

Harvest: Fruitful Followers

Why would the Israelites turn away from entering the Promised Land? Perhaps spending all their lives as slaves in Egypt never left them, even though they left Egypt. Slaves were human tools; whose value was in their productivity. A slave's value system was in what his master thought of him.

James Dobson wrote,

“We are not what we are. We are not even what others think we are.
We are what we think others think we are.”

One of the reasons they gave for rejecting the Promised Land was exactly this:
“...we became like grasshoppers in our own sight,
and so we were in their sight.”

That same 'slave-mentality exists today.

It's hard to break free from the past, even though in Israel's case it was due to their stubborn unbelief, in the face consistent miraculous intervention by God. The key issue of the American Civil War was summarized by Charles Sumner,

“Where slavery is, there Liberty cannot be;
and where Liberty is, there Slavery cannot be.”

The Promised Land was a beautiful and productive land, but it had to be conquered, thus making it a war-zone. Israel was out-gunned, out-manned, and totally inexperienced in warfare. If they were to go in on their own they wouldn't have a chance. But God had miraculously delivered their and demonstrated His faithfulness from the beginning; from the time they were Egyptian slaves, and every day since. They looked at their circumstances, and then voted to go back to slavery.

The Promised Land is a picture of the Spirit-filled Christian life (not of heaven). It is both a progressive battle zone, and a place for God's overcomers.

It is also representative of our relationship with God and bearing spiritual fruit. The Promised Land for the believer is not heaven, but it is where the Lord fights our battles, builds our character,
and bears fruit through us.

The Promised Land is a parallel of the victorious Christian life
– the Fruitful Christian Life.

The Psalmist speaks of such a life:

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.” (Ps. 1:1-3).

I. Fruitfulness

I remember a story told by a man who grew up near the orange orchards in Orange County. He would walk in the fields and listen to the deep groaning of the trees as they strained to bear fruit. Then he stopped and corrected himself, “Actually, it was perfectly quiet. Fruit was effortless to the trees. Fruit came.”

Fruit for a tree is a natural outcome of being positively planted near water and basic nutrients. It doesn't have to work at bearing fruit.

For the believer bearing fruit is the positive result of living decisively apart from the world's influences and instead, having as his delight and constant meditation - the Word of God.

Jesus said,

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing...If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, as so prove to be My disciples.” (John 15:5, 7-8).

How many people today, claim to be Christians, but spend little or no time in the Word of God. They separate themselves from Christian fellowship. The clear results are similar to malnutrition. Spiritually, there is no healthy development or growth; more likely, it is a sign of a lack of conversion.

When there's no life there is no desire to be with God's people. God's design for every Christian is regular feeding on the word of God through fellowship in Christ's church.

One of the prophets declared:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord.” (Amos 8:11).

Truly we live in such a day where biblical ignorance is high even among believers.

In an article by Prophecy News Watch:

“The number one reason why people go to church”

It's not the music, youth programs or even a change in preacher. Instead it is a shift in the church's beliefs. A new study has found that for the great majority of Americans, the number one reason they go to church is to hear sermons that teach about the Bible and how to apply God's word to their lives.

Matt Woodley wrote this year in Preaching Today's annual State of Preaching outlook that "in a distracted, outraged, shallow culture, people begin to hunger for something rare:

that which is focused, balanced and deep.

In-depth preaching is our best chance to change lives."

Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers concerning gifts in the church,

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...” (Eph. 4:11-15f).

The job-description of the pastor-teacher is to equip the saints in the Word of God so they will be stable in their faith and grow in grace.

As Peter wrote at the end of his second letter,

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:17-18).

The writer to the Hebrew believers exhorted them to faithfulness,

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Heb. 10:23-25).

II. Revealing Fruitfulness

During Jesus' earthly ministry He had only a handful of true followers, though thousands came to hear Him every day.

He often spoke of fruit as a metaphor for the Christian life.

The Parable of the Sower was one such example,

Matt. 13:3-9

“Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And other fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”

When Jesus explained the parable he defined terms.

Seed – word of God

Soils – hearts that heard

Four types of ground

- Hard
- Shallow
- Thorny
- Good

A farmer went out to sow seed – from a bag he tossed seed everywhere.

As he scattered the seed it fell on different types of ground.

Hard ground of the pathway, where no seed could sprout because of the hard ground. The seed was eaten by birds and didn't grow. These are people who don't respond to the gospel and Satan removes the truth from their minds. He has blinded them to the truth.

Then the sower scattered seed on **shallow, stony ground**. It sprouted immediately but was short-lived since it “had no root” and was dried up in the sun's heat. These people look like believers at first, but their commitment is shallow. They give a thoughtless agreement to the gospel, but little difficulties, or trials come and they forget about Christ.

Other seed fell **among the thorns** where it was choked out, receiving no sunlight, nor nutrients. Some people seem to have a genuine conversion

experience, but when temptations, persecution, or even prosperity come into their lives they get distracted and fall away.

These three types of soils reveal different kinds of hearts that the seeds of the gospel fall upon, but in the end do not result in the fruit of salvation.

Only the last soil – **the good soil** – speaks of genuine conversion.

In the **good soil** the seed of the word of God takes root, resulting in a salvation. “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”
(Matt. 13:23)

What kind of soil are you?

III. Confirming Fruitfulness

How do we gain assurance of salvation?

Diligence

“Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent**
to **make certain** about His calling and choosing you;
for as long as you **practice these things**, you will never stumble;
for in **this way**
the **entrance** into the eternal kingdom
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
will be abundantly supplied to you.” (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Gk. Spoudain – command to **be diligent** (used only here in NT.)

“work hard to prove it” “Make every effort”

Add your diligence to divine promises

Lit. *“to bring in by the side of”*

1. Make certain.
2. Put disciplines into practice – make them a habit!
3. Be confident – the fruit tells you what kind of tree you are.
4. Expect a party upon your entrance into heaven
– rejoice in constant hope

God’s grace should not lead us to a more relaxed demeanor, or lull us into a restful state, but rather into a decisive action to confirm your calling and election.

Fruit that Confirms Salvation (Growth in Character)

Your growth in character qualities is confirmation that you are good soil and have an eternal security as a growing Christian.

Will you enter into God's Promised Land? Conquer the Giants?

Confirm your calling by godly character growth and knowledge of Christ?

Or will you fade into the landscape and become a part of the wilderness, then join the hordes who wish to return to the slavery of Egypt;
And turn away from your salvation, drifting into unbelief and destruction
– loving this present passing world?

“So you wanna go back to Egypt?”