

Exhortation: Make the tree good, and his fruit good

Reading: Matthew 12

Once more brethren and sisters, we are confronted by the emblems before us upon the table. We are brought face to face with the love and the grace of our Heavenly Father, vouchsafe for us within the example of our beloved Master in the bread and the wine.

Yet at the same time we are brought into the stark reality of our own individual and our collective ecclesial failings. This example of our Lord that we have each come to remember, in obedience to the commandment, for our own eternal good, brings brilliantly into focus all our impurities and weakness.

Thus we are each doubly humbled by our own need and by the gracious provision of our Heavenly Father for us in Christ.

1st Corinthians Chapter 1 and verses 9-8 & Philippians 1 and verse 6

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ? That he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”.

What have you done, what have I done to co-operate in this great work of transformation over this past week? Indeed we could ask what are you and I planing to do, to co-operate in this miraculous work in the coming week if our Heavenly Father is willing?

After all this great work of transformation is no small thing brethren and sisters? Each of us knows only too well, just how much change is required in this work of conforming us individually to the one we have come to remember?

Indeed since we are supposed to be labourers together with God, we ought not to leave such things to blind chance. At this point we might ask the question, well what exactly can we do as individuals to aid our Heavenly Father and facilitate this tremendous change into our lives?

The answer must be, much indeed can be done, although we accept that this is a work of the Father through his beloved Son.

Proverbs Chapter 3 and verses 5 – 7

“Trust in Yahweh with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear Yahweh, and depart from evil”.

Two key things spring to my mind from this passage in the proverbs. Firstly to stop resisting our Heavenly Father as He providentially attempts to work in our lives. We do this in so many ways, but primarily by being so totally and constantly focused and obsessed with our own needs and wants in the here and now.

We have great difficulty in rising above the incessant calls of the present. Indeed the temporal, everything we see around us and experience after all seems so concrete to us. Yet we all know and intellectually accept that these things are only temporal, they are not the

eternal realities of life. As Corinthians records “*we look not at the things, which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which, are seen are temporal; but the things, which are not seen are eternal*”.

How then are we to overcome this problem? Well, the scripture records that we are to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians chapter three where that quote comes from instructs us brethren and sisters to busy our selves in certain activities. The activities of putting away the old fleshly man, by putting on the new man in Christ Jesus. It’s speaking about the deliberate and practical application of the truth on a daily basis.

More than this, the passage encourages each one of us to have a vertical focus to our lives. By spending more time in meditation upon the word of life, by spending more time in fellowship and by focusing more upon the things of the kingdom age. Here is an exercise for you over the next week to try. Take one of the kingdom passages from the word and do the following things with it:

- a) Spend ten minutes a day personally thinking about that passage and the vivid picture it presents of the age to come in total contrast to the present.
- b) Take a verse or two and try and memorize them over the week, just as you used to do for Sunday school proofs.
- c) Use the passage concerned to focus one of your daily prayers throughout the week.

Coming back to the second key thing, which comes out of that earlier proverb’s reference:

We need to learn to acknowledge our Heavenly Father in everything that we do. This is much easier said than done, as I am sure you are aware brethren and sisters. Now if your anything like me then your big problem is with consistency in this regard. We often forget to include God. We make decisions about life in the moment and then pray about it afterwards, seeking the blessing of the Almighty. Therefore doing things the wrong way round, I must admit to being very prone to this error.

The real issue is not so much with consistency, but rather with priority. Just **who** do you really give priority in your life and in my life? Is it to I or is it our Heavenly Father?

After all we all acknowledge our Heavenly Father in our lives, we all recognise intellectually that He has sovereignty in our lives. But it is not the case of our God having just a little sovereignty in our lives, but of total sovereignty.

Just think about how our God has juxtaposed his will into our lives in this past week over such a simple thing as the weather. Our Heavenly Father is reminding each one of us in these circumstances that it is He that is in real control over our lives.

Matthew Chapter 12 and verse 33

“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit”.

So brethren and sisters what sort of fruit have you produced this past week?

