresented God among the nations. They were not merely useless, but a decided hindrance. To a great degree their religion was misleading, and wrought ruin instead of salvation. COL 215.2

In the parable the dresser of the vineyard does not question the sentence that the tree, if it remained fruitless, should be cut down; but he knows and shares the owner's interest in that barren tree. Nothing could give him greater joy than to see its growth and fruitfulness. He responds to the desire of the owner, saying, “Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well.” COL 215.3

The gardener does not refuse to minister to so unpromising a plant. He stands ready to give it still greater care. He will make its surroundings most favorable, and will lavish upon it every attention. COL 215.4

The owner and the dresser of the vineyard are one in their interest in the fig tree. So the Father and the Son were one in their love for the chosen people. Christ was saying to His hearers that increased opportunities would be given them. Every means that the love of God could devise would be put in operation that they might become trees of righteousness, bringing forth fruit for the blessing of the world. COL 216.1

Jesus did not in the parable tell the result of the gardener's work. At that point His story was cut short. Its conclusion rested with the generation that heard His words. To them the solemn warning was given. "If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Upon them it depended whether the irrevocable words should be spoken. The day of wrath was near. In the calamities that had already befallen Israel, the owner of the vineyard was mercifully forewarning them of the destruction of the unfruitful tree. COL 216.2

The warning sounds down along the line to us in this generation. Are you, O careless heart, a fruitless tree in the Lord's vineyard? Shall the words of doom ere long be spoken of you? How long have you received His gifts? How long has He watched and waited for a return of love? Planted in His vineyard, under the watchful care of the gardener, what privileges are yours! How often has the tender gospel message thrilled your heart! You have taken the name of Christ, you are outwardly a member of the church which is His body, and yet you are conscious of no living connection with the great heart of love. The tide of His life does not flow through you. The sweet graces of His character, "the fruits of the Spirit," are not seen in your life. COL 216.3

The barren tree receives the rain and the sunshine and the gardener's care. It draws nourishment from the soil. But its unproductive boughs only darken the ground, so that fruit-bearing plants cannot flourish in its shadow. So God's gifts, lavished on you, convey no blessing to the world. You are robbing others of privileges that, but for you, might be theirs. COL 217.1

You realize, though it may be but dimly, that you are a cumberer of the ground. Yet in His great mercy God has not cut you down. He does not look coldly upon you. He does not turn away with indifference, or leave you to destruction. Looking upon you He cries, as He cried so many centuries ago concerning Israel, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? ... I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man." Hosea 11:8, 9. The pitying Saviour is saying concerning you, Spare it this year also, till I shall dig about it and dress it. COL 217.2

With what unwearied love did Christ minister to Israel during the period of added probation. Upon the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. After His ascension the gospel was preached first at Jerusalem. There the Holy Spirit was poured out. There the first gospel church revealed the power of the risen Saviour. There Stephen—"his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15)—bore his testimony and laid down his life. All that heaven itself could give was bestowed. "What could have been done more to My vineyard," Christ said, "that I have not done in it?" Isaiah 5:4. So His care and labor for you are not lessened, but increased. Still He says, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Isaiah 27:3. COL 218.1

"If it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that"— COL 218.2

The heart that does not respond to divine agencies becomes hardened until it is no longer susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then it is that the word is spoken, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” COL 218.3

Today He invites you: “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.... I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.... I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.... They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.... From Me is thy fruit found.” COL 218.4

