

First Fruit

Fruit. It seems like a lot of focus in scripture is upon it. God plants, He prunes, He provides nutrients, He waits, and He reaps. From the opening pages of the Bible to its closure, His word is resplendent with meaningful agricultural depictions. Israel has been pictured as a vine and as an olive tree. The righteous are pictured as fruitful palms, as wheat and as good seed. Jesus spoke of God as the owner of a vineyard, a farmer whose crop has been infested with bad seed and as a harvester.

At the beginning of man's relationship with his Creator, fruit was the instrument of both life and death. In disobedience to God, man ate the deadly fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. At the end of the age, in the book of Revelation, the angels of God are instructed to harvest the world.

It's quite evident that God's a farmer, a "husbandman" in the old King James lingo. It's a fundamental aspect of His being that bears consideration. The New Testament word for this simply means someone who works the land, and for our Father in heaven, this is true both physically as well as spiritually. Actually, Jesus described Him this way; He said, "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman." (John 15:1)

In fact, His first act on behalf of man was to plant Eden, a magnificent garden, and man's first job was to mimic God, if you would, in tending this paradise. His first command to man was to be fruitful. Now this isn't merely a nice word

picture but basic to our understanding of His ways and applicable to our walk in these last days.

James wrote, *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer (husbandman) waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain."* (James 5:7) Yes, God is indeed a farmer and He's into fruit. In these last days, He is patiently waiting for it to mature. So let's look into His husbandman techniques, consider the fruit that He's expecting and examine our role in it all.

First of all, God plants. He planted Eden (Gen 2:8). He planted Israel in the Promised Land (Psa 80:8,15; Jer 2:21; 11:17; Mark 12:1). His Son plants seed in the heart of man. (Mat 13, Lu 8) Thus, His plantings are physical, typical and/or spiritual. Like a farmer, He is very practical in it all; none of His efforts are wasted. There are divine purposes and outcomes all according to His will. Though He scatters seed freely, it only produces a crop in the good, weed-free soil. Thus, it is very important for us to understand that, spiritually speaking, it is not the seed that God is looking for in our lives but that which the seed has produced to fruition.

Next, God tends His planting. Jesus spoke of His pruning or cleaning the vines and even allowing for fertilization and aeration. He sends the rain in its season as well as the sunshine. Each of these has spiritual application for us. Pruning speaks of taking away those things that rob

the plant of strength but produce nothing in return. Cleaning speaks of removing the earthly coverings that impede the effective working of His light. Fertilization and aeration speak of improving the condition of His plants' environment. The rain speaks of His blessing and His Word while the sunlight speaks of His life and love. All of this, He does patiently but with an expectation in mind.

And with it, God waits. Most of us know we have so much to be thankful for, but we rarely consider how thankful we should be that God waits. Our society conditions us to rush everything, but one thing that simply cannot be accelerated is the bearing of good fruit. Why God waits as long as He does is a matter of His divine sovereignty and foreknowledge and certainly one of the greatest mysteries of His creation. Yet, no farmer in his right mind gets upset when he plants his crop in say April and finds no fruit in May. That's because he knows it will not come until August or September. God knows the soil, knows the plant, knows the seasons, knows the fruit... and thus, He waits.

But when He knows His fruit should be ready, His waiting is over. Then He harvests. Now, some fruit comes from shaking, some from cutting, some is plucked up. In any case, God is looking for fruit, lots of good fruit. Jesus said, *"He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit..."* and *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."* and, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that*

your fruit should remain..." (John 15:5,8,16) He also illustrated this in His parables saying, *"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it..."* (Luke 13:6) and *"Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard."* (Luke 20:10)

So what exactly is good fruit in God's eyes? The Bible speaks of many types of fruit – the fruit of the tree(s), the ground, the womb, the land, your body, your labors, your vineyard, your works, their own way, their thoughts; there is also the fruit of the righteous, the fruit of his mouth, of her hands, of the lips, of lies, and of course, the fruit of the Spirit.

Fundamentally, fruit has two characteristics; first, it is something that is produced for use or consumption by another. Second, it identifies the fruitbearer. (Luke 6:44)

To the latter point, Jesus said, *"Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."* (Mat 7:16,17) Righteous men and women are good trees in a spiritual sense. For instance:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season whose leaf also shall not wither and whatever he does shall prosper." (Psa 1:1-3)

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar

in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”
(Psa 92:12 – 15)

The righteous will bear good fruit in its season. The life of the sap will always flow but fruit comes ‘when it comes’. Oh, how we want McFruit! But, it doesn’t work that way.

So, when He comes, what will the heavenly Husbandman be seeking. What is the fruit that pleases Him? Surely the fruit of the Spirit is on His mind – “*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal 5:22,23). However...

Paul wrote to the Colossian church, “...*Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, ...declared to us your love in the Spirit. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work...*” (Col 1:7-10)

You see, there is one thing that the Bible tells us is required in order to please Him and it says He will come seeking it.

“*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” (Heb 11:6)

And...

“... *shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to*

Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:7,8)

Quite simply, the Husbandman will come seeking loving faith in Jesus Christ both in our life and in the lives of those we’ve influenced. Many other types of good fruit will be gathered into His barn as well but without this first fruit, the rest will not matter.

Strip away the shibboleths, remove the myriad doctrines that rise and fall, set aside the efforts of both the well intentioned and the self glorifying, still every mouth and quiet every heart. If we lose the lyrics and empty the edifices, all of Christianity comes down to one and only one fundamental fruit – loving faith in Jesus Christ.

Obvious? Not so. We are tremendously distracted by things we are convinced are essential to our Christian life and culture but are really more a part of some other agenda be it political, social and/or otherwise. We have been brilliantly side-tracked by an astute enemy. As a result, the fundamental fruit has been buried in the race for attendance, celebrity and the sirens of the morally/politically offended.

Righteousness is never legislated – it is the delightful flavor of the fruit of a healthy tree. If the church corporate would turn the tide, we must first focus on the fundamental fruit – loving faith in Jesus. May we never take it for granted.
(Psa 126:6)