Well if you are anything like me, then you would have to admit both good and bad fruit have been produced. Which reminds us of some words in James concerning the tongue. “*Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be*”.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be the Apostle declares. Indeed from the Master's statement in Matthew it appears we have a choice to determine which type of fruit comes forth. We do have a choice that is why we must endeavour to set our affection on things above.

Rest assured brethren and sisters fruit will come forth, there is no neutral position. Either we actively make **good our priority** or evil fruit will be the result in our lives, whether we want it or not. Indeed in both cases in that verse from Matthew twelve the word "make" is the same word in the same form in the Greek. And it is an ongoing imperative command; in other words these things are to be a daily conscious choice on our behalf.

The use of the imperative here carries with it a sense of urgency, which ought to be seen in our lives, because we know that time is short and we must redeemed it wisely.

You see then brethren and sisters if you don't actively choose to produce good fruit then you are by default choosing to produce corrupt or evil fruit. Yet we slip into that very thing almost daily on auto-pilot, because we let the temporal things of life cloud our vision of the eternal.

If we are to show ourselves fit for the Master's use in the kingdom of God, then we must make the conscious choice of developing good fruit in our daily lives. Not only in our own individual lives, but also in one another. As Hebrews records "*let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*".

The words of the Master here "*either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt*". Remind us of a later exhortation given to the Laodiceans:

Revelation Chapter 3 and verses 15 & 16

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth".

Not one of us want's to be declared lukewarm by our Lord, nor do we want to bring forth-corrupt fruit. Yet fruit development is the product of active and targeted cultivation, whether we are talking about in the natural or the spiritual realm. Here in Matthew chapter twelve the Master is focusing upon the thinking, the thoughts and the speech of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Elsewhere and earlier in the gospel, the Master uses the same phraseology to focus upon an individuals character.

Now character is the fullness of the fruit that our Heavenly Father desires and requires of those who will be constituted as Christ's brethren in that day. For we read in 1st Peter "*let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price*".

Now although these words are spoken primarily to sisters and thereby exhorting all those that claim to be part of our Lord's bride. So just as a tree is known by it's fruit, it is equal true of each one of us brethren and sisters. So how is your fruit production? Indeed how is mine developing?

James Chapter 5 and verse 7

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain”.

To this we might add from 2nd Peter the following *“account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation”*. These two passages are comforting brethren and sisters in that this fruit is developed to our Heavenly Father’s timetable not to ours. Because we seek to rush everything and cut corners and in doing so limit both the quantity and quality of the fruit produced. Our Heavenly Father understands the value of both patience and compound interest or reward.

We too need to learn this lesson that it is continual and consistent gradual progress day by day that this fruit is developed and produced within us brethren and sisters. For our inward man the Eternal Spirit exhorts us, is renewed day by day. Just like compound interest, the growth begins slowly and is gradual and almost imperceptible, but eventually it escalates exponentially. This good fruit of the spirit is produced within us, with patience, just like a natural fruit crop.

Our Heavenly Father wants you and I to be as interested and enjoy the process of developing this fruit as in the final product brought forth to his glory. For it is in the pursuing of the development of this fruit in all of its various facets that the real victory is achieved. For the victory of our Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in each one of us will be in the person we each become through the process. Finally conformed to the image of the son we will shortly remember and fit for the Master’s use in the age to come.

James Chapter 1 and verses 2 – 4

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”.

The Eternal Spirit through the Apostle Paul gave us a list of a single fruit - **love**, made up of eight constituent parts in Galatians; while repeating one in Ephesians and adding a further two:

*Joy
Peace
Longsuffering
Gentleness
Goodness
Faith*

*Meekness
Temperance
Righteousness
Truth*

Galatians Chapter 5 and verses 22 – 25 & Ephesians Chapter 5 verse 10

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord”.

