

Reading: John 15v1-8

Theme: Questions to answer (2)

Last week we started to look at 6 areas prompted by a little rhyme I use from time to time. *“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 use it with a text or passage to help clarify, understand think about what it is saying. Along with thinking about these questions, prayer is vitally involved too. Because I over prepared last week, I split a big message into 2 messages and to look at 3 questions in each message. Last week we noted:

Who are involved? – we saw these are the living branches, those who have personally and truly believed on Jesus as their Saviour and have become new creations in Christ. It is more than being religious, going to church, having religious rites done to us, but is coming into a personal relationship with God in and through the Lord Jesus. It is far more than an emotional high, or putting a hand up in a meeting or saying a prayer after someone, but a true work of God goes on in our lives and we trust in Jesus as our own Saviour.

What are these ones to do? – they are to produce fruit, the fruit of the Spirit and as much as possible. This happens as we go on with Jesus, getting to know Him and how He wants us to live, behave, react and it changes us from the inside out, as even our motivations and desires change as we want to become more like Him. We also saw:

How are we to encourage this fruitfulness? – by remaining, abiding in a close relationship, union with Christ – by using, what are termed the means of grace – reading and obeying God’s word, the Bible, praying to God the Father, through God the Son by the work and person of God the Holy Spirit. These means of grace also includes meeting together with God’s people as much as we are able, baptism (once) and correctly taking the bread and wine in the Lord’s table, communion, eucharist. Moving on to the final 3 questions in our headings:

When are we to bear this fruit?

We are always to bear fruit, so the when is always now - where we are and then! The fruit of the Spirit, of righteousness is to be evidenced in all our lives at all times. It is not when times gets favourable, or when we have it easy, or problems are sorted out. It is now, in whatever situation we are in! The Lord has saved us to bear fruit - Ephesians 2:10 says *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God **prepared in advance** for us to do.”* The moment we become a Christian, are in Christ Jesus, we have in place works, good works to do - not to **bring about** our salvation, but to **show it, evidence it** in our lives and show our Saviour’s glory. We are to be salt, light in a world that is petrifying and dark. Fruit on trees and bushes need light, warmth, favourable conditions to produce fruit, but the fruit of the Spirit and the way that impacts and affects our lives is to go on and develop and show itself even in the most inhospitable of places and times. We are to even start bringing forth fruit, the buds that produce fruit from the

moment we are saved. No matter our difficulties or learning, or our temperament, the fruit of the Spirit is to show in our lives, in all situations of life we are in and so we are to show and hold up the Light of the world.

Where are we to bear fruit?

It should be obvious - we are to bear fruit where we are - in our homes, relationships, jobs, schools, recreation. We are not to just seek to get into a Christian ghetto or commune, but to let our light shine, our fruit be openly displayed for people to see and notice so they can glorify our Father in heaven. Our greatest work for God, after in our home, is in our place of employment, education, the area where we live as a Christian. There you can reach people far better than I or anyone else can. Those around you are to see your fruit and realise there is a God who is real, relevant and changes lives. We may be the only Bible they will ever read! Begin to see the importance of fruit bearing and the need to abide in Christ fully. Remember people have eternally needy souls, with heaven or hell before them and we cannot save them, so we need God to work in and through us. While we do all we can, we realise that apart from Him we can do nothing and are totally dependent on God, needing to remain in Him and call on Him to work and save people through us.

We are to bear fruit where we are and not dream of being in idyllic, easy situations. People may or may not be saved, but we are not to bear fruit to notch up successes and certainly not to boast of successes (*even humbly*)! We realise there is a far higher reason given for our bearing fruit and we see:

Why are we to bear fruit?

The reason we are to bear much fruit is the same reason as for our existence - to glorify God (v8). Here is the supreme, the highest reason for our bearing fruit; this is what we are to aim at, desire, long for and to seek after.

God's intrinsic glory cannot be added to, we cannot add to the essential glory of God as God. His glory cannot be added to because it is infinite and no other glory comes anywhere near His. We glorify God by making others think the more highly of Him, think the better of Him. When He is thought the better of and goes up in their estimation - verbalised or not. Although if they truly think the better of Him, saying so is an additional glorifying of God.

As we remain in Christ and He in us we are to go on to obey His word, live it out, for people to see Him in and through us - not clearly, perfectly, but see Him and He is pleased with His glory and His grace being shown, reflected even in our lives and this glorifies Him. We say "*Imitation is the highest form of flattery*" - in God's case, as we imitate, copy Jesus, we find it pleases Him, brings glory to Him. It shows we appreciate Him - all He is, all He has done for us. We want to show how much we appreciate and admire our God and Saviour by wanting to be like Him for others to see how great He is.

