
Go and Bear Fruit

John 15:1-17

Introduction

This morning we commence our month long theme of “growing by faith”. Last month we introduced ideas and reasons for facility expansion. We asked each other to pray over the future of the Chapel. We asked each other to sacrificially give to increase ministry space in our facility. We called one another to faithfulness.

This month we are introducing ideas and reasons for ministry expansion. We will be talking about growing by faith in areas like 1) exaltation 2) edification 3) evangelism. There will be fresh initiatives and new ministries over which we will pray and in which we will involve ourselves. We will exhort one another to trust God and venture out onto His faithfulness. If last month was a call to faithfulness, this month can be characterized as a call to fruitfulness.

In John 15, Jesus Christ looked out over his disciples and commanded them to “go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). It is no coincidence that when Jesus commanded them to go and bear fruit, the next day he went and died (John 18:28ff). What does this summons mean for us: *Go and bear fruit* (think over this by reading 12:24-26). How does this call on us impact current ministries as well as future ones? In what ways do Jesus’ words “Go and bear fruit” shape our plans for and execution of facility expansion and intentional ministry? As we move through the month of September’s focus, let us keep in mind that the only fruit which lasts is the fruit that grows on the cross. This is what Jesus was aiming at when He spoke the words of John 15:1-17.

If you have your Bibles please turn with me to our text this morning; John 15:1-17. In this passage we see Jesus’ focus. It is fruit-bearing. As we read this text listen for answers to the following questions.

1. What is fruit-bearing?

In this section of the message we will uncover general information over the nature of fruit-bearing.

2. How are we to accomplish the task of fruit-bearing?

In this section of the message we will be probing some ways this task is to be done.

3. What is the task of fruit-bearing aiming to achieve?

We will conclude the message by exploring the motivation for this task; uncovering the purpose of this task.

Listen for the answers to these questions as I read for us John 15:1-17 (read and pray).

What is “Fruit-bearing”?

It is a work of God.

Vv.1-3

What is “fruit-bearing”? It is a work of God!

Our text for today is in the midst of a larger context. In chapters 13-17, John records Jesus’ extended conversation that he had with his disciples. The last supper, the farewell discourse, and the final prayer of Jesus are recorded to highlight the significance of God’s work through Jesus’ departure. His death, burial, resurrection, ascension and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit were the essence of why God sent Jesus to Earth.

Centered on Jesus Christ

V.1a

In the first verse we notice that this work of God is centered on Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the true vine”. Why does Jesus speak of himself as the *true vine*? The image of the vine was a rich one for the Jews. The land of Israel was covered with numerous vineyards. It, therefore, was a natural teaching metaphor. Isaiah, for example, spoke of the house of Israel as “*the vineyard of the Lord*” (Isaiah 5:7). Jeremiah said that God had planted Israel “*as a choice vine*” (Jeremiah 2:21). While the vine became a symbol of Israel as a nation, it also was used in the scriptures as a sign of failure. Isaiah’s prophecy spoke of Israel as a vineyard which “*yielded wild grapes*” (see Isaiah 5:1-7). Jeremiah said that Israel had become a “*degenerate and wild vine*” (Jeremiah 2:21). When Jesus calls himself the *true vine* he makes clear that what Israel could not do Jesus did. In place of faithless Israel we now have faithful Jesus Christ. Real life is bound up with Christ. No one can claim their spiritual inheritance through association with a particular people or family background. Rather, it is only through Jesus Christ that one can become grafted into the true “vineyard of the Lord”. Jesus offers true life -- the abundant life which comes from God and which results in great fruitfulness.

When we talk about growth of the Church here at the Chapel we are centering our conversations on Jesus Christ. He is “the way, the truth and the life”. He is essential to growth. He is the essence of growth. He is growth!

Don’t hear “growth talk” largely as a new auditorium or classrooms or community center. Let us not confuse the issue with ideas of 500 Sunday morning attendance equally growth. Facility expansion and ministry execu-

tion is all about Jesus Christ. Fruit-bearing requires nourishment. Jesus Christ is the sole source of it.

Cultivated by the Father

Vv.1b-3

Growth at the Chapel is not only a work of God centered on Jesus Christ. It also is a work of God cultivated by the Father.

