

Title: **THE KEEPERS OF THE VINEYARD**

Text: Song of Solomon 8:12

Readings: Office: Paul Winderl Auditorium: Bob Poncer

Subject: *Christ's Special Love For And Care Of His Church*

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Tape # V-7a and V-10b

Introduction:

Song of Songs 8:11-12 "Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand *pieces* of silver. 12 My vineyard, which *is* mine, *is* before me: thou, O Solomon, *must have* a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred."

In verse 11 several things are set before us.

1. The Church of God in this world is Christ's vineyard.
2. The Lord Jesus has trusted the care of his vineyard to chosen men (Matt. 20:1-2, 21:33).
3. Gospel preachers are the Lord's rent-gatherers. They collect his fruit and bring it in to him (John 15:16).
4. The fruit gathered and brought by these keepers of the Lord's vineyard is all the same.

The fruit brought in by each one is "*a thousand pieces of silver.*" God's servants all have the same commission to preach the gospel. They have different gifts and abilities. And their outward, apparent successes differ. Some have greater and some lesser success, at least in their own eyes and in the eyes of men. "Yet," as *John Gill* wrote, "in the faithful and honest discharge of their work, they are all so blessed by him, as to answer the end of their ministration (**ministry**) designed by him; so that he reckons that every one, even the meanest (**most humble and least gifted**), brings in his thousand pieces, as well as the more able and successful."

- II. Now, let's look at this sentence as though it were spoken by the church herself, as spoken by us to our Savior - "*My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.*" **THIS IS THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH ABOUT HER OWN RESPONSIBILITY.**

The church is Christ's own vineyard. It belongs to him. But he has let his vineyard out to many "*keepers*" (v. 11). It is our responsibility, as "*keepers*" of the vineyard, to be faithful stewards over that which the Lord has committed to our care.

- A. **Every believer is responsible for his own heart, his own life, and his own work** (Song of Sol. 1:6).

Song of Songs 1:6 "Look not upon me, because I *am* black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; *but* mine own vineyard have I not kept."

If you are a believer, if you are one of those men or women who belong to Christ, you are a "*keeper*" of the Lord's vineyard. He has placed into your hands, under your care, a part of that vineyard which is so dear to him that he paid for it with his own life's blood. Now, it is your responsibility to faithfully serve him in his vineyard.

1. Keep your heart for him. - **Proverbs** 4:23 "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life."
2. Keep your life for him.

See to it that your life upon this earth is a life lived for the honor and glory of Christ (Col. 3:1-3).

Colossians 3:1-3 "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

3. Faithfully keep to the work which he has given you.

Illustration: *Peter (John 21:20-22)*

John 21:20-22 "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? 21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*? 22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me."

Serve the Lord where you are. To serve him is to serve his people and to serve his cause. There is something that you can do, something that you are responsible to do, something that you must do for Christ, for the good of his church, for the furtherance of his gospel.

- You can visit the sick.
- You can bear faithful witness of Christ.
- You can bring folks to hear the gospel.
- You can minister to God's servants.
- You can take care of the church property.
- You can assist in the many aspects of the ministry God has given us.

B. There are some who are given special talents and special responsibilities as "keepers" in the Lord's vineyard.

With special talents come special responsibilities.

1. Some of you are teachers in the church of Christ.
2. Some of you are deacons in the church of Christ.
3. I am given the privilege and the awesome responsibility of being one of the Lord's pastors, an under-shepherd, a keeper of the Lord's vineyard.
4. Now, there is one thing which the Lord requires of us, in each of our respective places - Faithfulness! (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

As a steward under God, this is “*My vineyard*”. It is the vineyard which God has given to me. This is the sphere and place of my responsibility - It is “*before me*”.

I am not responsible for my brother, or for his work; but I am responsible for myself. I must always keep my own work before my eyes. I must go about my work, doing what I have to do, just as though there were no one else in the world to do anything.

If I see another man prospering more than myself, I will thank God for his blessing upon my brother and his work. But still, I must say, “*My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.*” I do not look for, nor do I desire another man’s place. This is the place God has for me. This is the work God has committed to my hands. This is the place where I must faithfully serve him.

What about you? Will you be faithful in the place where the Lord has put you, and faithful in the work he has set before you?

III. Now, thirdly, here is **THE DECLARATION OF THE CHURCH TO HER GREAT LORD.** - “*Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.*”

A. The fruit of the vineyard belongs to Christ and He must have it.

I trust that each one of us feels the necessity of that word “*must*”. Jesus Christ must have the fruit of his vineyard. That is to say, He must receive all the honor, all the glory, and all the praise from his church.

1. We must not applaud ourselves for God’s blessings upon us.
2. We must not exalt and magnify those who labor most zealously and those who give most generously.
3. We must not give glory and praise to the preacher through whom the Lord speaks and works.

“*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*” No flesh shall glory in his presence.

B. And the keepers of the vineyard shall receive their reward as well.

No earned rewards in heaven are promised here! But this fact must not be ignored - Those who honor God, God will honor (1 Sam. 2:30).

1 Samuel 2:30 "Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that* thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

1. Each man and woman who faithfully serves the Lord Jesus Christ will find great reward in doing so.
 - Your own soul will be profited by your faithfulness.
 - Such men and women should be highly esteemed by those who profit by their labors.
2. Those who are faithful pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons in the church should be given their proper respect and esteem.
3. And those who preach the gospel of Christ are to be rewarded for their labors by those for whom they labor.
 - a. Every true and faithful servant of God is to be esteemed very highly for his work's sake (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; (13) And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves."

One of the old writers made this observation – “Where Christ gets his due among a people, there and there only do ministers get their due. Where Christ is heartily received, the feet of them that bring glad tidings will be beautiful. Where Christ has his thousand, ministers will have their two hundred.”

- b. Those who preach the gospel are to live by the gospel. They are to be generously supported and maintained by their congregations (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:9-11).

1 Corinthians 9:9-11 "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? (10) Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. (11) If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?"

Galatians 6:6 "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."

1 Timothy 5:17-18 "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (18) For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward."

- c. This two hundred, which is the reward of God's servants, certainly includes those chosen, redeemed sinners who are converted by the Spirit of God under their influence.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 "For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20 For ye are our glory and joy."

- d. This two hundred shall be the full possession and compensation of every servant of God in eternal glory.

Here, we may seem to come far short of it. Poverty, disrespect, and reproach are the common lot of faithful gospel preachers in this world. But there is a day coming when, "*they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever*" (Dan. 12:3).

2 Timothy 4:6-8 "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Application: These three things I would have you to take home with you and meditate upon them.

1. The church belongs to Christ. It is his vineyard, always under his watchful eye and the object of his loving care.
2. It is our responsibility to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ in the place where we are, with the capacity he has given us.
3. Those who faithfully serve Christ, all of them, are to be duly honored by us.