

Fruit for the Father

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[0 : 00] So grateful week after week for the faithful ministry of our praise team and John as he selects the songs, the music that we will sing, kind of leading our hearts to the throne of grace and helping to prepare us for the message of the word.

It's a unique opportunity to be able to be brought into the presence of God through his word and singing songs that testify of the wondrous work of Christ.

It's a blessing. Well, several years ago, or at least I should say a couple years ago, I ran across this story of something that happened in Pontiac, Michigan.

There was a, I don't want to be morbid, but there was a woman who was found dead in her car in her garage.

Now, that wouldn't seem to be so significant or unusual except for the fact that she had been dead for six years in her car, in her garage.

[1 : 18] You might ask, how in the world could anything like that go unnoticed for so long? Well, partly because this woman often went on road trips, was often traveling about the country and traveling about the world, and her neighbors never really saw her much anyway.

And so they didn't think anything was unusual, the fact that they hadn't seen her. And this woman, knowing that she often traveled, set up special deposits that were made from her bank account to all of the various places where she needed to pay her bills.

The utilities and the mortgage and all these other areas as well. And her neighbors, really trying to make sure that they kept appearances, often mowed her lawn for her so that no one missed this woman.

Except for the fact that the bank, after the funds began to run dry, decided that they needed to foreclose on the house, as you would expect.

And after a period of time of this home being foreclosed and notices being made and things showing up in the mail, they sent a person to the house to prepare it for sale.

[2 : 38] And the worker who went to repair the roof, peering into the garage, noticed that there was not only a car in the garage, but a figure seated in the front seat.

And this mummified woman who had been there for six years was finally discovered. Now, you might say, what in the world does this have to do with our message for this morning?

Except for the fact that it's an interesting story. This morning, we're going to look at the significance of fruitfulness. It's easy for us to play games.

It's easy for us to have the appearance of life and activity and progress when all the while there is lifelessness and emptiness in your heart.

There is the moving through rituals. There is the appearance of service and function and duty and coming to church and being involved in ministry and doing your devotions and praying and having things to share in Sunday school and participating in small group and all of the things that have the appearance of life when actually there is deadness in your heart.

[4 : 04] There is barrenness spiritually in your life. There is this moving through the spiritual life that has the appearance of fruitfulness, but at the end of the day, it really is deadness.

Jesus, in our passage this morning in John chapter 15, wants to help emphasize the fact that fruitfulness is not only something that God expects for our life, but fruitfulness is possible through the ministry of God into our lives.

Jesus does such a tremendous job at making things simple. And if you're anything like me, you appreciate things that are simple. Jesus, who helped us consolidate the law and the prophets in two simple phrases, love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself, wants to help us understand the significance of fruitfulness and realize the simplicity of fruitfulness and, as we'll see,

results in or comes from a life that is abiding in Him.

As this first point notes, fruitfulness is demanded by the Father. So turn with me, if you would, to John chapter 15. If you're visiting with us this morning, it's on page 901 in the Pew Bible in front of you.

I want to read these first 11 verses for us, and I want us to make some observations, and then we'll work through this passage to see that fruitfulness is only possible as you are connected to Christ.

[5 : 59] Let me read this for us. Beginning in verse 1, it says this, I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away.

And every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine.

Neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

[7 : 07] By this, my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. Just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

As we've seen through the gospel of John, John is no stranger of repetition. John actually gives himself to repeated phrases, and thoughts, and ideas, that courses through the entire book of John. And here we find again, John continues to come back to the same kinds of themes. Can you see what he's trying to emphasize in these verses?

The two phrases or words that come to the surface consistently are the words abide, and the word bear fruit. God demands that we bear fruit.

[8 : 18] He expects it to be true of the life of everyone who is connected to Christ. Now just by way of background, I want to remind us where we are in the flow of this study.

We are in the last few hours of Christ's life. We are moving ever closer to the point at which Jesus will be taken captive.

