

God Wants Our Lives to Bear Fruit

Mark 11:12-19

February 19, 2012

I was reading an article the other day when the writer of that article made a connection between two passages of scripture that I had never connected together. Once he made his point, my reaction was the typical, why didn't I ever see that connection before. Let's hear that passage of scripture and see what you think.

Mark 11:12-19

Now the first portion of scripture has Jesus angry at a fig tree because it was bearing no fruit. The tree was barren, but Jesus was hungry. The next section of scripture tells about Jesus going into the temple, the key place of worship, prayer, and teaching. He found that the house of worship was being misused. He found that items that could be used for honoring God were placed in the entrance where seekers, people who were new at searching for God would enter the temple. Again, Jesus was angry, real angry. He wasn't mad because the youth group was having a bake sale set up at the front door of the church. He was not mad because a gospel group is selling cds in the lobby of the church after their concert. Jesus was angry because the leaders of the temple were exploiting the spiritual outsiders to buy things for worship. The temple leaders were not worrying about producing converts to the faith. They were not being spiritual prophets. They were worrying about producing and keeping financial profits. Jesus was angry because the spiritual leaders who ought to know and live better were bearing no spiritual fruit.

So both stories of Jesus having a bad day really are about Jesus being angry because what was designed to produce and have purpose was empty and barren.

Today I want use the message this morning to get us ready to enter the traditional season of Lent. Next week we will be 7 Sundays away from Easter, the most holy day in Christianity. Lent is a time when historically the church spiritually speaking took a look in the mirror to assess its relationship with God. Lent could be described as a time when Christians assess whether they are living lives that spiritually are bearing fruit. Lent is a time for Christians to assess and prune away from our lives whatever hinders us from being fruitful. **Pastor Mark Driscoll recently said, we are to kill the sin in our lives not just manage it.**" (Churchleaders.com, 2/15/12) Easter was the conclusion of that season when the church celebrated with hope because Jesus was raised from the dead.

I want to remind us that a key question to ask ourselves as we enter the season of Lent and preparation toward Easter is to remember this, God 's power that raised Jesus from the dead is to bear fruit in our lives. His resurrection is the game changer of all game changing events that have ever happened in the world. But the dilemma is that we don't always live our lives bearing spiritual fruit. The truth is Jesus comes to us and he can find us to be like that barren Fig Tree. He sees a lack of evidence of his power flowing through us. **See that is the issue, the power of God is here; but our lives aren't always expressing it.**

Pastor Alan Danielson gives an example of what I am talking about when he tells of serving as an interim minister in a small church. He said their sanctuary could seat 400, but they only had 40 people attending for worship. He said they had a million dollars in their church accounts but refused to spend the money. The roof leaked and throughout the building you could find the occasional bucket placed to catch the water leaking from the roof they refused to repair. He said they weren't bearing fruit in leading people to Christ, nor maturing people in their faith, let alone taking care of the sanctuary. They were not depending on God for new life; their

congregation was on life-support, no spiritual fruit was going to come from them. (Churchleader.com, 2/15/12)

So today is about reminding us of some basics of Christian faith.

God wants our lives to bear fruit: Matthew 28:19

Scripture is consistent from Old Testament to New Testament that we were created in God's image and part of that image calls for us bear fruit. In **Genesis 1:28**, God gave the instruction to Adam and Eve be "fruitful and multiply." He created us to physically thrive and not to stagnate and barely hold on in this life. In **Matthew 28:19** when Jesus gives the words we know as **The Great Commission**, once again it sounds similar to Genesis. Jesus tells his disciples to "**go into all the world and make disciples**" - in other words be fruitful and multiply the people who will trust in Christ. Jesus commanded his disciples to teach others. Bearing spiritual fruit is when our lives specifically teach and lead others to trust and commitment in Jesus Christ.

Spiritual fruitfulness is also about who we are on the inside. Spiritual fruitfulness is about who we are when we think no one is watching us. The Apostle Paul would write, "**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**" (Galatians 5:22)

God wills that internally and outwardly our lives bear spiritual evidence of his power in us.

God wants us to prepare to bear fruit: Revelation 2-3

God also wants us to **prepare to bear fruit**. Jesus took 3 and half years before he launched his disciples to be totally on their own. He took the time to get them ready. He taught them. He demonstrated what he was teaching to them through his ministry to

others. He sent them out to do ministry and when they returned, talked with them about what they experienced. He also worked them through the times when they failed. But he prepared his disciples for the great mission he gave them to be fruitful, and effective to make disciples.

The need to take the intentional time and steps to live a prepared life runs through out the teaching of scripture. But there is one section of the Bible that seems to contain in a very short space the entire picture of how our lives can have both strengths and yet weaknesses that need to be assessed and addressed. The book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible. I believe it is accurate and fair to say that between chapter one, the introduction part of that book and before the prophecy and visions unfold from chapter 4-21, chapters 2-3 are the hinge chapters, the pivotal chapters. Because in chapters 2-3 seven churches are addressed by God through John's prophecy. The number 7 is a symbolic number of wholeness and completeness. It could be that seven churches were addressed to symbolize the entire church, all believers. Read Revelation 2-3 and every church is given some sort of instruction about what they need to change, how they are lacking, or what they need to keep doing so they can be prepared for what the Lord was going to do. Each church was different, but each needed to be more prepared to live for God.

