

Reading: John 15v1-8

Theme: Questions to answer (1)

In our previous studies we have seen 4 pictures, images used to convey important truths - the Vine, the Vinedresser, the unfruitful branches and the fruitful branches. This morning I hoped to round off the first 8 verses, but again over-prepared – so I am splitting the message into 2 parts. I have a little rhyme I use when I'm stuck in preparing a message and it goes like this *"I have 6 faithful friends; They've taught me all I do, Their names are How and What and Why, When and Where and Who."* I picked it up from a book on preaching many years ago and with a text, passage, I use them to see what is going on, being said etc. I don't just then spew out answers to those questions, but use it to get to grips with the text of the passage/verse I am looking at. Obviously, prayer and thinking about things are very much involved too! Yet in these 2 messages, I intend to use them as the basis of my 6 headings - with some points being longer than others and not in the order of the rhyme as we begin to conclude v1-8, especially focusing on v7-8. So, I want to look at 3 questions in each of the 2 messages:

Who are involved?

In v5-8 the emphasis is on those who are to bear fruit - we are concerned primarily with the fruitful branches, those who are in this living union with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Vine. This picture is carried on and underlined as important - living branches in a living union with the Vine. Such ones have been born-again of God's Spirit, have new life - regenerate. Regeneration is a work of God in our lives. We are to realise it comes before belief on our part, before our conscious conversion experience. It is the order of fact – regeneration

(new life) and then conversion; while in the order of our conscious understanding it appears as if conversion comes first and we have new life.

We do not believe and then are born-again. In the order of God's working, we are made alive, given eyes to see, ears to hear, living hearts changed from hearts of stone and even given faith by God's grace. Then we can see, hear, believe. The recognition and outworking of this in our lives and experience may occur suddenly or gradually, but the work of regeneration is by God alone and occurs instantaneously, even if initially unrecognised by us. The word of God then begins to make sense, preaching makes sense, we desire God and the things of God, we recognise who and what Jesus has done. We see our sins for what they are and the consequences they deserve.

It's not that we become religious, but God has made us alive, opened our eyes to see the light. On our conscious part there has to be belief and acceptance of the truth of Jesus Christ - who He is and all He has done. We are alive in Him and in a living union with Him. It is either alive in Him and a living branch; or we are a dead branch. This is the contrast and they are opposites, with no in-between state - we are alive or dead. It doesn't matter our morals, feelings or upbringing. The question this morning is, do we have life, new life in Christ, are we born-again of the Spirit? Now see:

What are these ones to do?

A number of times in this passage, Jesus says that living branches in union with Him are to bear fruit. Such branches are pruned to bear more fruit and in v5 & 8 it is **much** fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit is a great evidence of a person being a true Christian. By our fruits will we be known. A good tree produces good fruit, a bad tree does not produce good fruit. In the same way a dead branch will not produce the fruit of the Spirit, fruit of regeneration, because such a person does not have the Spirit of God.

Yet it is not to stop at a bare minimum of fruit. We are all different. Yes, in many areas we are alike as Christians - all saved by God's free grace, all had our sins totally forgiven, all of us have a home in heaven, all are justified and have the same hope and standing before God. Yet there are differences – in talents, abilities and also fruit bearing. We all differ widely in our attainments, our growth in grace, knowledge and love for our Saviour.

Picture two Christians, the same age, saved about the same time, same talents and abilities and yet there can be a wide variation in their spiritual fruitfulness. Why is this? We could hide behind God's sovereignty and say "*God has deemed it to be so!*" Really that is a copout, an escape route. Our heavenly Father wants us to produce fruit, more fruit, much fruit. Realise all of us are different, so production of fruit will be different, but fruit must be produced in and through us. Our Father expects all Christians to produce the fruit of the Spirit and it is to be our aim in all we do - at home, in public, in private, in church things, in secular things, in our jobs and studies, in our friendships and relationships, in our marriages, in our recreation - in other words, in every area of our lives! As believers we are all to produce and show fruit for our God, who has called us to be His.