He will stand trial. He will be crucified and killed on the cross. These are the final moments of Jesus' time with his disciples. And so the things that he wishes to express to the disciples at this point are the things of utmost significance.

We find at the end of chapter 14, Jesus, using these words, says, Rise, let us go from here. They had previously been in the upper room, enjoying this Passover meal together, and now they are moving out of this upper room through the city of Jerusalem, perhaps down into the Kidron Valley at this point, viewing the vineyards that is populating or dotting the landscape, and moving their way over into the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus will be taken captive.

And the thing that seems to be on Jesus' mind as he is providing these parting words to his disciples is the significance of the Father.

[9 : 47] Now, the Apostle John is caught up and blown away by this concept of God being the Father. In the Gospel of John, John alludes to the fact that God is the Father 122 times.

One time for every 10 verses in the Gospel of John, John alludes to this incredible concept of God being Father.

And in these final parting words, these chapters 14, 15, and 16, John uses the concept, the idea of God being Father 45 times in 82 verses.

One time for almost every two verses, John is helping us to understand that Jesus is trying to emphasize and focus on the fact that God is Father.

Why is that significant? Well, it's significant because Jesus has just told his disciples that he is going to be moving away. He's going to be departing from them, and the only thing that will help to secure them, will keep them enduring through the hardship that they will face, is the understanding that God is Father.

[11 : 14] That God will uphold them and help them and keep them through the mission that Christ has put them on. How will that take place?

What is that mission? And how will it be accomplished? Jesus, right out of the gate here in John chapter 15, wants to help his disciples understand that fruitfulness is significant, and fruitfulness is only accomplished in the Son.

Fruitfulness is accomplished in the Son. Jesus here at the beginning of verse 1 says, I am the true vine.

We'll dig into this as we move through this passage. But a cursory look of this passage helps us understand the significance of fruitfulness, and Jesus wants his disciples to understand that if they will be fruitful, they need to rest in Christ.

He is the vine. Although this is the first time that Jesus has really dealt with this subject of him being the vine, and the whole concept of fruitfulness in relationship to the vineyard, this was not a foreign concept to the Jews.

[12 : 34] As a matter of fact, through this Passover week, they would have read Psalm 80. And Psalm 80 helps to illustrate the fact that God had commissioned Israel to be his vine.

It says in Psalm 80, you're welcome to turn there if you like. Psalm 80, verse 3 is where it begins. Again, if you're visiting with us, you can find that passage on page 491.

Psalm 80, verse 3 says, Enemies laugh among themselves.

Verse 8, You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

[14 : 10] Verse 14, Turn again, O God of hosts. Look down from heaven and see. Have regard for this vine. This concept of Israel being the vine was not foreign to the people of Israel.

And yet God had rejected his vine because the vine had not only been unfruitful, the vine had rejected God's commands. Coming to the forefront of this is Isaiah chapter 5.

Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 to 7. We won't read the whole thing, but it's on page 569. It says, Let me sing for my beloved, my love song concerning his vineyard.

My beloved has a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared its stones and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it, and he hewed out a wine vat in it.

He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Jumping down to verse 7. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasing plant.

[15 : 25] He looked for justice, but behold bloodshed. For righteousness, but behold an outcry.

Although God had desired that Israel would be this fruitful vine, would be a reflection of fruitfulness in the land, they had actually rebelled against God and had rejected his commands and had gone the way of the nations.

So Christ, in coming to earth, was not only the fulfillment of the law, was not only the seed of Abraham, but here we find he was the vine.

He was the ultimate fulfillment of what God expected for Israel. He was the only one who satisfied God's demands for his people and said that those who want to experience the blessings of being fruitful as God had commissioned them to be will only be able to experience that as they are in Christ.

Those who would be fruitful vine must recognize the imperative of life with Christ, trusting in him, relying on him. He is the only one who meets the demands of the Father.

Christ is the vine. This morning, I would ask you this question. I'll continue to ask as we go along. Are you a fruitful vine?

[16 : 57] You can only be a fruitful vine if you are placing your only hope and confidence in the work of Christ as being the only one who can satisfy God's demands.