Another look at the work of God for growth can be seen in vv.1b-3. The words of these verses introduce us to the ultimate Gardener of the vineyard. He is seen as the One who takes away. In this passage we notice two kinds of branches -- those which bear fruit and those which don't. The non-bearing branches must be carefully taken away and thrown into the fire (see v.6) in order for the vine to conserve its strength for bearing good fruit. And the bearing branches must be carefully pruned of old debris for the vine to express its abundant life by yielding much fruit. Jesus talks about the Father's work of cultivation as a way of discussing what fruit-bearing is: namely a work of God = centered on Christ and cultivated by the Father.

As we talk about growing by faith in the month of September, keep in mind that the work of God is to make Christ the main thing. And this work of God will be quite personal. He will expose us through the preaching of the Word and the disciplining of each other as either fruit-bearing or non-fruit-bearing. There is no in-between. The Father will see to it that He cultivates the branches by either taking away branches (i.e. Judas) or by pruning branches (i.e. Peter). Decisive discipline is clearly a necessary work of God to increase fruit among his people.

It is a receiving and giving of love

Vv.4-17

Secondly, we can see in our passage for this morning that "Fruit-bearing" is not only a work of God but it also is a receiving and giving of love.

Receiving love

Vv.4-11

All through this passage we see "fruit-bearing" as a dependent or resultant thing. The fruit-bearing branch (representing Christ's disciples) must receive what the Vine (representing Christ) provides. And what is this sap which the Vine gives the branches? The answer is laid out for us in vv.4-11 (clearly seen in vv.9 & 10).

Bearing fruit must start by receiving Christ's love. If the branch, as seen in vv.4-5, does not remain in the vine it can do nothing. What Jesus is referring to is the fact that growth in the church; i.e. "fruit-bearing", is dependent upon Christ. Like needing oxygen, we need Him for something basic. And this vital substance is His love.

What is “fruit-bearing”? Having seen that it is a work of God, we now notice that it is a receiving of Christ’s love.

Giving love

Vv.12-17

But it does not stop there! Not only is it a receiving of Christ’s love it also is a giving of sacrificial love as noticed in vv.12-17.

As the sap of Christ’s love enters the branch of true believers, an out-cropping occurs. This is, according to vv.12-13, an obedient, sacrificial love for people. This love for people is demonstrated as a love for God’s people as noticed in v.12. Fruit-bearing caused by God exhibits in a loving congregation.

It also, according to v16, manifests in a love for the lost. Jesus tells his disciples to “go and bear fruit”. When he commands his people to “go” he is referring to the mission of the church; namely to evangelize the world (cf. Matt.28:18ff; John 4:38; 20:21). We see the idea of fruit-bearing as evangelism by noticing John 4:35-38. In this passage he tells his disciples to go into the harvest and gather fruit. Plainly this points to mission or evangelism.

The love referred to in John 15:12-17 is for people in the church and people in the world. Fruit-bearing is a giving of love to edify the saints and to evangelize the lost. The point of vv.10-17 is simple. Abiding in the love of Christ will manifest in loving both believers and unbelievers. (cf. vv.10-12, 16).

In Sum

Let me summarize where we’ve been so far. We’ve been looking at the type of growth Jesus wants for His disciples; the type of growth to which Jesus is summoning Clearcreek Chapel. We noticed that He calls it “fruit-bearing”. And we’ve seen that fruit-bearing is:

1. *A work of God.* God is the One who takes initiative to grow His people (cf. 1Cor.3:9). He sent His Son Jesus Christ to Earth to suffer and die for the sins of His people. Jesus, in John 12:24, tells us that He bears fruit by dying. The work of God centers on the Christ crucified. In addition, God’s work is seen as cultivation of His people. He cuts back and prunes all our affections and actions which are contrary to His good, pleasing and perfect will (cf. Rom.12:1-2)

This painful work of God in the lives of His people yield wonderful results. It yields much fruit. God takes away in order to give more!

2. *A receiving and giving of love.* The second thing we've noticed from Jesus' teaching on growth is that fruit-bearing is a receiving and giving of love. Remaining in Jesus' love brings about a sacrificial love for both believers and unbelievers. Receiving Jesus' love and then giving Jesus' love is what Jesus calls "fruit-bearing."

