

472 The Husbandman's Glory (January 2022 / Practical Discipleship)

In last week's Reflection we finished with the picture of the Lord God being the "patient husbandman" (from James 5.7, KJV).

In our time-frame it is easy to think that the long-promised physical return to this earth of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is indeed taking a very long time to be fulfilled as far as we are concerned, and why doesn't He just "get on with it?"!!

But the Holy Spirit gives us through James the answer to that question. Just as the husbandman waits patiently to "receive the early and latter rain", and thence "the precious fruit of the earth" (from James 5.7), just so is God our Father waiting patiently until the date (long since set) for Jesus' return to the earth is reached. We can be sure that there is nothing random in the divine diary, so we are bidden – "Be ye also patient" (from James 5.8), as we trust in the Lord's promises and timings, and meanwhile we get on with our responsibilities under the Lord.

This word "husbandman" is rarely heard these days, but as we explore its use in the King James' Version via our Concordances we can learn much about the Lord and the rest of us. The English word "husbandman" is translated from the Hebrew word "ikkar", which in essence is about digging, so it applies to someone who ploughs and sows, tills and cares for the ground and the crops and animals upon it. The first mention of "husbandman" scripturally is in Genesis 9.20 – "Noah began [to be] an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard", with much success it appears, but it did him no good (v.21ff). Other Old Testament occurrences of "husbandman" (or "-men") are worth exploring – II Chronicles 26.10 / Jeremiah 51.23 / Amos 5.16 / Zechariah 13.5.

In the New Testament the Lord Jesus speaks of the husbandman and husbandmen (from the Greek word "georgios") on two most significant occasions. The first involves His parable of "a certain householder, who planted a vineyard and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country ..." (Matthew 21.33-41 / Mark 12.1-12 / Luke 20.9-19). This parable is spoken in the temple, just a few days before Jesus' death, to "the chief priests and elders of the people" (Matthew 21.23), who have angrily demanded to know Jesus' authority – an authority which of course deeply angers and threatens them. The message of the parable is very clear to those priests and elders, entrusted as they are with the

care of God's vineyard, God's covenant people Israel, that they themselves are "the wicked husbandmen" whose attitude has always been, "Away with the prophets, and away with the Son and Heir!"; Matthew 21.41-44 must have provoked the greatest rage.

Jesus' next mention of "husbandman" is found in John 15.1 – "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman ...". This well-known passage, spoken during "the Last Supper discourse" (John Chapters 13-17), concentrates on Jesus as the Vine, and His followers – His disciples of then and now – as the branches of the Vine. Jesus teaches firstly the need for His disciples to produce spiritual fruit in great abundance (15.5a); and secondly He emphasises that such fruit can and will only come about if His disciples "abide" in Jesus the Vine (15.5b). This abiding allows the (unmentioned but equally important) "Holy Spirit sap" to flow up from the roots of the vine, through its trunk and out into its many abiding branches where the fruit will inevitably appear.

But besides the Jesus-Vine, with its Holy Spirit-sap and the Jesus-abiding disciple-branches, there is that fourth "player" in the process, namely, God the Father Himself, the Husbandman. In that role the Father gives to the Vine and its branches His caring, patient, skilled attention, with spade, fork and secateurs as it were, to ensure that the Vine with its branches brings forth abundant fruit. We must also note here the Husbandman's willingness to set aside those branches which are not doing their job, that is, they have become fruitless by no longer abiding in the Vine. They may "look the part", but in reality they are just a waste of sap and of space (John 15.6 / eg., Revelation 3.1b,14-16).

Now this picture of the Husbandman, the Vine and the branches applies to each of us as individual branches, and, to change the picture but to keep with the same message, also to the Church as the body of Christ with Christ as its Head (egs., Romans 12.4-5 / I Corinthians 12.12-14 / Ephesians 1.22-23; 4.15; 5.23). Regular "spiritual self-examination" in the presence of the Lord, and possibly of others too, as individuals and church members, is surely one means of ensuring our continued faithful abiding in the Vine (eg., Matthew 6.6-7 / Galatians 6.2 / James 5.16).

As we wait patiently for the Lord's return for His true Church, we set our wills to "abide" in the Vine, and thereby allow the Husbandman's fruit, graciously growing even in our lives, to add to the Husbandman's glory.