



October 1, 2006

Making Jelly

The past several weeks I have been making jelly and this year was one of the best seasons for grapes that I have seen in a while. The fruit was fat and plenteous and while other parts of the country suffered with drought, we had just the right amount of rain and sun at the right times. During the juicing process, I kept thinking how wonderful it was to be blessed with them. After passing the crushed and boiled grapes through a colander and then a cheesecloth strainer I watched the deep red juice ripple as the drops slowly collected in the pot. I would go away for a while and then return to check the progress. The color deepened and looked like blood as it dripped. It had more apparent body than the commercial grape juices that we are used to and it was a deep red, almost maroon. The body of the liquid made each drop appear heavy as it fell to the surface below and was absorbed. Christ chose the "fruit of the vine" (**Matt 26.26-29**) to represent his blood that was to be shed on the cross. Looking at the drops as they fell I saw the resemblance. This is not usually apparent in the clear, colored commercial juices employed in our observance of the Lord's Supper. This was the real thing and made a significant point. As I stirred the grapes when they were boiling I realized the only thing I had done was pick them. Earlier in the year I trimmed the vines a little bit but the real work was done by God. Christ was set apart as the sacrifice for sin before the foundation of the world (**Titus 1.2., Eph 1.3-4**) and it was the work of God that prepared and brought him into the world. It was in the mind of Christ to offer himself for the sins of the world (**Phil 2.5-8**) and it is through his blood that we have remission of sins (**Rom 5.9, 1 Cor 10.16**). The power and blessing of God can be seen in many things and even in such a natural event as harvest we can see these lessons. The grapes ripened in stages, since not all of them had the same exposure to the sun. In a similar fashion Christians do not always mature spiritually at the same rate. Those who never mature are not usable and will eventually be cast away. Some grapes went bad while on the vine and fell to the ground below. Christians can lose their objective, compromise their faith and fall away. Paul was aware of this reality and was diligent not to fall short of the things that God wanted him to do (**1 Cor 9.27**). After a few trips cutting clusters from the vines it was becoming a chore to some degree. I thought that it was getting too hard after working all day and doing everything else that this was one thing that I could let go but then if I did I would not have any jelly. I would not enjoy the fruits of my labors. Many grapes would go bad or be picked off by animals and birds who were willing to do what I did not. (**1 Cor 3.7-8**), Keeping my mind on the end result, I kept up with the vines and rapidly saw my refrigerator, and bags and entryway fill with grapes. The house was full of the sweet smell and each time I walked through the door I thought about what I would have missed out on. In the same manner there are souls that need to be taught who are ripening on the vine. If we do not try to reach them and tell them the gospel they will go bad or will be devoured by the devil just as we will be (**1 Pet 5.8**). If we teach we will reach the lost who are honestly seeking for the Lord and as we enter the buildings where we worship the sounds of praise on the part of the saved will remind us that the work that we have done is worth it (**Lk 10.2**). There are many times when opportunities have presented themselves and those who have expressed an interest in learning have not made it easy to reach them. We may have a tendency to take the easy way out and leave them hanging on the vine so to speak but by doing so we will never know the true fruits of our own labors nor will we see the results that we want. When the first jars of jelly were ready and more grapes were ripe, I realized that as Christians we can let the harvest rot where it is and spend money for what others package, or, I could use what God provided. Even as Christians we have to decide if it's going to be homemade, or Welch's. God prefers homemade, that's the good stuff.

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