

A Song of Two Vineyards

Song of Solomon 8:11-12; Matthew 21:33-43

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Every Christian has a calling from Jesus to watch over, nourish, and guard his/her own soul. Scripture likens your soul to a vineyard which you are to cultivate that it might bear the fruit of trusting Christ, loving Him with all of your heart, obeying His commandments, and growing in your delight to commune with Him and spend time with Him. Jesus doesn't save us to be lazy or comfortable and just sit back and wait for heaven to come. He calls us to be busy in this life in bringing forth fruit for Him.

Are you more concerned with the vineyards of others and how their vineyards are growing or failing than you are with your own vineyard committed to you by your Savior? Are you more concerned with measuring the fruit of your vineyard by what you perceive to be the fruit from someone else's vineyard? Whether you come out looking good or bad from such a comparison, God's Word says that this is not wise (2 Corinthians 10:12). We are not rivals to one another, as if we were competing with one another to see who has the most fruit (that is simply an evidence of self-seeking pride). No, we are to evaluate ourselves by what Christ has given to us and the fruit (or lack of fruit) in our vineyard.

If you are focused on looking for faults in the way others are tending their vineyard, you are almost certainly not tending your own vineyard; and, therefore, will have little fruit. We are often most critical of the vineyard of others because our own vineyard is in such a mess. We deflect the light from the sins and problems in our own vineyard by shining it on the vineyard of others. Our duty to God is for our own vineyard. What are you doing in your own vineyard to bring forth fruit to the honor of Jesus?

Let us consider the two vineyards mentioned in our text today: (1) Christ's Vineyard (Song 8:11); (2) The Bride's Vineyard (Song 8:12).

I. Christ's Vineyard (Song 8:11).

A. We have noted throughout the study of this Divine Love Song that it is an allegory wherein Solomon signifies the greater Solomon, Jesus; and the bride signifies Christ's elect church whom He loved and died to redeem. It is the greatest love story ever told. Likewise, the Lord has a vineyard which is to bear fruit for Him, which represents Christ's Church in the Old and New Testaments (Isaiah 5:1ff; Matthew 21:33ff).

B. The bride states Song 8:11 that it is Solomon (or rather Jesus) that possesses this vineyard (the Visible Church). The Church does not belong to a pope, bishop, minister, or king. Jesus is alone the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). This is why no one has a right to impose upon His Church doctrines or worship that Jesus has not imposed in His Word (no innovations), and why no ruler has a right to impose upon His Church what Jesus has not authorized in His Word (when it can or cannot gather for worship, how many can attend, or what it can or cannot teach). Either Jesus is King of His Church, or He is not King at all (which is a lie).

1. This vineyard is Christ's because He paid for it with His own blood—you are not your own, you were purchased by Jesus, 1 Corinthians 6:20. Jesus loves His vineyard (His Church). He cares for it that it might produce fruit (as any owner of a vineyard would do). The fruit from this vineyard is the salvation of sinners through the faithful preaching of the gospel and the fruit of sanctification in growing up in Christ to be mature, sound, faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

2. The greater Solomon (Jesus) has "let" or rented out His vineyard to "keepers" who maintain and guard the vineyard for Him. These keepers are His church officers (ministers, elders, deacons) who are commissioned by Jesus to care for His Church on His behalf. This is a delegated authority, not an

absolute authority. They must be qualified and set apart (ordained) by the standards He has appointed in His Word (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and not by the standards of men (popular, successful, attractive, CEO, good fund raiser, funny, life of the party). A close parallel is found in Matthew 21:33-43.

3. Since the keepers (officers) are appointed by Jesus, to Him they must give an account as to how they have cared for His vineyard (the Church) and the fruit that has been graciously brought forth (by way of conversion and sanctification in the lives and families of those who sit under their ministry). Some of the fruit may be known now, but some of it may not be seen and known until the day of accounting (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Christ's ministers (and officers) are accountable to their flock (Yes!), but they are primarily accountable to the Lord Jesus (who commissioned them). Therefore, we cannot take this calling lightly. We will stand before Jesus and give an account of how we have kept, cultivated, weeded, and protected Christ's vineyard entrusted to us. What a sobering thought! The ministry is not a vocation—it is a calling.

4. Here in Song 8:11, note that Christ's ministers (and officers) are to bring 1,000 pieces of silver to Him from the fruit that they received from the vineyard. This is not speaking of some literal financial arrangement that His ministers owe to Jesus, but as this is an allegory, the 1,000 pieces of silver signify the value of the fruit which they then give back to the Lord Jesus who hired them to work in His vineyard. My reward (as a minister) is not financial in nature, but is the converted and fruitful souls of those entrusted to me by Christ (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). It is similar to what we find in Revelation 4:10-11.

