

A Fruitful Life

Luke 13:6 [NIV] *“Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.”*

In the Old Testament, a fruitful tree was often used as a symbol of godly living.

Psalms 1:3 [NIV] *“He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”*

This is a description of Christians who are developing the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 [NIV] *“But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”*

Notice that adverse physical conditions do not stop a child of God producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 17:5-6 [NIV] *“This is what the LORD says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no-one lives.”*

Two kinds of people are contrasted in these scriptures.

Those who trust in human beings and those who trust in God.

At the time this was spoken by the prophet of God, the people of Judah were trusting in false gods and military alliances instead of God.

This is exactly what is happening today throughout the whole world.

As a result of **not** looking to God they were barren and unfruitful.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,”*

How many of these God-like characteristics do we see in society today?

Even worse, how many of these God-like characteristics do we see in the body of Christ on earth, the Christian church?

In contrast those few who do trust in God flourish like a tree planted by a stream of water.

In troubled times, those who trust in human beings will be impoverished and spiritually weak, because they have little strength to draw on.

But those who trust in God have abundant, eternal lasting strength of their Creator God to draw on at all times.

Sufficient strength for all their own needs, but even for the needs of others.

We have to ask the question, ‘Are we satisfied with being unfruitful?’

Or do we desire to be a well-watered tree that is bearing fruit for God to feed others with.

Remember that each fruit has in it the seed from which a similar tree can grow.

As others receive and digest the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in us, this seed in the fruit can begin to grow in their lives, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 13:7 [NIV] *“So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’”*

Jesus is pointing out what would happen to an unfruitful tree.

The kind of person who took up valuable time and effort of his pastor and space in his church and still did **not** produce fruit for the patient Head and Owner of the church, Jesus Christ.

This is one way that Jesus Christ is warning us the Sovereign Creator God will **not tolerate for ever** the lack of productivity in His created children, you and I.

Luke 3:7-9 [NIV] *“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.** And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can **raise up children for Abraham.** The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

This is John’s version of the same warning.

What motivates us to repent and begin to produce fruit?

A fear of the future?

Or the desire to be a better person in a better world!

Some people wanted to be baptised by John so that they could escape eternal punishment but they were **not** turning to God for salvation.

John had some very harsh words for such people.

John knew that God values reformation of our lives above any rituals in our lives.

Psalms 51:16-17 [NIV] *“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**”*

David knew that what God desired was a changed heart.

The heart is the driving force of our lives, if the heart stops beating we die.

If we stop producing fruit in our lives that God can use to extend His Kingdom, we die.

Is our faith motivated by a deep desire to be “*born again*” of the Holy Spirit and beginning to produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Or are we only seeking a vaccination or insurance policy against eternal death?

Luke 3:8 [NIV] *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*

Many of John's hearers were shocked when he said that being child of a Christian was **not** enough [an updated translation of "*Abraham's descendants*"].

The religious leaders of John's day relied more on their family lines than on their faith for their standing with God.

For them religion was something that they inherited.

We cannot hand down to our children a personal relationship with God.

Every person has to make their own personal commitment to develop a relationship with their Creator God.

Christianity is not a religion but a relationship with God.

A personal relationship with God and a corporate relationship with God as Christians meet together to worship their God and Saviour.

We cannot rely on someone else's faith for our salvation, only a relationship of trust with Jesus Christ who is God and our Saviour.

We have to put our faith in Jesus and then exercise that faith in our day-to-day life every day, not just when prompted to do once a week by your pastor.

The confession of sins that John was calling for, and a repentant and changed life are inseparable.

James 2:14 [NIV] "*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?*"

Our faith in the blood of Jesus Christ will **not** save us unless it prompts us to works of love towards others, especially those who do not know Jesus Christ.

James 2:15-17 [NIV] "*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*"

Faith in Christ's blood without loving works is a dead faith, unable to save us from eternal death.

James 2:18 [NIV] "*But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*"

One person with faith and **no** deeds cannot receive salvation nor can a person with "loving" deeds but **no** faith in the blood of Christ receive salvation.

James 2:19 [NIV] "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder.*"

Even the fallen angels know that God exists [faith in God] but we find **no** loving deeds in their lives, so they end up in total isolation from their Creator in total darkness, physical and spiritual.

Jude 5-7 [NIV] "*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home, **these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.** In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*"

Jude gives us three examples of the result of rebellion against God's way of life, love and mercy.

1 The children of Israel – who were delivered out of Egypt, then refused to trust God and enter into the Promised Land. [Numbers 14:26-39]

2 The angels – although they were created by God pure, Holy and living in His presence, some of them gave in to pride and joined Satan to rebel against God. [2 Peter 2:4]

3 The cities of Sodom & Gomorrah – the inhabitants were so full of sin that God wiped them off the face of the earth. [Genesis 19:1-29]

If the chosen people, angels and sinful cities were punished, how much more should we who have the full revelation of God's plan of salvation?

