

Greetings, dear reader, in the Worshipped & Wonderful Name of JESUS!

Here we will look at the Church as God's Vineyard.

The key New Testament passage for this study is John 15, where Jesus declares that He is the Vine and we are the branches. Jesus used this illustration to drive home several points.

First, apart from Him we can do nothing, just as branches depend on the vine to bring sustenance and life to them:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. Jn 15:5

The church is the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1); apart from Him we are just dead branches and can do nothing, but (hallelujah!) through Christ Who strengthens us we can do all things (Phil 4:13). In Him is life (Jn 1:4, 1 Jn 5:11) and He not only gives to us eternal life (Jn 10:28), but as we die to self, His life is made manifest in us (2 Cor 4:10; Gal 2:20), for He is Our Life (Col 3:10). To use the analogy of electricity, Jesus is not only our electricity generator (our source of life), but He is our very electricity (life) itself and without our being connected to Him the light bulbs of our souls are dark. Without being plugged into Him, we cannot shine His light to others. The beloved apostle John succinctly puts it this way: ***In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.*** (Jn 1:4)

Second, our purpose here on earth is to bear fruit.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. Jn 15:16

In the Old Testament there are a number of passages about vines and vineyards which bear out the importance of a vineyard bearing fruit. For example, to plant a vineyard and not to partake of its produce was one of the curses of sin (Deut 28:30). The importance of the planter partaking of his produce is also underlined by Deut 20:6, and Prov 27:18. We see from 1 Cor 9:7 and Song of Sol 7:11 the principle that the Keeper of the Vineyard is to get his due (major) portion and those workers (leaders) who tend the vineyard under His care are also to partake of its fruits. Also, under the law, the vineyard was to be a source of blessing not only for the owner but the poor and the stranger (Ex 23:11, Lev 19:10) - a picture of how the church is even more so to be a source of blessing

to the needy of the world. So when we don't bear fruit, we miss our calling and purpose, we rob ourselves of God's reciprocal blessings, we dishonour God, we rob our spiritual leaders of what is their due, and we starve the world's needy.

A vineyard covered with thorns and nettles is associated with a slothful man in Proverbs 24:30-31, but Our Husbandman God is not like that; any lack of produce on our part is not His fault. He was oft frustrated over the vineyard of His people of Israel when despite all His care there was no fruit (read e.g. Isaiah 5:1-7 and Jer 2:21), laying the blame at the foot of those to whom He had lent out the care of the vineyard (Jer 12:10) - a theme echoed by Jesus (Matt 21. Mk 12, Luke 13), in His pointed parable concerning Himself as the Owner's Son who would be killed by those who were once appointed to be tending the vineyard. However, Revelation 14:14-15 shows the vineyard will indeed bear fruit at the time of the great harvest at the end of this age, which illuminates the prophecy of Genesis 49:10-12 concerning Christ. (Note that there are two harvests mentioned in Rev 14 - one of believers in verses 14-15 and one of the wicked in verses 18-20 as prophesied in Joel 3:13.)

Check also the most beautiful words of Isaiah 27:2-3:

In that say sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.

You may quote the above every time you are tempted to feel deserted by God - He has promised to look after you, to keep you, to water you, to tend to you night and day!

Re Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ", Mel was largely inspired, re the movie, by the life of Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824). You may download the story of her life at (http://www.emmerich1.com/ANNE_CATHERINE_EMMERICH.htm), and re her experiences in prayer, she was shown the church as a vineyard. It is said that she would be praying for several dioceses which were shown to her under the figure of vineyards laid waste, and, to quote from the above reference:

"She complained one morning that her hands and arms smarted and itched, and on examination they were found to be covered with blisters, like what would have been produced by the stinging of nettles. She then begged several persons of her acquaintance to join their prayers to hers for a certain intention. The next day her hands were inflamed and painful, as they would have been after hard work; and when asked the cause, she replied: 'Ah! I have had so many nettles to root up in the vineyard, because those whose

duty it was to do it only pulled off the stems, and I was obliged to draw the roots with much difficulty out of a stony soil.' The person who had asked her the question began to blame these careless workmen, but he felt much confused when she replied: 'You were one of them,-those who only pull off the stems of the nettles, and leave the roots in the earth, are persons who pray carelessly.'

It is scriptural (Matt 20) that God has called us to be co-labourers in His vineyard, whether by prayer or otherwise. It matters not so much where or what hour we labour; we shall each receive a reward if we are faithful. I close with the following prayer:

"Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself." Ps 80:14-15

May God bless you all richly, and may we all be fruitful, for His Name's sake, amen.

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