It's accomplished in the Son. Second of all, we find that it is assisted by the Godhead. It's assisted by the Godhead.

We find that here in verse 2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit.

Now this is an amazing concept. This ought to blow you away. God has given himself to specific and unique ministry to you.

Those of us who are recipients of grace of God, forgiveness for sin, called into fellowship with him, we should be serving him. And yet here we find in this verse, the Godhead is serving you.

[18 : 12] The Godhead is working on your behalf through Christ and through the Father to create fruitfulness in your life.

Isn't that amazing? And here we find not only the Son as being the life source, the vine for the branches, but now we find that the Father is intricately involved in your life to help you produce more fruit.

There is this dual ministry of the Father. It says, Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes.

What is taking place there? What is happening? We find that God is involved in cutting off or cultivating. He's involved in destroying or disciplining.

The Father takes special interest in the vine, determining its fruitfulness and acting as a result. Now one of the things that may cause a bit of concern in your mind, we run up against a theological wall in this verse.

[19 : 26] Maybe something that is confusing to you as it was to me. The language here says, Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

What in the world is Jesus talking about? Are people losing their salvation? And he's judging them because of a lack of fruitfulness? Is that what's happening here?

Who are these branches? Can those who are in Christ be fruitless? Can those who are in Christ be taken away and thus lose their salvation?

Well, as we look at the Gospel of John, we need to understand that Jesus is dealing with his disciples before the era of the new church. Jesus is dealing with the disciples in an old covenant understanding.

Where connection to Christ and association with Christ was understood as being in something rather than this union that we'll find out about Christ later on once the Holy Spirit comes.

[20 : 35] We can see this throughout the Gospel of John. Turn with me back to John chapter 8 and you can see how this plays out in people who supposedly believe in Christ.

You can be a person of faith and not be a person who is saved. Notice this in John 8 verse 30.

As he was saying these things, many, what is the word there? believed in him. Verse 31. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

Does that sound familiar? But clearly, as we move through this passage, we find that this group of individuals who supposedly believed in Christ were not receptive to his word.

so that we find here in verse 44, Jesus makes a very clear statement that says, you are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

[21 : 44] He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. There was no abiding relationship with Christ.

There was no abiding relationship with Christ's words and their initial belief was evidenced by the corruption of their heart.

We find back in chapter 6, another group of individuals who were also connected to Christ but who abandoned him.

We find that in chapter 6, there's this great interest in Jesus because of him feeding the 5,000. But once we get to verse 60, we see this.

When many of his disciples heard his sayings, they said, this is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that the disciples were grumbling about this, begins to confront them over the issue.

[22 : 48] We find in verse 66, after this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. Even those who were followers of Christ, who even were considered disciples of him, who followed him wherever he went, abandoned Christ once the word confronted their hearts.

And what could be said of Judas? Judas, who was one of the 12, and Jesus helping the disciples, the 11, understand how to reconcile how this could happen.

We find even here in chapter 6, Jesus deals with that issue. Simon Peter in verse 68 says, Whom shall we go? You alone have the words of life.

And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Jesus answered them, Did I not choose you, the 12? And yet one of you is a devil.

He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the 12, was going to betray him. Jesus knew Judas' heart. He knew that his allegiance to Jesus was temporary.

[24 : 00] He knew that when the rubber met the road, that Judas would betray him. And he would show the true nature of his heart as being one who had no fruit. The father is interested in fruitfulness.

He will either judge those who have no fruit or he will nurture those who are bearing fruit. It says he prunes their life. He says he cultivates them and seeks to help them bear more fruit.

There are so many ways that God seeks to do that for us. His ministry to us to help nurture more fruitfulness in our life. And he often uses difficulties in our life to not only show us the nature of our abiding relationship with him, but to help us to see how much we need him in life.

I had an experience like that and by the way we're probably not going to finish all of these notes for today. We'll just hold it off to next week. So don't be nervous if we're not going to finish.