Luke 3:8 [NIV] *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*

What did Christ mean that He would create children of Abraham out of stones?

James 2:20-24 [NIV] *“You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”*

Those who have faith that includes works are children of Abraham who will be made righteous by such active faith.

Such people would also be friends of God.

Romans 4:1-3 [NIV] *“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”*

Paul uses Abraham as a good example of someone who was saved by faith.

By emphasising faith, Paul is **not** saying that God's laws are unimportant.

Romans 7:7 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”*

The law is to show us what is sin, and what we must repent of.

1 Timothy 1:8-11 [NIV] *“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made **not** for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”*

Such people need the law to show them what is sin and then open the way for the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin.

John 16:7-9 [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will*

convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;”

One of the specific tasks that **only** the Holy Spirit can do.

When God’s Word and the Holy Spirit come together conversion takes place.

Romans 4:13-16 [NIV] *“It was **not through law** that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, **but through the righteousness that comes by faith**. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has **no** value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”*

It is impossible to be saved by simply obeying the law.

The promise of righteousness [holiness] and eternal life come through faith is what God has done for all humanity in Jesus Christ.

Abraham pleased God by faith in His promises **before** the law was given through Moses.

The Covenant promises made to Abraham were repeated in the New Covenant brought by Jesus Christ the Son of God and ratified by His spilt blood.

The New Covenant, first given to Abraham, is also a covenant based on faith in God’s promises.

Romans 4:5 [NIV] *“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*

When some people learn that they are saved by God through faith, they start to worry.

“Do I have enough faith?” they wonder; *“is my faith strong enough to save me?”*

These people miss the point.

It is Jesus who saves us, **not** our feelings or actions, and He is strong enough to save us no matter how weak our faith is.

One example of this is found in **Mark 9:17-29** [NIV] *“A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” **Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”** When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”*

This man who asked Christ to heal his son said *“I do believe, help me to overcome my unbelief.”*

He knew his belief was weak but even so Christ did show mercy and healed his son.

Jesus offers us salvation as a gift because He loves us, **not** because we have earned it through a powerful faith.

What then is the role of faith?

Faith is believing and trusting in Jesus Christ, and reaching out to accept His wonderful gift of salvation.

Galatians 5:22 [King James] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,”*

Our faithfulness in and to Jesus Christ will increase as we allow the Holy Spirit Whom He will send to live **in** us.

If we ask Him, the Holy Spirit will produce these fruits of the spirit in us, and one of them is faith.

Luke 13:8-9 [NIV] *“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”*

Here we see the mercy and patience of our Creator God.

We need to ask ourselves the question: *‘Have I been enjoying the freedom of fear and the peace of mind that can be ours by accepting Christ’s death as a substitute for our deserved death without giving back to God anything in return?’*

John 15:1-5 [NIV] *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

This intimate relationship with Christ is accomplished through our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, Whom Christ sent to continue His work on earth, while He is our High Priest at the throne of God.

John 15:6 [NIV] *“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”*

Again we are reminded of the end result of a fruitless life.

John 15:7 [NIV] *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

This is how we can give something back to God in response to His Love for us.

Such a life will also be proof that we are disciples of Jesus Christ [Christians].

John 15:12-13 [NIV] *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

One of the fruits of this Spirit is love and we express this love in the same way that Christ did by laying down our lives for others.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Just as Jesus Christ is alive after making this sacrifice, our lives also be a “*living sacrifice*” expressing our love for all of God’s children.

John 15:16 [NIV] “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and **appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.** Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*”

The very reason for God calling us is for us to bear “*fruit that will last*”.

Eternal fruit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the very characteristics of a Holy God.

Don’t overlook the promise Christ made in this verse.

Look at the life of Christ, the boldly claim in humble prayer that we also may fulfil the same things “*in His Name*”.

John 14:12-14 [NIV] “*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. **He will do even greater things than these,** because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*”

If what we ask will bring glory to God, then we can in faith ask Christ to empower us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Here is a promise of unlimited power to do God’s work here on earth, why are we reluctant to claim that power?

The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God in us and all believers, helping us to live as God wants and building Christ’s church on earth.

Let us all dedicate ourselves to show our love for God by doing His work, His will here and now, fulfilling the commission He has given us.

Matthew 28:18-20 [NIV] “*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*”

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Plus the fulfilling of the commission He has given us will assure us of eternal life.

James 2:17, 20 [NIV] “*In the same way, faith by itself, if it **is not** accompanied by action, is dead.” ... “*You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*”*

Be warned!!