

Sermon Series: **POWERfull: The work of the Spirit through us**

Sermon Title: **Fruitfulness**

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Scripture Text: John 15:1-8

Introduction

We are starting a new series this morning entitled, **POWERfull**. This is on the heels of the series we just concluded called Hands and Feet: *Advancing the Kingdom Here & Now*. In that series, we looked at how God intends to use us as his hands and feet. In this series, we want to talk about the *power* that God supplies through the Holy Spirit to do his work. It's one thing to know that God has called us to be his hands and feet, but it is another thing entirely to know the resources he has given us to accomplish his work. We want to look at that power which He has promised to give us in four areas: the power for *fruitfulness*, the power for *prayer*, the power for *faith*, the power for *proclamation*.

The backdrop of John 15 is that the Lord had just announced in chapter thirteen that in a little while, they would see him no longer. You can imagine how devastated they were when they heard this. They had been with him three years and had given up everything to follow him. They had grown accustomed to having him physically *with* them. Now, he is telling them that he would no longer be with them. What does he do in the following three chapters? (John 14-16). He is defining the relationship between himself and the disciples once he is removed from them physically! Shortly he will tell them "*It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away the Holy Spirit would not come.*" In other words, HAVING the Holy Spirit without having HIM *physically* is far better than having him there physically WITHOUT the Holy Spirit.

Parable of the Vine

That's because only if the Holy Spirit comes can the disciples achieve their ultimate purpose—to *bear much fruit and thereby glorify the Father!* In order to make this really clear, Jesus tells a parable based on something everybody in his world understood. Let's put this parable first in context (Go to the last verse in chap. 14). They left the Upper Room and were heading towards Gethsemane. They had to pass through the Kidron Valley. As they were leaving the temple and entering into Kidron, they would have passed the temple gate where the Rabbis had suspended a huge *vine*.

The *vine* was the symbol of Israel and the fruitfulness God called her to (Isaiah 5, Hosea 10:1). Old Testament Israel was called to bear the fruits of the kingdom but they failed. I believe that as Jesus passed through the gate he looked at the vine suspended from the gate and said, "I am the *true* vine." Now, only those who are attached to Jesus are the true Israel who bears fruit for God. Now, what can we deduce from this parable about the relationship between the believer and Christ?" I believe Jesus shows us in this parable the goal of being a believer, *fruitfulness*, the means of being fruitful, *abiding*, the location where all this happens, *within*, and the source from which we are fruitful, *Jesus*.

THE GOAL: *Fruitfulness*

What is this parable really about? Jesus is now describing the relationship between Himself and the believer. Why does he use this analogy of a vineyard? *Because the chief purpose of a vineyard was that it might produce much fruit* (luscious grapes). Vineyards weren't for show but for fruit. That's why Jesus used this analogy because the chief

reason he saved us and called us is to bear much fruit ("By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples"). This is what ultimately brings glory to God. Every believer should desire to bear much fruit and thus prove to be his disciple.

What exactly is the fruit? There are two areas we are called to be fruitful. (1) *First and foremost, it's the fruit of the Spirit in our lives* (Gal. 5). Paul lays it out clearly in Gal. 5:25 ('fruit' not 'fruits'). Fruit folks, is the character of Jesus being produced in our lives because of the presence of the Spirit. Jesus is saying that the only way we can know whether a person is in Jesus is that he or she begins to look, act, talk, think and reveal Jesus. Paul enumerates them individually so we can look at our lives and say, "Am I growing in love? Do I have increasing joy in my life? Am I becoming more patient with the people in my life? Do I treat people kindly? This is the first test of fruitfulness in our lives and it is why Jesus came so that we might be "conformed to the image of the Son."

Yet, there is a second aspect to fruitfulness—*being fruitful in our doing the ministry of Jesus*. I see two problems in the body of Christ: first, there are people who major on being Christ-like but they never do anything. They never share the Gospel so that they are fruitful in winning souls. Then there are people who are bold witnesses but who are obnoxious. God wants us to have both. He wants us to resemble Christ in our character but he also wants us to *resemble Christ in his ministry*.

Jesus glorified the Father by manifesting the fruit of changed lives wherever he went. Paul writes to the Romans and tells them why he wanted to see them: "*I do not want you to be unaware, brothers that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.*" Paul wants to be fruitful wherever he goes and so should we.

So the goal of our being in Christ is that we should bear much fruit. Here is the frightening thing—*fruit and fruit alone authenticates we are believers!* Every believer should examine himself of herself and ask "*Am I becoming more like Jesus?*" and "*Am I gaining people for the kingdom of God?*" But remember, this fruit is not the result of human effort or striving but is supernaturally produced by the life of God.

THE MEANS: Abiding

Jesus tells us that the only way to produce fruit is by abiding in Him. How much fruit we bear depends totally on how closely we *abide* in Him. This takes us to the heart of this passage by defining the relationship between the vine in a vineyard and the branches. If you asked a branch on a grapevine "*How do you produce fruit?*" *What would be the reply?* "*I don't know; I don't grow it, I just bear it. If you cut me away from this vine I will just wither and become useless.*" Likewise, this is true in our Christian lives." I grew up learning all kinds of things about what *abiding* means. You have to pray for hours and hours and read your bible all the time.

