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The Coop Report...

Harvest Time, Fruits, and Fruit Stems

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, that only moments before had provided the object of my appetite, I realized how simple and complex the vine and the stems had partnered together to eventually produce the fruits I had just enjoyed.

I was also reminded that it was God's hand that had instructed the vine *not* to continue to knit new stems forever, but rather it was His intent (purpose) for those stems to produce fruit. God's creativeness has predetermined just how many new stems and stems from these stems that can continue to grow before He provided for the *budding* of the fruits.

It then occurred to me that the same responsibility holds true for you and me….for all of God's people. Just as the vine's ultimate purpose is to produce the fruit, man must have an ultimate purpose 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 bring people to Christ…to bring the Word to all nations, baptizing them, teaching them to obey God. We are to evangelize, preach, teach, and witness in any way we can to all peoples with the hope that they will come to know Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, according to scripture, the end result of all of the evangelism…of all the preaching...of all the witnessing we Christians have or will ever do before Christ's return will be 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 will come to Christ? Or, is it so small because *we* really have not been performing according to Jesus' instructions to spread the gospel? To what extent is it the former of these two propositions? I don't think we have to spend too much time with the answer. The following passages offer some insight, I think, regarding those who have had opportunity, but without commitment.

> 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).*

Although some will hear the gospel and not receive Christ, many more may not even have the opportunity to hear the gospel. 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. 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

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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)*

If we fail as Christians to take the Great Commission seriously, we will commit a sin of omission. Ezekiel 33 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" in your stomach because you are saddened by the millions who heard the Word, but ignored the salvation they could have had through Jesus; or will you feel the bitterness of the Lamb's small book of life in your stomach because you regret not having taken up the cross and continued to spread the Word? Will you be fruitful or just a fruit stem?