

Living a Fruitful Life

The fruit of teaching others

Intro: From the beginning of the year we've been thinking together about "living a fruitful life." We've talked about the importance of being fruitful, the keys to being fruitful, the need to get rooted by personal daily Bible study and by assembling with the saints and how to get more out of and give more in our assemblies. And then we've talked about the kind of fruit that comes from such a life. There is the fruit of godly character (or moral excellence) manifest by the Christian virtues. There is the fruit of our mouths (or lips) manifested by edifying speech. There is the fruit of good deeds we do from day to day. And finally today, there is the fruit of teaching others.

The importance of being fruitful by teaching others

It is interesting that in the Scripture one of the most common uses of "fruitful" has to do with reproduction. The command to be fruitful was a part of the creation blessing:

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:27-28)

God renewed the blessing to Noah after the flood:

And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it." (Gen. 9:7)

Likewise in God's "new creation," the church, God desires that we "be fruitful and multiply." It is cause and effect. As God's people bear fruit, they also multiply. Jesus sent out His disciples with this goal:

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, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. (Jn. 15:16)

And we Christ's blessing fulfilled in the lives of his apostle in the early church:

And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. (Ac. 6:7)

Likewise we see Paul's passion for continued fruit-bearing among the Gentiles:

And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. (Rom. 1:13)

And even when confronted with the possibility of death and the prospects of being with the Lord, there was one thing that made Paul look back with equal desire:

But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. (Phil. 1:22)

All these things show us the importance of being fruitful; but what motivates us to bear fruit by teaching others?

Finding motivation to be fruitful in teaching others

Perhaps no chapter of Scripture gives us more insight into fruit-bearing by teaching others than John 4. Jesus was on his way from Judea back to Galilee. He was passing through Samaria; and both hungry and tired, he sat down at the well Jacob had dug centuries before. A woman comes; and though she is both a Samaritan and a sinner, Jesus talks with her and leads her to know who He is and her discovery of Him takes her away joyfully to tell the rest of her village about Jesus.

In the aftermath of that episode, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the blessings of bearing fruit through teaching others. The disciples had gone to get food; and while they were gone he had been teaching the Samaritan woman. Now as they offer him food he responds to them in an unusual way:

*But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." The disciples therefore were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus *said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." (Jn. 4:32-38)*

Jesus revealed four important truths about evangelism that will motivate us as well to bear fruit by teaching others. Teaching others is...

Satisfying

Jesus astounded the disciples with the claim that he had food they did not know about; and as usual, Jesus spoke spiritually and they understood physically. For Jesus, to do God's work supplied "food" for His inner being!

If we are truly disciples of Jesus, there is nothing more important to us than doing God's work; and God is in the soul-saving business!

Urgent

This episode could well have taken place in the early spring when the grain fields were still green with the winter wheat. Perhaps based on that scene Jesus said, "Do not say there are four months, and then comes the harvest. The fields are always ready for reaping; start to work now!"

Jesus wants us to believe that the work of teaching is urgent. It is our reason for existence (1 Pet. 2:9). And when we neglect

to teach others the gospel, we are really saying, "God's truth is not all that important!" We are saying, "The good news is not really all that good!" It suggests that we do not properly evaluate ourselves the blessings God has given us!

Rewarding

God rewards those who do His work! The farmer has incentive to work hard in the fields because he knows he will gather the grain that will be his bread and give him life. So, in a similar way, our dedication to God's work results in the gathering of fruit for eternal life.

We also receive the joy and satisfaction of rescuing the lost from destruction. Think of what it will be like to praise God in heaven beside someone you helped to bring there!

Unifying

Those who work together to save souls are joined in a spiritual bond that will not easily be separated. They share the joys of their mutual efforts and there is a sense of fellowship in God's work! One often sense that comradery in the epistles of Paul as he speaks of "fellow-workers", "comrades", Phil. 4:3; 2:25 When we bear fruit together by teaching others, we too will be joined in common cause in a way that will keep us unified.

Conclusion: Let us make it our goal to bear fruit for the Lord and share a word from God to every person that will listen. Sometimes we do not recognize the vast potential we have for bearing fruit. While in AL I came across this new song written a few years ago by Anne Stevens, "How many apples are there in a seed?"

In the fruitful tree there is an apple; Deep within the apple many seeds;
So the Father set all things in order, knowing just what everything would need.
You may count the seeds within the apple, you may count the apples on the tree.
You may count the trees within the orchard, who can count the apples in a seed?

From the mind of God before creation, from the heart of heaven, mercy's plan,
Bringing peace to every tribe and nation, heaven's hope for lost and dying man,
God would take the brightest Star of heaven, send Him down to hang upon a tree.
Tell the world that Jesus is redemption, say He came to pardon you and me.

Do not doubt that someone will believe it, though a hundred hear and turn away,
For if only one heart will receive it, through the one a thousand may obey.
It may be a gentleman of ninety, it may be a child of only ten.
Sow the precious seed for the Almighty, you can watch it multiply again.

Chorus:

Who can count the apples in a seed? Who can say how much the fruit will grow?
(Who can say how far the Word will go?) Who can know the harvest of
tomorrow? Who can count the apples in a seed?

Hymn written and arranged by Anne Stevens. Copyright 1999.

Our labors will not be in vain. Let us focus on a verse with which we started this series:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. (Ps. 1:1-3)

May be ever be that kind of fruit-bearing disciple!