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FRUITFULNESS: THE CALLING

by Dan Trygg

When Jesus was with His disciples in the upper room on that last night before His death, He wanted to share with them some of what was going to be taking place. He wanted to tell them ahead of time, so that they would understand and be prepared for the changes that were coming. Besides telling them that He was going to be leaving them, He began to speak of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and began to unfold more of the big picture of what God's plan would be for their future ministry. At the very heart and center of this explanation, He told them the allegory of the vine and the branches, and brought up the issue of fruitfulness (Jn. 15:1-17).

Many observations can be drawn from this illustration, but there are some very definite statements that stand out above all others as central to Jesus' teaching. The one principle that is emphasized is this: **God wants His people to bear fruit.** We see (from vs. 2) that fruitless branches are of no value to Him. They are removed, set aside, and ultimately suited only for destruction (vs. 6). Furthermore, if any branch shows any promise of fruitfulness, the Master Vinedresser sets about to promote more fruitfulness (vs. 3). The optimal situation, the ultimate goal of Jesus' exhortation to abide in Him, is the production of much fruit (vss. 5,8). **Why? Because it brings glory to the Father, and it demonstrates the genuineness and reality of our life in Christ** (vs. 8). The Father is exalted and honored as we clearly express the same quality of life as that which was revealed in Jesus' earthly sojourn (Cf. Jn. 1:14,17,18).

God wants fruitfulness. He watches for it. He works to produce it in us, and to encourage it in our lives. In fact, Jesus said that it was to be our vocation as His disciples to be fruit-bearers. He specifically chose and appointed us to bear fruit (vs. 16). The original Greek literally says that He selected us and placed us in order that we might go up (or go our way) and bear fruit. The activity of going about producing fruit is the purpose we have been put to, or appointed to.

This idea is also reflected in other New Testament passages. Eph. 2:8-10 speaks of how God took the initiative to save us by His grace. We are the product of His gracious work. The passage goes on to say, however, that **we have been created in Christ Jesus for good works.** Furthermore, God's involvement in this process goes far beyond a mere desire to see fruitfulness in us. **He is not only personally involved in fitting us and preparing us to do His will, He even prearranges the situations that are especially suited for us to express His working in us.** Again, in Tit. 3:4-8, we are told, on the one hand, how our good deeds are worthless as far as making us acceptable to God, or as a basis for saving us (vss. 5,6), while, on the other hand, we observe Paul reminding Titus to exhort the believers to set their minds to do good deeds. This is because, as the apostle had said earlier in 2:14, **the very purpose behind God's redemptive action was to "purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."**

A final principle from Jn. 15, found in vs. 16, is that **God is seeking not just any fruit, but fruit that will remain**, i.e., enduring fruit. **There is to be an eternal dimension to our fruit-bearing.** In other words, fruit-bearing is not just in the doing of good things as ends in themselves. This is viewing fruit-bearing from a temporal perspective only. What could Jesus have meant by fruit that abides? What of "non-abiding fruit"? What do we know of that? Is it not possible to do actions that have no permanence, no lasting impact? Certainly, in our experience with the natural world, we see fruit that is not permanent. Fruit of plants or animals, for example, may be eaten, or die, or decompose. That fruit is gone forever. On the other hand, we are to be, and to produce, abiding, living, continuing fruit. Being good, or doing good things, can often pass away as rapidly as the second hand on the clock sweeps by. There is much more

to Christian fruit-bearing than merely being moral or helpful people. The fruit that God is looking for is not contained in momentary expressions of goodness or "niceness" alone. There is a much broader reality to fruit-bearing than this aspect only. However, we can discuss that at a later time.

Father, we see that You desire fruitfulness from us. Not only do You desire it, You *expect* it. You reject all that is unfruitful and dead. However, we thank You, Lord, that, as our Master Vinedresser, You tenderly cultivate and encourage us in growth, so that we can come to full bloom in Jesus. May the glory of our blossoming lives adequately show forth Your working in and with us. May they declare Your beauty, and be a testimony of Your care and wisdom. Father, lead us in the way of fruitfulness. Keep us from every distraction, every false way. Lead us in the way of true and abundant life, with its abiding fruitfulness.

FOR MEDITATION: John 15:8,16.

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain..."

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THE NEED FOR A VISION

Proverbs 29:18 states "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law" (NASB). Vision. The word draws our minds to natural parallels associated with our sense of sight. One's physical vision can be clouded, limited, out of focus, distracted, pre-occupied, distorted or totally blinded. In our common speech, we often use these examples as figuratively descriptive of one's mental acuity. Could they not also be applicable to one's spiritual awareness?

It is readily apparent that our decisions, whether for action or inaction, are directly influenced by our perception of the reality around us. If we perceive danger or discomfort, we will take steps to change our situation. If we think there is no need, that all is well and comfortable, we tend to relax and let down. What Prov. 29:18 expresses is that unless a person sees clearly that (1) a goal is worth pursuing, or, (2) a danger is worth avoiding, he will not take any measure to change his or her life. A complacency will set in that will cause him/her to settle for a mundane mediocrity, with its accompanying comforts and pleasures (and there *are* pleasures and securities in the status quo!). What we have in the spiritual realm is a *perception* problem. To be more specific, our *lack* of perception often produces a motivational muddle, when there is a very real and present need to rouse ourselves and induce change.

We need to see clearly what the state of the church is in our day. We need to realize that the way we are "doing church" is not accomplishing what it is intended to. We are *not* raising up an army of mature soldiers for Christ. We are *not* effectively reaching the unchurched in our society. Our traditional church activities are *not* effective at equipping us to do ministry. They are *not* leading us into life-transforming relationship with God. They are *not* producing communities of love and unity which dramatically display the reality of Jesus to a needy world.

We need a vision. We need to see clearly the danger of our ineffectiveness so that we will rouse ourselves. Then we need a positive revelation that will motivate us to pursue change, something worth paying a price for. May God give us a glimpse through His eyes, may we feel with His heart, and may we hear His counsel, that we may affect meaningful change.