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The Coop Report...

Time to begin producing the fruits of the harvest...

I was looking carefully the other day, at the stem of a cluster of grapes (after I had satisfied my craving for the grapes). As I studied the intricate, yet simple structure of the cluster's skeleton, I realized how both the vine and the stems worked together to produce the fruit I had just enjoyed.

I was also reminded that it was God's hand that had instructed the vine to produce stems, but not forever. After all, for what purpose was the vine commissioned if not to produce something useful? Rather it was His intent for the stems to eventually stop reproducing and bear fruit.

It then occurred to me that the same responsibility holds true for you and me….for all of God's *"people stems."* Just as the vine's ultimate purpose is to produce fruit, God also expects us to produce fruit.

Just what "fruit" are we supposed to produce? The fruits of our labor are tied to the Great Commission… the command that Jesus gave his 11 disciples before his ascension to Heaven.

> [18]"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19]Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
>
> *Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)*

According to the Great Commission, then, we are supposed to evangelize the nations of the world, teaching all people about Jesus' redeeming love for all *that no one should perish*. For those who accept His invitation, declaring Him as their Saviour, we should baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, according to scripture, the end result of all evangelism…of all the preaching...of all the witnessing we Christians have or will ever do before Christ's return...will be just a small percentage of all of mankind (past, present, and future). Why is this number so small? Is it because so few people who hear the Word come to Christ? Or, is it because *we* really have not been performing according to Jesus' instructions to spread the gospel? The following passages offer some insight...

> [23] Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. [24] Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
>
> *Mt 19:23-24 (NIV)*

> [13] "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. [14] But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.
>
> *Mt 7:13-14 (NIV)*

Some will hear the gospel and refuse to accept His offer of redemption. Those who have not had an opportunity to hear the gospel and have not recognized the authorship of His creation. His . Perhaps only 20% or 10% or 5% of all Christians have or will actually engage in evangelism, in preaching, in witnessing. Knowing that the percentage of names that will ultimately be recorded in the Book of Life is extremely small, it should be apparent that it is the reciprocal percentage (the 80%, the 90%, the 95% -- or more) that is crucial to bringing the unsaved to Christ before time runs out.

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After all, this is our job…according to Jesus Himself! Hmmm, so what happens if we don't do our job? This passage from the Book of Revelation speaks directly to me regarding our responsibility *to get into the world to get the Word out..*

> [9] So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." [10] I took the *little book* out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. [11] And they said to me, *"You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."*
>
> *Rev 10:9-11 (NASB)*

The little book was sweet at first, because it does contain the names of many saints. However, after further evaluation, John realized it does not contain as many as our Lord wants to include in His Kingdom. If we fail as Christians to take the Great Commission seriously, we will commit a sin of omission. Ezekiel 33 also speaks to this great responsibility we have:

> [6] But if the sentinel sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any of them, they are taken away in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at the sentinel's hand. [7] So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. [8] If I say to the wicked, "O wicked ones, you shall surely die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand.
>
> [9] But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.
>
> *Ezekiel 33:6-9 (NRSV)*

How will you feel on the day you meet Jesus in heaven? Will you feel the bitterness of the Lamb's "small book of life" because you are saddened by the millions who heard the Word, but ignored the salvation they could have had through Jesus? Will you feel the bitterness of the Lamb's small book of life because you regret not having been the kind of witnesses our Lord commanded us to be?

We are together in Christ

Brian

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