

Mine own vineyard have I not kept The Song of Solomon 1:6

There is great emphasis on the environment today ... and rightly so. ... Not because of any reputed 'greenhouse effect' or 'global warming', but we, - as mankind, and believers in particular, - were given our first responsibility by God to look after what He has created. Indeed, Christians ought to be at the forefront in the stewardship of God's creation.

The earth is not ours, - it is His. When Moses spoke with Pharaoh, prior to leaving Egypt, Moses told this unbeliever who had the scientists with all their ideas and theories at his 'beck and call', the earth is the Lord's (Ex. 9:29). David repeated the same truth, Ps. 24:1 The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Paul believed it too, I Cor. 10:26 For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

The Bible teaches us we have great responsibilities in the upkeep of our world ... and yet, its present and its future are not in the hands of men and women. Governments cannot legislate and determine how it must develop. If the future of this world was left in the hands of mankind ... yes, it would destroy itself.

It is lovely going out into the countryside or walking through a beautiful garden and holding it in your mind that all of creation owes its glory and its beauty to our God. When God spoke with Job, He asked him mighty questions that reached deep into his soul, 38:4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... 6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? ... 9 When I made the cloud ... and thick darkness ... 12 Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place ... 33 Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?

... And yes, God has words to say to those who attribute His creation to another, 38:2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? ... 40:2 Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.

Our Heavenly Father looks at the seed that falls into the ground and He watches over it as He causes it to grow. The animals, - even the most common of them ... Mt. 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. And even these sparrows have a place around the Throne, Ps. 84:1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh

crieth out for the living God. 3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

Indeed, wise old Solomon got it right, Eccles. 3: 11 He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

It is Harvest Sunday, and we are turning our attention to giving God thanks for His abundant provisions. We thank Him for answering the request of the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, Mt. 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread.

He Himself loved the outdoors, - He brought His disciples through the fields of grain, into the garden of olives, along by the fig tree, down by the Sea of Galilee and into the hills of the same region. He loved nature for it spoke of the grandeur of God.

There are a number of gardens in the Bible, - indeed, the Bible begins and ends with a garden ... and it has the Garden of Gethsemane in the middle, but there are other gardens too. We are going to consider one of them in particular; actually, to be more precise, it is a vineyard.

The first time a vineyard is mentioned in the Bible it is the vineyard Noah planted in Gen. 9:20. Naboth also had a vineyard stolen from him by King Ahab (I Kgs. 21). The Psalmist pleaded with the Lord to come and restore the glory of Israel and he used the similar picture, 80: 14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; 15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. ... And then we come to our verse for this Harvest Sunday, 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.

First of all, let's look at the background of this *keeper of the vineyards*. As you read through this Old Testament book you will discover the *keeper of the vineyards* is a beautiful young girl whose eye is on her beloved who is at present in a far country. She's looking forward to his return and she knows that one day he is coming back *for her* and she will be his bride.

As you can appreciate, she spends much of her time watching to see if he is coming. She is constantly looking out for him, “Maybe he will come today!”

Of course, you know we can understand this love story can point to the love affair between the Bridegroom Who is the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bride who is His beloved Church. It is a love affair that began in the Council Room of Heaven when even before we loved Him, He first loved us. ... Oh ... and she knew it ...

The Happiness She Enjoys thy love is better than wine” (v.2) ... thy name is as ointment poured forth” (v.3)

* From the outset we are met with the intimacy of this relationship between the Bride and the Bridegroom, Christ and the Church.

* The Bride is describing the joy and the happiness she delights in because of her love and commitment to the Master.

* It is of the most precious value to her; it is like the most beautiful savour/smell as it fills the room. Even when she cannot see Him, she knows He is there by the fragrance of His presence ... I know that Thou art here!

* It takes up her whole attention; indeed, the very mention of His Name is to her as the ointment/perfume poured forth.

* When we translate her thoughts into the language of the believer, - saved by God’s sovereign and wonderful grace, - the Name of the Lord Jesus is uppermost and pre-eminent in this most beautiful of songs.

* Jesus Christ is the very essence of her living, - the reason she exists.

* ... The full attention of the Bride, - the Church, - is upon her Master, - He occupies her every thought. In another era in Scripture a Godly saint cried out, Job 19:25 I know that my redeemer liveth.