5. This is not working to pay Jesus for my salvation or to pay Him to be a minister (church officer). No, this is a minister acknowledging that Jesus Christ receives all of the glory for the fruit that comes from the vineyard (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). What a difference one can see between those who are in the ministry for fame, fortune, and power in building their own kingdom and those who are in the ministry to serve Jesus and bring forth the fruit of souls that have come to Jesus and are growing in Christ and His truth and holiness. When people come to hear the mere voice of man rather than to hear Jesus speak through the man, people set themselves up to be misled and deceived. They want their ears tickled. They want to be entertained not to hear Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Dear ones, I pray you have come not to hear a man, but to hear the Lord Jesus preach through me, which is to hear His voice speaking in His Word. You are Christ's vineyard. It is my duty to feed you Christ's truth. It is your duty to receive it by faith and apply it to your life that you may bring forth fruit to the glory of Christ. We are both accountable to the Lord.

II. The Bride's Vineyard (Song 8:12).

A. The bride of Christ (His elect Church) continues speaking. Whereas in Song 8:11 the vineyard belonged to the greater Solomon, Jesus Christ ("Solomon had a vineyard"), here in Song 8:12, the elect bride of Christ speaks of a vineyard that is hers, "My vineyard, which is mine." This is the bride speaking, for she immediately addresses the greater Solomon—Jesus: "thou, O Solomon." Don't forget that the bride had earlier in the Song referred to a vineyard that belonged to her and for which she was neglectful (Song 1:6), but now through her growth in Christ and blessed communion with Him, she can say that her vineyard is no longer neglected, but is rather "before me" (i.e. it is under my constant and diligent care). Whereas earlier, she did not faithfully tend to her own vineyard, now she has come to realize and to fulfill her duty in watching over that vineyard of her own soul entrusted to her by Jesus.

1. Not only have ministers been given a trust and responsibility to care for Christ's vineyard (the Visible Church) and to bring forth fruit from the vineyard to the glory of Christ, but each member of Christ's Church has been given his/her own vineyard of responsibility to watch over on behalf of Christ and will give forth his/her fruit to Jesus—just as Church officers will do (Song 8:12—1,000 pieces of silver to the Lord and 200 pieces of silver to the keeper as a gracious reward or crown for his/her care of their own vineyard).

2. Dear Christian, your soul and your life is your vineyard over which you are to watch that little foxes not enter in to spoil the vine (Song 2:15). Personal sins and weaknesses are like little foxes that tempt you to compromise the truth of Jesus Christ, to follow the crowd, to seek the approval of man, to feed the lusts of the flesh, to find time for all manner of business and pleasure—but to find little or no time for the Lord Jesus, to make excuses for sin, and to blame others for your sin. It's the little lies that lead to the big lies. It's a little exposure to nakedness on websites that leads to addiction to pornography. One sin leads to many.

a. All sin and error must be taken seriously, especially the little foxes; for they are the ones that you are more likely to excuse. When we begin to rationalize "little" sins and errors, we then have assumed authority over God Himself, who calls all sin, the transgression of His Law, 1 John 3:4 (whether we consider it great or small). When you minimize sin because you were only angry with your child, your parent, your husband, or your wife (rather than with someone in the church or a co-worker), those little foxes are finding a home in your vineyard. The nearer the relationship, the more aggravated is the sin.

b. Take care of that precious vineyard of your soul (and your family). You reveal how valuable something is to you by how watchful you are over it (house, car, job, or bank account). How valuable is your soul and family to you? How watchful are you over them?

c. But by far, what I am about to say is the most important part of watching over your vineyard. You will never watch over your vineyard and care for it by simply keeping predators and destructive vines and weeds from growing in it. You must most importantly feed and water the vineyard in order for there to be fruit. Without nourishment there is no life—there is no growth. You faithfully feed and water your vineyard (your soul and your family), and then you will see fruit coming forth from your vineyard through your communion with Jesus—in private worship and family worship (prayer, in His Word, in meditation, in obedience, in sound Christian literature) and in public worship through the public ordinances appointed by Jesus in His Word (keeping the Sabbath Day holy, faithful preaching, singing His psalms, public prayers, and the sacraments). If you are not growing in Christ and communing with Him, you will not think to guard your soul or your family from destructive enemies. It is the Word of God that makes you alert to the enemies that would seek to destroy you and your family. It is the Word of God that teaches you that there is victory only in Jesus Christ (His death to destroy sin and His resurrection to give you power to overcome sin). It is the Word of God that is your light to expose sin in your life and family and that cleanses you through God's promises (Psalm 119:9,11).

B. I can point out all of the little foxes and stampeding elephants that you must keep out of your vineyard, but that will not empower you to do it. There is no power in the commandment. It is a light that exposes your sin, inability, and need for Jesus Christ. It is only the gospel of Jesus Christ—His grace and His strength through the death and resurrection of Christ that will give you the holy desire and power to guard and nourish the vineyard of your own soul and that of your family.

C. You spend time in caring for relationships and possessions that are important to you. You watch over them, and yet you will leave them all behind when you die. That which you will take with you at death is your own soul. How important is your own soul to you? When you stand before God will you have the fruit of His love, mercy, forgiveness, communion, and growth in obedience to present to Him? Or will you appear empty-handed and without excuse (Mark 8:36-37)? Fall upon His mercy now. He will make of you a fruitful vineyard.

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