How is this accomplished?

If this is what fruit-bearing is, how is this accomplished? How can we experience the increase of Christ's love in us and His love through us for others?

We now shift to the second part of the message which looks at our passage from a slightly different angle. This viewpoint notices how fruit-bearing is accomplished.

In Principle

When an author uses one word repeatedly in a short space his desire is to draw the reader's attention to something crucial. Ten times in vv.4-10 Jesus uses the word "abide/remain". "Go and bear fruit" is accomplished by abiding in Jesus. In verse five forcefully we read, "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing". What Jesus emphasizes here is the importance of vital, intimate connection with Him. Abiding means living in him and having him live in us.

As we talk about growing as a church in the month of September, we see that it is all about the work of God centered on Jesus. This work centered on Jesus and expressed in sacrificial love for believers and unbelievers requires us to remain in Christ. Here, in principle, we have what we need. "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".

In Practice

With this said, we must press the passage for practicality. What does it mean to "abide in Christ"? In what ways must we practice "abiding" in Jesus?

1. You must be born again by the cleansing power of the Word

To abide in Jesus and thus bear much fruit, we must be born again. Jesus in v.3 said, "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you" (cf. Jn.3:1-16; Eph.5:26). What started these branches off clean and fruitful was Jesus' word. It appears by reading Jn. 1:1,14 & 14:23 that

“the Word” refers to who Jesus is, what Jesus taught and what Jesus does (Remember Jesus is the Word incarnate; cf. 1:1,14). And so, it seems that verse three points us to what has already taken hold in the life of these followers (cf. 13:10). “Go and bear fruit” is not about conjuring up activities and events. It is all about being captured by the teaching and activity and essence of Jesus Christ. In accord with verse 16, it’s all about being chosen by Christ to be cleansed from sin by Christ in order to be fruitful by Christ.

❖ To practice “abiding in Christ” you must be born again (cf. 3:3)

2. You must accept the painful pruning of the Father

To abide in Jesus and thus bear much fruit, secondly we must accept the wounding work of the Father. This is clear from v.2. This is clear also as we listen to Peter thirty years after Jesus said these words to him. In 1Pet.1:6f he said, “In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you, if necessary, you’ve been distressed by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ”. He understood both from Scripture and experience that to go and bear fruit involves pain. Abiding in Christ requires discipline. And he chose this gladly.

❖ To practice “abiding in Christ” you must accept the painful pruning of the Father.

3. You must allow Jesus’ words to richly dwell in your thoughts

Next, to abide in Jesus and thus bear much fruit, we must allow the gospel to dwell richly in our thoughts. We come to this observation by noticing how Jesus interprets the metaphor of the Vine and its Branches. In v.7 we read, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you”. What does it mean to have Jesus’ words abiding in us? If we believe that John is using the word “abide” consistently throughout this passage, we are inclined to read verse seven like this: “If you stay vitally close and connected with me and my words stay vitally close and connected in you”. That is, Jesus’ individual teachings (i.e. his words) must become precious in our hearts. For His words to stay vitally close and connected to us means that:

- **We know the Word.** We are reading and studying and thinking and listening to the Bible. We are noticeably increasing in our knowledge of the Bible.
- **We love the Word.** We consider the Bible precious. We prize the book. And we see not merely principles and precepts in the Word. We see a Person. And we savor the living Word;

Jesus Christ. We are noticeably increasing in our affections for the Bible.

- **We conform to the Word.** We become what we enjoy. Glad-hearted obedience flows out of a knowledge of the Word and love for the Word. We are noticeably increasing in our obedience shaped by the Bible.
- ❖ To practice “abiding in Christ” you must allow Jesus’ words to richly dwell in your thoughts.

4. You must ask for what you need from the Father

Lastly, to abide in Jesus and thus bear much fruit, we must ask for what we need from the Father. We see this in vv.7 and 16. To grow as a church means to grow in our prayer life. If we believe that we are mere branches utterly dependent upon the Vine for life; if this is our belief we will ask much from the Father.

