

Joy and Fruitfulness (John 15:1-11, Isaiah 54)



1 The Joy of Fruitfulness

Trinity was introduced in John ch14-17. John 15 introduces the Father as the vinedresser, the Son the vine, the Holy Spirit the sap and we are the branches. How does the vine bear fruit? Not by trying hard, but by being connected to the vine - the quality of the branch's connection to the vine, the nutrients that flow through it, and the work of the vinedresser who prunes the vine – it can feel devastating!

The key to fruitfulness is 'abiding in the vine', 'abiding in His word', and 'abiding in His love'. It refers to the quality of our connection and relationship to God. Jesus boldly invites His disciples to a life of fruitfulness and joy they had never experienced before, and the vehicle to this joy and fruitfulness is prayer (John 15:7-8).

2 Fruitfulness and Life of Prayer

Jesus prefaces the life of prayer with one precondition, '*For without Me you can do nothing.*' (John 15:5) Nothing in Greek means absolutely nothing – ZERO (δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν). Most Christians do not really believe this. It takes a long journey for us to realise we can do NOTHING to bear fruit in our own strength. All fruitfulness flows out of the inner life of prayer, not on external circumstances or luck. Jesus gives us fruitfulness from the inside out, beginning with our relationship with God. The world tries to build from the outside in. 'It is a great tragedy when a man succeeds before he is ready - Martin Lloyd Jones.' It is a tragedy to be promoted beyond our level of spiritual competence.

The tabernacle was built inside out rather than outside in (Ex 40). God takes far more time and effort to build on the inside of us than outside. All true fruitfulness in our life is first the work of the Spirit inside of us. And all lasting fruitfulness in our life is the direct result of receiving from the Lord through prayer. 'Man can have nothing unless he receives from God.' (Derek Prince) C.f. Ps 37:1-11.

3 Inner Fruitfulness and Spiritual Growth

We are to grow spiritually in every respect to Christ's full stature. Stunted spiritual growth in a Christian means stunted joy in the Lord. What is the cause? There could be many reasons, but one most common cause is unperceived pride. This is what the Lord spoke to us from the prayer getaway. No one suffers from too much humility. Everybody suffers from unperceived pride. Why? Pride is like bad breath. Everyone knows it except the one who has bad breath. Everyone walks away but nobody wants to tell the person. Great peace and joy are found in yielding, and in letting go of control.

The only virtue Jesus spoke of himself is humility. '*Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*' (Matt 11:28-30) What is Jesus' yoke? It is the yoke of humility. Life is heavy without this yoke of humility. It is like operating heavy machinery without greasing it with oil, and something breaks inside if we persist. Jesus' yoke is the yoke of humility. There are days we will not step into the next phase of our calling apart from increasing in humility and meekness. God's great priority for His people today is producing more humility and more character rather than more influence and more ministry. And God will choose what produces more humility in our life.

- a. Words – Jesus said we will be judged by our words. We need to pay attention to what comes out of our mouths. E.g. boasting, condemnation, and judging invite the enemy's attack. Apostle Paul said, 'God forbid that I boast apart from the cross,' (Gal 6:14), 'I will boast about my weakness,' (2 Cor 12:5). 1 Pet 5:5-6 says, 'God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.' James 4:6-7, 'God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.'
- b. Attitude – Assumption of superiority or greater knowledge. We need to learn the art of listening. God has given us two ears and one mouth. We need to listen twice as much as we speak. A lot of relationship problems come from our inability to listen deeply. Speaking without hearing is a foolish practice. '*He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him,* (Prov 18:13). Impatience is a form of pride.