* How important is Jesus Christ to you? Perhaps this is how you feel about Him, - He is your Saviour, ... you love Him with every breath and, - as we say, - with every bone in your body.

* He’s not merely a character out of a book, nor someone you visit once a week; neither is He someone Who is only *part* of your life,

* He occupies the centre of your very existence, ... and you understand **the happiness this woman enjoys**.

* Yes, you have a relationship with Christ, one that started when He looked upon you, and He loved you with an everlasting love, and He drew you unto Himself. Jn. 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.

- * This woman loved her master because in love and in grace, - she recognised she did not warrant His invitation, - but nevertheless she testified, *Songs 2:4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.*
- * You know that it was for you Jesus went to the cross of Calvary, and He died to demonstrate His love for you ... even more than that ...
- * His death and sacrifice has saved you from sin, made you into a new creature; through His 'love letter', - the Bible, - you have come to see how much you mean to Him.
- * ... and you identify with the feelings of this woman in the *Song of Solomon*, ... **and the happiness she enjoys.**

THE HOPE SHE EMBRACES

Draw me, ... after Thee (v.4)

- * It is only natural when you love someone you want to be with them, - you don't want to be parted! Where they are you want to be.
- * Well, that is the case here too, - she longs to be with her Betrothed.
- * She wants, - more than anything else, - to be with the One Who has entered her life and changed it so dramatically, - her Bridegroom.
- * It is not that she is not happy where she is, - but she knows that where He is is the place of total fulfilment and happiness.
- * She knows too that He feels even stronger towards her than she could ever possibly feel towards Him. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, one day He will come for her and take her away with Him, ... and she can even see it in her mind's eye, *the King hath brought me into his chambers:*
- * By faith, she awaits the glorious moment when she, as the Bride, - the glorified Church of Christ, - will walk along the golden street of Heaven and be presented in all her beauty before the King of Heaven ... and she will stand there, presented with her Lord and Saviour and Master, - the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ Himself, - and she will be pure and altogether beautiful, ... *a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:27)*
- * Do you feel you are precious unto God? Do you feel He loves you, and He has loved you forever? ... The joy and contentment you have in Christ is so real and alive ... it takes hold of you that you can almost feel the very physical presence of the Lord Jesus as if He were standing in bodily form beside you.
- * Paul expressed it, - *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*
- * Yes, this woman enjoyed the love of her Master, and how much more she yearned that He would come very soon and take her away.
- * She's looking for Him; she's expecting Him; she's waiting for Him every moment.

- * Indeed the Lord Jesus is coming back again, and the more I study the Word of God the more I am convinced He is coming soon.
- * Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, the Loved One of the Church, is coming back again,
- * ... and just as this woman was looking for the Master she loves, so the Church must be looking for His return.
- * We see the signs of His coming around us, it is getting nearer. The world is progressing along exactly the way the Holy Spirit describes in God's Word.
- * And the very last words of Scripture echo the words of this woman,
Rev. 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. 20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.
- * The arms of the Lord Jesus Christ are outstretched and will soon embrace His Bride for He is attentive to her cry, - Draw me ... after Thee (v.4).
- * *It's a beautiful picture, isn't it? It stretches throughout Scripture. It is the dream that will come true for every born-again believer who knows Christ as Saviour and Lord.*
- * *Jesus Christ loves you and, - in the plan of God, - Heaven will not be complete (and I say this very carefully), Heaven will not be complete until every one of Christ's Redeemed is gathered in.*
- * *But let's now read further into the chapter, - there is a very clear change of mood. The delight and the enjoyment seem to disappear. What has happened?! Maybe she has made a mistake? Maybe she has pinned her hopes on a 'dream' that will never come true. No, it's not that, ... let's look closer.*

The Happiness She Enjoys (v.2 thy love is better than wine ... v.3 thy name is as ointment poured forth (v.3) ... **The Hope She Embraces** (v.4 Draw me, ... after Thee (v.4) ... but now look ...

