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Vineyard and vine

Vineyard

In Isaiah 5, the prophet sings a sad song about a vineyard. I remember many years ago hearing a Messianic Jew speak on this subject.

> *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. 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. " And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 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?*
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> *And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 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." (Isaiah 5:1-6)*

Then comes the explanation of the vineyard. The vineyard is the people of Israel:

> *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. (Isa. 5:7)*

With this song, Isaiah foretold the exile of the people of Israel and the tribe of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem about 200 years before it happened. The northern Israelite tribes were exiled to Assyria, and the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were exiled to Babylon. The northern Israelites never returned from their exile, except perhaps for a few individuals. The Jews, however, returned in droves from Babylon after about 70 years of exile.

When the Jews returned to their land, God's vineyards began to flourish again. However, it soon became apparent that the Jewish people would again be left spiritually in poor care. God sent prophets among them, but the Jewish leaders would not listen to them. Then Jesus was born among them, as prophesied, but the Jewish leaders would not listen to Him either, but killed Him. Thus they proved unfit to care for God's cultivated land, and the Jews were again driven from their land. Jesus prophesied this second exile to the Jews thus:

> *"Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and*

they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet. (Matthew 21:33-46)

God had sent prophets and even His own Son to the people of Israel, but their message was not heard. On the contrary, the Jewish lawyers rejected them and abused or killed them. As a result, the vineyard of Israel fell into desolation for two millennia and the gospel message was allowed to spread among the nations. Thus, the vineyard was given to others to tend.

However, at this time the Israelites have returned to their own land. That is why Isaiah sang a different song about end-time Israel:

In that day sing to her, "A vineyard of red wine! I, the Lord, keep it, I water it every moment; Lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day. Fury is not in Me. Who would set briers and thorns Against Me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of My strength, That he may make peace with Me; And he shall make peace with Me." Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, And fill the face of the world with fruit. (Isa. 27:2-6)

According to many prophecies, the return of Israel to its land is a sign of the end times. It is also associated with the beginning of a great revival among the Jews, of which we have already begun to see signs. As a result, we can begin to expect the fulfillment of other end-time prophecies. These include the rapture of believers and the return of Jesus to the people of Israel living in the midst of the tribulation. Israel's enemies will then experience God's judgment and wrath. They will be destroyed, but soon after that the Millennial Kingdom of Christ will begin. According to Isaiah, then the Jews and Israelites will take up their priestly duties and the saved from other nations will take care of the cattle, fields and vineyards:

Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner Shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs. (Isa. 61: 5-7)

Vine

During Jesus' last evening with His disciples, He revealed one of his greatest secrets, which is hidden in the parable of the vine.

> *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*
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> *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*
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> *(John 15:1-6)*

Fig. A vine and its fruits.

These words contain one of God's greatest secrets: we can be spiritually one with Jesus Christ, like a branch in a tree. Whoever finds this message and applies it to himself, finds Life. If we truly begin to see ourselves as branches in the vine founded by Christ, it will change our perception of ourselves and the reality around us.

Then we will also begin to control things through this connection, for Jesus added:

> *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:7-8)*

When we pray from our new identity in Christ, our prayers begin to bear abundant fruit. Just as the tree and its branches are one, so we are one in spirit with our Master.

It is important to understand that this vine connection is built through the Holy Spirit, who has been poured into us. (Rom. 5:5) Jesus taught about this connection as follows:

> *But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. <u>It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you</u>; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. (John 16:4-8)*

Just as there is a connection between Jesus and the Father through the Holy Spirit, so there is a connection between us and Jesus built by the Spirit. Jesus prayed for this connection like this:

> *Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, <u>that they may be one as We are</u>. (John 17:11)*
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> *I pray that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <u>I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one</u>, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:21-23)*

So Jesus prayed in His last prayer that all His followers would be one with Him, as He is one with the Father. What does that mean? What is this vine identity in us?

Too often we believers think that God is far away and behind some curtain. We try to get messages from God, as if on a broken telephone from another planet. Usually this communication does not work that way. What if instead, led by the Holy Spirit, we boldly entered into the divine communion that Christ clearly authorized and encouraged. Then, without a doubt, our spiritual ears would be opened to hear the voice of God. That would become our prayer identity, or our inner man identity, whatever we want to call it. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

> *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24)*

If we pray in spirit and truth, that is, through our born-again spirit and the Holy Spirit, then our prayers will be heard in heaven and we will receive answers to our prayers. When we enter into His reality, we can hear His voice easily, for His thought passes into our consciousness as if by itself without any spoken words in between. When we learn to use this telephone of the Holy Spirit, does not Christ truly dwell in us? Is not then the parable of the vine a reality for us and not a theory?

The more we live according to our born-again spirit and the Holy Spirit, the more Christ becomes visible in us. That is the identity of our inner man, which we use, for example, when praying, meditating on God's Word, and serving in intercession. Of course, in everyday life, when we do our daily chores, our outer man may be on the surface, but even then the identity of our inner man is constantly on standby and can pop up when needed. Our inner man's identity in Christ thus forms the basic tone of our entire life. Later, when we have already departed from this life, our souls and bodies will also enter into the glory of Christ. Then we will be perfectly one in God's all-fulfilling connection.

If we are branches in the vine of Christ, doesn't that mean that our own identity is like a part of the identity of Christ? Then we are one in the spiritual whole formed by Christ and the Father. Then we have found ourselves in Christ. Then our time of separation has ended, when we have found ourselves in the communion with God, i.e. our Creator. For some reason we had drifted away from that communion, and groped in different directions to find our identity somewhere, but in Christ we have arrived, in the communion with God, where we were originally when God created us. The circle has closed. We have come home.

Where else could we find our identity? Of course, only the One who originally gave us our identity can restore it to its original state. We are once again His children, as we were once upon a time when we were originally created. As we exercise and live by this inner man identity, we may come very close to Jesus' own identity. We are not Christs, but we are approaching His identity, as Paul said:

> *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)*

I'll leave these thoughts for you to ponder.