And what would our requests be in light of this passage? Notice the logic of verse 16 with me. “You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give it to you”. Jesus sovereignly chose His people and authoritatively appoints them to do what this message this morning has been talking about; “go and bear fruit”. We saw that this fruit is a love for believers and unbelievers. This “go and bear fruit” is a mission to edify the followers of the Word (i.e. Jesus) and evangelize the followers of the World (i.e. the lost).

Now notice the purpose clause at the end of v.16. “so that whatever you ask the Father in my Name he may give it to you”. Jesus lays hold of us and commissions us so that we will be in ministry. When we are involved in ministry we sense the need for help. We pray more devotedly when there is more difficulty. And when we hear Jesus commanding us to edify believers and evangelize unbelievers we pray. What do we pray for? We pray for more love, more power and more wisdom to reach out to people with the good news!

- ❖ To practice “abiding in Christ” you must ask for what you need from the Father.

What is its purpose?

This leads us to the third and final section of the message. What is the purpose of bearing fruit?

For our joy

Listen to the astonishing words of Jesus as I read verse 11. “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full”.

The reason for Jesus’ commission of Clearcreek Chapel to “go and bear fruit” is for our joy. He aims to increase our joy until it is utterly full; full of His joy in you. He desires for a no more grumbling lifestyle. He intends to put away all depression. His agenda for us is full and forever joy. What more could we possibly desire in this life and the life to come than never-ending, ever-increasing joy in Jesus? To have Jesus’ joy made full in us is an unspeakable reality given to all who believe John 15 in an obeying way.

Why does God command us to increase in fruit-bearing? Why did He send His Son to die for our sins? Why does God cultivate us through his painful pruning of discipline? Why does God require that we grow in our fondness of Bible and fervor in our prayer life? Why doesn’t He just leave us alone? The reason is that His sights are set on making us full of joy. Stop resisting His loving commission. Stop thinking that you have a better strategy for increasing your joy. Stop with your unbelief and enlist in the mission to “go and bear fruit”!

❖ The purpose of fruit-bearing is that your joy will be made full.

For His glory

As we continue looking at this amazing passage we recognize that full joy is a means to a larger purpose. Listen as I read verse 8. “By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”. After Jesus said this he went out to die for the sins of His people. He took their penalty upon Himself and three days later came out of the grave. He ascended into heaven and sent His Spirit to change the hearts of His people. By God’s hand, people were daily compelled to faith by the supernatural quality of the church community (cf. Acts 2:43ff). Christ has risen. This is an unshakable fact of history. Everybody who believed this fact was filled with inconceivable joy. This 1st century community of joy was commanded to “go and bear fruit”. As they went forth the Bible demonstrates that they suffered for and rejoiced in Him (Acts 4). And this transformation ; this supernatural filling of joy amid pain brought glory and honor and praise to God.

As He sends us out, 21 centuries later, to bear much fruit, Jesus’ joy becomes our joy and this transformed life puts the Vinedresser on display. God gets the glory and we get the gladness when we believe in an obeying way John 15.

Conclusion

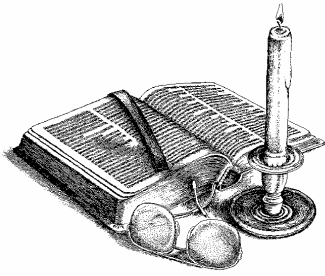
❖ The purpose of fruit-bearing is that the giver will get the glory.

Let me bring this message to a conclusion by pointing out three things.

1. God's Commitment
 - a. He will give us what we need to give Him what He commands.
2. God's Commandment
 - a. He commands us to "go and bear fruit".
3. Our Involvement
 - a. To believe that to "go and bear fruit" will gladden our hearts and glorify our God.
 - b. To reorder daily life in order to enjoy the love of Christ
 - c. To look for ways of loving believers.
 - d. To look for ways of loving unbelievers.

May the last words of this message be from the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me the Father will honor him" (John 12:24-26)



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John 15:1-17

Daniel Turner • The Chapel Pulpit • 9/5/2004 Sunday Morning

Requests for tapes or questions about this message may
be directed to the church office at (937) 885-2143 or e-mail.

Daniel Turner uses the *English Standard Version* in his preaching and teaching.

Personal Reflection and Application