The Heaviness She Encounters mine own vineyard have I not kept (v.6)

- * Yes, she is still taken with her Master for she is able to speak about the joy and delight she sees in the face of her companions.
- * Her Master is still the same, - He hasn't changed; His promise to her has not been broken, - He is coming back for her again, just as He promised ... but she is out in her vineyard now.
- * When the vine trees were planted she cared for them so meticulously and so conscientiously, - she started off well ... but she looks at her vineyard again and a certain sorrow enters her now.
- * The weeds are starting to shoot up in places they never did before.

- * Certain parts of the garden are starting to grow wild. Oh, she never allowed this to happen, - she had always been so careful in her vineyard.
- * But she is being reminded now that she falls so far short of the mark.
- * By all that surrounds her, compared to Him, - even though she is beautiful, - she is dark (v.6). She is not what she would like to be. She knows she cannot measure up to her Master. ... She looks at herself and she wonders what there is about her that He could ever love. She had been out in the searing heat of the sun too much ... and she felt she had lost her attractiveness.
- * No matter how much she loves Him and lives for him she still can never compare with His beauty, and she makes a very sad claim,
 - My mother's children [i.e. my brothers] were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*
- * In the midst of all the happiness, the joy, and the looking forward to seeing the Master she has neglected to look after her own vineyard.
- * It wasn't her fault; she was genuinely pressured into it by her brothers,
- * Time passed so quickly, she was so busy, - legitimately busy, - and she had forgotten about her own vineyard for which she *alone* was responsible.
- * Do you see what she is describing here? She was so caught up with other things, - even good things, - that her relationship with her Master, - Whom she loved more than life itself, - had been relegated into second place.
- * What a sad picture! She ought not to have allowed *anything*, - no matter how legitimate it sounded, - to have squeezed in between her and her Beloved!
- * There's no excuse ... and in the same way, our relationship with God is the most important aspect of our lives, - He takes priority over everything.
- * Can you identify with her? Do you see what she's talking about?
- * Yes, there is no doubt you love the Lord Jesus; you love Him with all your heart, ... but maybe something has crept in to threaten That relationship,
- * Your eyes have been taken off the Saviour and all of a sudden *it's dark around you*.
- * A beautiful young girl that has come into the glory of the sunshine and she is dark, she is black, ... she has become so unappealing.

Let's not stay in the dark too long though because ... look! We've got a woman here who knows how to deal with the darkness. How did she cope? What did she do?

THE HELPER SHE ENTREATS Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth (v.7)

- * Many another one would have given up, ... not this woman!

- * She came into conversation with her Master; look at the words of verse 7
Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? - this woman is not for giving up.
- * She has known the love of her Master and enjoyed His attention,
- * And look, when she spoke to Him, - when she brought before Him all that was in her heart, - He had an answer for her ... specifically for her, vv.8-13.
- * He told her to return to the joy she shared with Him, - He told her how precious she was to Him.
- * Where she could see no beauty in herself He made her see how much He loved her, - and what she meant to Him.
- * “You are precious to the Master!” ... and not only has He blessed her with the rows of jewels, and the chains of gold around her neck, - but look, - do you see it again? v. 11 We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.
- * *That’s the work of the Trinity*, - your salvation is dependent upon the work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *All of Himself* God has invested in you! ... And because of that the promises of God never run out! ... *and she is back at the table again* (v.12)

CONCLUSION We all know we need to keep our gardens, - if you don’t, the weeds blow in and very soon it will be out of control.

- * Neither can you afford to let someone else look after *your* garden, - it’s your responsibility, it’s your duty to tend it and care for it.
- * You need to watch out something does not slip in and in next-to-no-time it threatens to take the place of Christ.
- * There are the ‘little foxes’, - of 2:15, - and they look so cute ... skipping about and playing and rolling in the grass ... but the ‘cute’ little foxes spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.
- * Is God speaking to you this Harvest morning? He it is that provides the vineyard and the vines to produce the grapes. He tells you again to be fruitful, and multiply and replenish (Gen. 1:28).
- * Spiritually feed from the Word of God; spiritually ‘water’ the plants with the fresh and Living Water. He is the Lord of the Harvest and He has provided all you need for a bumper crop.
- * On examination this woman discovered, - *mine own vineyard have I not kept* ... the sin of neglecting God had crept in upon her.
- * May His Word keep us from such a condition, and may we be careful the fruit we produce brings glory and joy to our most precious Bridegroom.