I do not deny that prayer and Bible study is important but we had it backwards. *It's not that prayer and Bible study are the basis of abiding but abiding is the basis for prayer and Bible reading!* One day I walked through a grove of orange trees in Florida and I knew that they were Christian oranges because I could hear them straining to bring forth oranges. Jesus in this parable doesn't teach that we have to strive to abide in him but that we are already branches in the vine and simply must *remain*. The branch, as long as it stays attached to the vine, will be fruitful. Abiding, first and foremost, is a matter of faith. I must believe that I am in Christ and Christ is in me. Jesus says that we can abide because we are already clean through the word that He has spoken (justification). Now, drawing on the fact that I am a branch attached to the vine, I simply *remain* in Him. Jesus said it this way: "*In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me and I am in you.*" So abiding in Him has to do with living out the reality that "I am now *in* Him." But the corollary to this is that not only am I in him, *He is also in me!*

THE LOCATION: *Within*

Our Christ-likeness is not something that is applied from or worked from without—it is produced from *within* us. In Galatians 5, Paul compares the *works* of the flesh and the *fruit* of the Spirit. Fruit is the work of the Spirit, by means of the life of Christ within us. It does not come from the outside in but from the *inside* out. Here's a neat quote from an early 20th century Methodist minister named Samuel Chadwick:

Work belongs to the workshop, fruit belongs to the garden. One comes from the ingenuity of the factory; the other is the silent growth of an abounding life. The factory operates with dead stuff; the garden cultivates a living force to their appointed end. Works are always in the realm of dead things. Every building is built out of dead material... fruit does not come of man's labor. It requires his diligence, but it is neither his invention nor his product. He does not make the flowers. No skill of his brings the golden harvest of the fields or the lush fruit of the trees. When man has done all he can do, then God begins and life ensues. Fruit is God's work. The phrase, "fruit of the Spirit" assigns the graces of the Christian character to their proper source. They are not of man's producing.

This is the whole teaching of the New Testament that the Spirit now dwells in the believer and that is the life source from which we live. My life now is the result of the Spirit abiding in me. Spirit-filled men and women can be distinguished by their fruit in the same way that a carnal person can be identified by fleshly works. There are varying degrees of fruitfulness based on degrees of being Spirit-filled. Ephesians 5:18 literally reads: "*Be, being filled with the Spirit*". The Holy Spirit indwells every believer but not every believer is living *filled* with the Spirit. Even after the apostles received the Spirit on Pentecost they were continually *filled* with the Spirit. It says of Stephen, "*and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.*"

It meant not just that Stephen had received the Spirit but that He was continually being controlled by the Spirit. In the New Testament, the believer is to derive his or her strength and the power to live the Christian life by the indwelling Spirit. Look at how Paul prays for the Ephesians that "*according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*" (Eph. 3:16-17) The book of Acts also reveals that it was the power of the Spirit working through the apostles that empowered them to preach the Gospel. Jesus had told them "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses.*" We need to be continually filled with the Spirit if we are to be powerful witnesses of the resurrection.

THE SOURCE: *Jesus*

Life develops from a life-source. Our source of life and fruit is Jesus Christ. "*I am the Vine.*" A branch must be attached to the vine because it has no independent life source. So, Jesus Christ is the vine from which we derive our life; not a facsimile of Jesus but Jesus Himself. According to the New Testament, when He died, I died. When He was buried, I was buried, when He was raised, I was raised, when He ascended, I was ascended. I am in Him, the mighty Christ, and He is in Me. The wrong question is, "What would Jesus DO?" The right question is, "What is Jesus doing?" Acts should be called "*The Acts of the Risen Lord Through His New Body, the Church*" Sometimes we think we don't have much faith, but it's not how *much* faith we have but in *who we place* our faith. It could be as small as a grain of mustard seed, but if it's in the mighty Christ, it is sufficient.

The Danger of Not Being Fruitful

I mentioned it earlier in this message but Jesus gives several warnings here about what happens to branches that are not fruitful. Scholars and Bible teachers have debated for years whether or not this teaches that people can lose their salvation. I don't want to spend time here debating that. I will go on record saying any so-called '*branch*' that

bears no fruit never was a legitimate branch to begin with. *The issue is not debating whether these were true branches or not but to realize that no profession or claim matters but "by their fruits you shall know them."*

If we are relying on a past confession rather than a present testimony of fruitfulness we are deceived. We must be willing to examine our lives truly as to whether or not we are bearing fruit. There are a lot of people who are deceived and will be found out on that day when the Lord judges their fruit not their profession. Jesus warns here and in the Parable of the Sower that it is very possible to be deceived; to go through our entire life thinking we are in the Vine when we are not. Now be careful. As I say that some of you might despair that you don't have more fruit and open the door for the enemy to torment you. You might have some fruit and wish you had more fruit (that does not mean that you are not in the Vine). We are talking about people who bear no fruit, their lives have not changed, they have no hunger for God, no desire for his Word, no desire to share the Gospel.

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Below are questions to use in House Church Group Discussions

1. What are chapters 14-17 in John's Gospel about?
2. Why did Jesus say it was to the disciples' advantage that He go away?
3. What did the symbol of the 'vine' represent in the Old Testament?
4. What are the two aspects of fruitfulness we are to bear?
5. What did Jesus mean when he said "Abide in me?"
6. What is the difference between "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit"?
7. What does Jesus say is the danger of not being fruitful?