The fruit of the spirit primarily represent internal qualities and attitudes, which renew our minds as our Heavenly Father desires. So that all our attitudes to life are corrected through his word and orientated towards the production of godly good works, to his glory. Thus each facet of the fruit represents an aspect of our thinking and attitudes, which need renewing from those naturally occurring in us due to the mind of the flesh.

None of these facets come naturally to us and so they must be cultivated in our lives, which takes great faith, effort, focus, determination, patient endurance and time. For since we are talking about fruit brethren and sisters we must note that these qualities are not surface behavioural changes, but deep-rooted character transformation and the beatitudes of the new creation in Christ.

Each of the facets of this fruit when developed will aid us in the crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts. Thankfully each of these facets of the fruit of the spirit, strips away our preoccupation with self in one form or another.

So the cultivation of the fruit then, takes away little by little our perennial problem of focusing only upon the temporal here and now. Which we discovered earlier is one of our most pressing issues to overcome.

Indeed positively each of these facets will likewise further enable us to not only walk together. But to also live more like our Master abundantly in godliness now, as our Heavenly Father intended.

John Chapter 15 and verse 5

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the living embodiment of the fruit of the spirit. He provides the model from which you and I must to learn how to co-operate with our Heavenly Father in our spiritual growth. This brings to mind an exhortation from Philippians *“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”*.

Like a young child we are to be avid observers of the Master and the other faithful examples contained within scripture. Observation is how children learn, so we need to become like little children. Therefore we must learn to read the gospels in particular with a focus upon what we can observe in terms of the Masters actions and behaviour.

Far too often brethren and sisters we miss this important aspect of understanding our Lord’s life. Because we are so focused upon what is the passage about, its context, historical setting and meaning. We unfortunately are conditioned to learn using the Greek model of education. Which is for the pupil to learn to know what the teacher knows, where the focus is upon knowledge.

Brethren and sisters we need to renew our minds and come to understand the way the Master taught using the Hebrew model of education. Which was through a mentoring process. Which is a relational experience where someone empowers another by sharing God given resources with the goal to spiritual reproduction or duplication.

The Hebrew model of education is concerned not with content, but with context in other word’s life application. The focus is not upon learning all the knowledge of the teacher, but rather upon the pupil **becoming** what his teacher is.

The idea then is that of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ being poured into us. Through the word of life, through our interaction one with another and through the providential circumstances of life. Our Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ is investing into each of our lives, just as naturally as a parent does with their child.

Speaking of the priesthood of the one we have come to remember Hebrews declares:

Hebrews Chapter 7 and verse 25

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”.

To this we can add these well-known words from Ephesians to complete this picture:

Ephesians Chapter 5 and verses 25 – 27

“Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”.

The Apostle Paul expressed the same sentiment to the Galatian brethren and sisters *“my little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you”*. This is the same attitude we ought to have one to another, a desire that each of us would come to imitate and resemble the Master in both character and action.

No wonder the Apostle elsewhere exhorts us brethren and sisters to *“be ye followers (or imitators) of me, even as I also am of Christ”*. Indeed to Timothy his own protege in the faith the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle wrote:

2nd Timothy Chapter 2 and verse 2

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

Like Timothy the word of life instructs us to likewise pour our lives into one another in a relational way. Not only in sharing and empowering each other through our knowledge and experience of the truth, but also importantly by imparting our own beings to one another through sacrificial love.

It is through this meaningful fellowship and intimate interaction that we will become imitating disciples and glorify our Heavenly Father by bearing much fruit. Let us recall brethren and sisters we have a daily choice to make our tree good and its fruit good.

As we come now to remember the Master once more in these emblems of bread and wine. Let us *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”*.

For in the bread we clearly see **the bread**, which speaks here of the love of our Heavenly Father in Christ, expressed in his word. That word, which is able to transform and renew our minds and characters to be, like his.

Then with the wine it clearly speaks to us of the outworking of that word in a life poured out in service, invested into others. This is modelled for us in the Master’s sacrifice, which we remember now. And also in his ongoing High Priestly intercession on our behalf to our eternal wellbeing in the father’s mercy and ultimately to our Heavenly Father’s glory.

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