Some churches like **Peragamun** were described as living close to the evil power brokers of Satan and yet the spirit acknowledged they were holding fast to the name of Jesus and not denying their faith in him. Yet they were called to change and practice repentance for some things they were not doing well. Some churches like **Thyatira** were known for their great works of love and patient endurance under persecution, but even they were called to get ready and be prepared for what God would unfold in the future.

Those descriptions of the churches remind us we don't always realize our lives and church are not bearing as much spiritual fruit as it could and part of the reason is about living a life of greater preparation.

Let me tell you about an event we have planned for our church to help anyone who has a desire to live a life that produces spiritual fruit for the sake of Christ. March 11 is the Sunday when former pastor of this church, David Comperry is going to preach for us in morning worship. He will be speaking about the need for us to take stock and assess where we stand in our relationship with God and the church. He has been asked to do this because our church can do all the planning and visioning about being a strong church; but if we aren't strong and healthy in our relationship with God then there is no way we'll produce spiritual fruit. If we aren't spiritually healthy then either our planning and efforts will go to waste, or our ideas and vision for the church will never become reality. Just like scripture from Revelation called for Christians to take stock where they stood with God so they could be more fruitful, our church needs to do the same. Before any doctor formulates a treatment plan for their patient, the first thing they do is a thorough evaluation, then comes the treatment plan.

David is a well respected and effective pastor and former pastor of this church. We look forward to him reminding us that part of the way we live a prepared life for Christ **starts by knowing our spiritual strengths and weaknesses.** And when worship is over that day we are planning a luncheon at The Depot down the street. And when the luncheon is finished we are going to give out a spiritual assessment with insightful questions that just takes a few minutes to answer to help us assess our spiritual strengths and weaknesses. More will be said about the 11th later, however, the first thing we want to do is let you know that there is a concrete event to help us evaluate ourselves spiritually so our lives can bear fruit as a believer in Jesus Christ.

God wants us willing to bear fruit: 2 Corinthians 2:5

God also wants us to be **willing to bear fruit**. I believe a key to bearing fruit is to **transform our love and passion for Jesus Christ into obedience**. The one thing we can control is our obedience to God. Obedience is not just agreeing with God; but doing that which we say agrees with God. The Apostle Paul once said, **“And I came you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:3-5**

Now keep in mind that Paul was preaching to a culture of people that could separate what the mind did from the body. They could live lives of drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, cheating, and stealing; but still believe their soul could be pure. Sounds a lot like today's culture. Sounds a lot like some who are Christian or at least claim that they are believers of Jesus; but their lifestyle consistently contradicts their beliefs. So Paul's words came to those people and their culture as a shock and a different point of view. **Paul's taught God's power in your mind and heart flows through our lives, our bodies, and our actions.** God wants us to bear fruit of his presence in how we live.

But that is just half of it because Paul said the demonstration of the Spirit's power was for the purpose **“so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.” v.5** God wants us to live obediently to his word. so we experience his power in us. Remember that scripture from Isaiah used in the call to worship, says **“my word shall not return empty or void?”** God wants us living by his word so we can experience a power in this life beyond ourselves. He wants us choosing to obey his word so we are in situations where we depend on him to get us through

some trial or challenge by his power not just our will power.

Illustration: Let me tell you about something that we did in our Wednesday evening prayer group this past week. We started off the group asking for only prayer request that we ourselves could somehow be involved in and be used by God to help. Instead of gathering names of people we know of and praying for them, we listed only names of people one way or another we could take action, a visit, a hand of help in some way to demonstrate God moving through us.

The reason this was done is because we need to be a demonstration of God's power and boldness. We need to get into situations where we depend on God right there and then to help us speak a word on his behalf, or give assurance that he is reaching out to someone through us, or share how God has gotten us through a similar situation that someone else is going through.

Don't get me wrong we are praying and talking about other studies and activities on Wednesdays for adults. But the truth is sometimes churches are not bearing fruit and Christians are not growing because we study about God, we study about what other Christians and churches do, but we aren't putting his word in to action.

I know a lot of you love basketball, high school, college and pro. Have you ever seen when a player has the ball and he tries to throw it in bounds but can't make up his/her mind what player to throw to? If they stand there too long holding the ball, time runs out and they loose possession of the ball. They won't score.

Paul's words are telling us it's not enough just to stand with God's words in our hands, we got to put into action, the clock is ticking, opportunities come and go, do nothing and we loose out on bearing fruit.

So our strategy in our prayer group is about putting our faith and knowledge of God into action through concern for the people for whom we are praying. It's a way that we can be obedient to be fruitful. I believe if we'll give this approach a chance we'll start seeing and hearing people describe how God is working through them.

Conclusion:

Did you read this week about a restaurant in Las Vegas called The Heart Attack Grill? It is known for its menu that is high in fat and calorie content. One of their burgers is named the "Triple By-Pass Burger." It contains three big patties of beef, cheese and the works. A man was eating the Triple By-Pass Burger a few days ago when he suffered a heart attack. Thankfully, he is going to be okay, but I bet that meal will have him making some smarter choices about what he puts into his body.

God calls us to be effective, to make a difference to be fruitful by choosing wisely what we put into our hearts and minds so we demonstrate His hope and power as we live; not just studying and hearing about it. God calls us to be fruitful so we can share Him with the world, with that neighbor across the street or that co-worker across the hall. God's love that makes a difference in this life and eternal life to come. Amen