Living in such a way also shows we adore and worship Him. This God is the only God and He has done great things for us and we long to glorify Him in worship, adoration and our

lives are to show that out in practical ways as we glorify Him in our affections, love and lives. This great God is to be loved and lived for. It is to be a delightful thing to love and to live for God as we want to please Him. It is not a cold obedience and conformity, but in loving Him we want to please Him above self and we give Him, as it were, the cream of our love. The seraphim are “the burning ones”. Christians should also be seraphim - burning with love for their God and Saviour. If we love God, we should want to glorify Him and want others to think the better of Him.

Involved in our glorifying Him is our obedience in every area of our lives, public or private, secular or religious. We should give over to Him the whole of our lives to do with as He wants and wills and we also stick, persevere at continually doing so. This is our loving obedience.

These things are our reasonable service, for we are to glorify God by bearing the fruit that demonstrates His grace and His character, so that all will think the higher and better of Him and it will leave them without any excuse as to the reality of God in and through our lives. We are to be coming more and more what we truly are in Christ so that the world will then have to sit up and take notice; for among them will be a remarkable phenomenon - people living and showing the glory of the grace of God in their lives, living to please Him not themselves, exerting a magnetic attraction - as the presence of God will be on and with us and it will be seen we are enjoying God more than the things of the world.

Living in this way, there will be a reduced need to plan evangelistic outreach events per se - as people will be presented, confronted daily by those in whom the transforming power of the gospel is so clearly evidenced. We will show that we are His disciples as we bring forth much fruit to His glory.

Why is this not the case with the church in the UK? Why is it not the case in our church here? Why is it not the case in our lives, in your life, in my life? Let's all pray that our God would continue to have grace and mercy upon us, to stir us up to remain in Him, to bear fruit, to produce more fruit and much fruit, so that our heavenly Father and our Saviour Jesus will be glorified.

Our God has said He will not give His glory to another - Isaiah 48v11 (KJV) *"I will not give my glory unto another."* We need to seriously pray Psalm 115:1 *"Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."* Then we are to live that out by His grace and enabling, to remain in and know His love more and more and to show that love to others – which is what we will start to look at next time...

For now, let us just recap what we have seen from this picture of the Vine and the branches: we have focused on Christ and what He is to His people - He is the source of our life and fruitfulness, our life is bound up with His. For this to be the case, there has to be a vital, living connection between Him and us. This begins and happens when we trust the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour. On the way we

have seen and noted that in the visible church here on earth there can be those who are fruitful as well as those who are fruitless branches as they could be nominal or struggling Christians, but this does not destroy the connection between Christ and His true people within the visible Church. This means we need to self-examine our own hearts and lives. This is so vital as the difference in place or hidden here in time, will one day be clearly revealed in eternity when it will be too late and it is vitally important that we make no mistake here.

Also, it is important we should show the reality of our faith by our abiding, remaining in Christ. Note how many times (6x) the Lord Jesus mentions this necessity and truth in the space of a few verses (v4-8). This hit home to the apostle John and in his first letter as he encourages the Christians he wrote to - often saying of abiding, remaining in Jesus. It is so important that we abide, remain in Christ to bring forth the fruit by which the Father is glorified.

With such encouragements, it is such a sad situation if someone who seemed to be in Christ, a believer by name and even actions at one time in their life, but now they have shown they were never truly in Christ. If anyone is listening or watching who is in that situation, realise that you can still go to the One you know about and He will be kind, gentle and will bring you into this living relationship with the Son of God who loves you and gave Himself for you. You can know the privilege of being welcomed when you go to Him as your Saviour and be sure that He will welcome you and will not cast you out. His grace is sufficient for anyone who

has wandered away from the offer of salvation in and through Jesus, even those who knew Him and have wandered away from loving and living for Him, as well as those who think that they are too bad to ever be a Christian because of the things they have said, seen, done or thought. Jesus is the one who not only invites you to come to Him, but will welcome you and rejoice over you with singing and joy.

I encourage you, press upon you the urgency, the need for you to trust in Jesus and being in this living relationship - pictured here as being in union, abiding, remaining in the Vine. I must tell you not to delay, as this may be the day of salvation for you - so do not delay or put it off until another time, but come to know Him who gives fullness of life here on earth and give eternal life from this moment onwards. Then this Saviour and God may have many surprises for you in your life as He can use you in ways that you never expected or thought possible as you produce fruit to His glory! This God is the God of surprises here on earth and when we get to heaven, as much as we think we know what it is going to be like, we will be constantly surprised for all eternity at Him, all He has done for us and the wonders of heaven.