On Friday I was going to go pick up my daughter in Cedarville. She had spent the night there. And I had the opportunity that morning as you know it snowed on Thursday night and so I went out to the car and tried to clear the snow off the front windshield and as I was lifting the wiper in order to get the snow underneath the wiper fell off.

[25 : 43] That was frustrating trying to put the wiper back on and then I wanted to listen to a sermon on the way and realize that the cord wasn't in the car.

So I went into the house to try to find the cord and all to no avail. Well I remember maybe the cord is here at the church and so I made a trip here to the church and sure enough there it was all was great.

I get out on Trayview Road I take a right and for whatever reason the traffic was nuts on Trayview trying to get over to Wilson. Well to try to shortcut the system a little bit I turned right on Angaro and the roads were slippery enough that I nearly collided with the car that was stopped there at the stop sign.

And then I finally got on Wilson it's three lights before I can finally get on to the 70. I finally get on to the 70 and I realize that the reason why the traffic is so nuts is because right there where the 70 and the 270 meet there was no way to stay on the 70 I either had to get off on the 270 north or the 270 south.

Well I figured if I go up to Roberts Road it's going to take me a little extra time and I happen to remember there's this little pass through on the 270 south little dirt road that gets from the 270 south to the on ramp of the 270 north you've done that right but as I'm taking the 270 south I realize I can't do this I shouldn't do this so I stayed on the 270 I didn't use the pass through and I didn't realize I forgot that Broad Street was so far down the road well I get off and as you can well imagine everyone else was doing the same thing and so it was like gridlock on Broad going west well then there's finally the way to get to this 270 and I had to kind of merge over three lanes because I was in the wrong one and had to get over so I could take a right and I get down the road maybe a quarter of a mile and it's a dead stop

[28 : 07] I get so frustrated I make a U-turn I get back on to Broad I'm booking it down I won't tell you how fast I was going and I finally get on the 70 it has been 50 minutes since I first left my house I wish I could say that my life demonstrated that it had a great abiding relationship with Christ this past week but God puts us through these situations of pruning and exposure to help us realize how far away we are from the kind of fruitfulness that God wants us to have I could tell you a similar experience that happened yesterday here at the church trying to make copies for the bulletin but I won't go there because we don't have enough time

God the Father is interested in your fruitfulness he takes special delight in messing up your day so that he can help you see what is most important he takes special delight in exposing your heart fruitfulness so that you know where you stand in terms of fruitfulness and so that you can step back you can reevaluate and you can say oh I have so much work to do for Christ's life to flow through me well it takes us to this third point here it's assisted by the

Godhead and it is accompanied by a changed life accompanied by a changed life notice what it says here in verse three it says already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you now you might wonder what in the world is this verse doing here how does this fit in the flow of what we're talking about it almost seems to be disconnected in every way yet Jesus is not only trying to reassure the disciples of where they stand but he's helping them to recognize the trajectory the focus the product of fruitfulness what does it yield what does fruitfulness look like in a life so

often when we hear the idea of fruitfulness we think of outward success we think of converts that we have had some way of helping to bring to Christ or we think of some impact that we're making in the world we think of some ministry that we're involved in and it's had some sort of benefit to the people who have been part of it but when Jesus is talking about fruitfulness he wants them to understand that it focuses on cleanness change life it has nothing to do with externals it has everything to do with what's happening inside what has God done to change your life not just to change your behavior but to change the person that you are that's what he cares about that's what he's interested in and Jesus has already addressed this particular subject earlier you might remember in John chapter 13 during this feast time this Passover meal Jesus he puts on the towel and he's washing the disciples feet and he gets this protest from Peter Peter says Jesus you're not going to wash me and Jesus wants to help him understand that washing him is significant in verse 10 we see this it says Jesus says to him the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet but is completely clean and you are clean but not every one of you for he knew who was to betray him that was why he said not all of you are clean Judas was not clean his heart was not pure there was not a change in his life there was not fruitfulness that was showing it was barrenness it was emptiness it was deadness and yet for the rest of the disciples who still had much to learn and much to grow in there was there was cleanness and forgiveness and repentance and faith and moving in the right direction they were clean and [33 : 29] Jesus reemphasizes that here in verse 2 or excuse me verse 3 of chapter 15 you are clean they had experienced the repentance from sin experienced forgiveness that God gives they had been sanctified by the truth that Jesus had preached!