How are we to encourage this fruitfulness?

We are told in v5 that we cannot do anything our own without Christ. We are to abide, remain in Him. This is not a mystical, surreal thing, but a constantly close relationship with Jesus - speak often with Him, think often of Him, listen often to Him, always try to obey Him, love Him more and often fall in love with Him afresh. This is not a mechanical process, but an organic, living thing and an ever ongoing and developing relationship.

We are in a living union - the branch of a tree, a vine, draws its life from the stem - the sap, nutrients, water etc. flows through 2 main channels - the xylem and the phloem. I am not going to push these 2 - for the picture would break down - the tree, vine gets food and nutrients from the leaves as well, but the spiritual branches are always drawing all they need from the Vine = Lord Jesus. We are to understand that we are to draw from our Saviour all the nutrients and refreshing that we need via the main channels of the word of God and the honour and privilege of prayer – both those means of grace blessed by the Holy Spirit.

There needs to be this abiding, remaining in Christ to bear fruit. If we were to neglect what we eat, also our partners and our hygiene, then we would soon be in a pretty miserable condition - weak, cold in affection and smelly! Yet sadly, often Christians fail to realise that by neglecting God's word, prayer and their relationship with the Lord - by living careless lives, that such things occur on a spiritual level. It is by these habitual ways of a constant close relationship with our Saviour that we remain, abide in Him.

As this is done, the more fruit will be borne. I don't mean a rush of feeling before an important event, or after conference or a big meeting, but by the habitual course of our life in this constant close, ever growing closer communication and relationship with the Lord Jesus. Fruit on trees and bushes do not suddenly appear, but gradually grow and show itself.

As such, His words will remain in us. Here it is not the usual word for "word" = λογος, but ρημα rhema = that which is or has been uttered by the living voice, thing spoken, word – here referring to all Jesus' individual utterances as a collection. Such words are to remain in us, so we conform, desire to conform to what He has said. Because we have His life in us and we love Him, obedience to Christ will be a natural, yet supernatural outworking of knowing His word. It is not a matter of cold obedience, for we realise that His word carries Him with it - the incarnate Word is within the living inscripturated word i.e. His written word in the Bible.

Christians who are like that, will prevail in prayer v7b. It does not mean they can have anything and everything they ask for. Such ones have come to love Christ, **His words** and ways have become **their** desire. They joyfully and willingly are directed and controlled by His commands; their desires and wants are moulded, shaped by Him, His will and His pleasure. His will and pleasure has become their will and pleasure and they are careful not to do or desire anything contrary to Him and His will. They will only ask for that which pleases Him - meaning they can safely receive whatever they ask for.

Prayer is not a case of persuading ourselves it is right, good for us and therefore God's will, but a case of being close to

our God and Saviour and knowing what pleases Him and asking accordingly. Matthew Henry sums it up - far better and shorter than I could - by writing "**First**, that if we abide in Christ, and His word in us, we shall not ask anything but what is proper to be done for us. The promises abiding in us lie ready to be turned into prayers; and the prayers so regulated cannot but speed. **Secondly**, that if we abide in Christ and His word, we shall have such an interest in God's favour and Christ's mediation that we shall have an answer of peace to all our prayers."

Here is the reason for our increasing fruitfulness - abiding, remaining in Christ and His word in us. There are no dramatic and sudden shortcuts, or booster charges, no special experiences, but this glorious living process of remaining in a constant, close and growing union and oneness with the Lord. We will all have our ups and downs, all bear fruit according to our maturity as people and Christians, but there are no socio-economic barriers, class or educational barriers or restrictions in place. It is for all of God's children to produce fruit by our abiding in Him.

We will leave it there and see the remaining 3 areas next week. Sorry to leave it dangling and incomplete, but I will do a quick reminder next week before dealing with the final few areas.

I pray we would all be those who, even in the strange Covid times we live in, we would be producing fruit for our heavenly Father and be aware of the freshness, the vigour of the life we have as we abide in Christ and glorify our lovely Saviour Jesus.