They had given their lives to follow him desire to surrender themselves to doing what he had said they had witnessed! His power and witnessed! working in their own life the disciples had shown themselves that there was inward change that had taken place we see through Christ's ministry that the Pharisees were really great about external behavior they went to the right places at the right times they said the right things they knew all of the right scriptures and they performed the right duties but inwardly their heart was so far from Christ it's not a fruit of external righteousness but a fruit of a changed life one that is sanctified one that is showing the fruit of repentance that John talks about John the Baptist talks about in Matthew chapter 3 one that shows the fruit of the good soil in Matthew chapter 13 the word is taking root and it begins to grow and flourish in a life there is transformation there is purity this morning I would ask you again are you a fruitful vine one that has allowed the word of God to settle in and to produce a harvest the Holy Spirit is producing a harvest of love and joy and peace and kindness and goodness is there a changed life we're moving from here in verse 4 there's not only a demand of the father for fruitfulness but we'll touch on this and get to it the remaining time next week but fruitfulness is dependent on the son fruitfulness is dependent on the son there is a demand for fruitfulness but there is a life source for fruitfulness there is a means for fruitfulness in your life how does it come we find the answer in verses 4 and 5 abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine neither can you unless you abide in me I am the vine you are the branches whoever abides in me and I in him he it is that bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing apart from me you can do nothing let me just close with this thought what does it mean to abide in Christ what does it look like and we'll develop this more next week how does remaining and being steadfast and existing in the life of Christ how does that play out in your life and I might ask you two questions that will answer whether or not it's happening in your life the first question would be how do you respond when you have done all the right things and you get the wrong result for example you have followed the scriptures teaching as it relates to training up your children in the way they should go but then you turn them loose into the world and they turn their back on [37 : 33] God how does that affect you? How does that frustrate you? Or you have done all the right things you've played by God's rules in your workplace and for whatever reason it doesn't matter how much you try to do to please God you can't ever seem to get that promotion you can't ever seem to get that raise you can't ever seem to get the recognition that you feel you deserve when you're doing the right things but you don't get God to answer the way you expect how does that affect!

your life that would mean that you're not abiding in Christ that all the things that you're doing to please him you're doing for yourself and not doing for him the second question would be what what is connection with Christ worth to you what is a connection to Christ worth to you is a deeper relationship with Christ an abiding relationship with him worth the risk of losing other things that you value like could you ever find yourself saying Jesus I want to abide in you so much that I'm willing to give you full control of every aspect of my life so that I can learn to abide in you completely what is an abiding relationship worth we'll talk about that more next week come back we'll discuss that let me pray for us and we'll close our service this morning Lord we want to be fruitful people we want to be a fruitful vine we understand that it's only possible as we're connected to Christ God we pray that as we make our way through the Christian life that there would be such a dwelling such an abiding relationship with you that we find you as all satisfying we find you as our life source we find you as the only one that is sufficient to really make us happy and that pleasing you and loving you is the delight of our life regardless of the disappointments we may experience regardless of the hiccups and bumps in the road

God we find that as the challenges nudge up against us from day to day that what pours from our life is the evidence of fruitfulness of a changed life God we know this is not something that we can do on our own and even though you have commanded us to abide in you that the ministry of the Godhead the father who prunes and the son who gives us life to begin with and the spirit who empowers us for obedience is so necessary and essential we need you to work this out and so Lord this morning wherever we may be whether we are fruitful vines that need to be pruned or we are unfruitful branches that need to be connected to the life source God I pray that you would do what is necessary for us so that we can be fruitful and not just casually fruitful but that we can be abundantly fruitful do do do