

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 9 October 2011

No. T0697

Speaker: Mr. Paul Thomson

How can God use me in the world today: A Fruitful Life

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*. Over the last two weeks we have asked the question, "How can God use me in the world today?" We have considered the following topics; a faithful life, a fulfilled life, and we will complete the series this morning with a fruitful life.

Living as a Christian in today's society is not easy. We are faced with different pressures, challenges and difficulties every day. Many Christians are not very content with where God has placed them and the work that they have been given to do. Some even feel that their life has a sense of emptiness and uselessness. We expect instant results in the work we do for God. Maybe you are feeling a bit like this today? The help we need comes from God. We need to accept that God's ways are higher than our ways and God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9) He is the one who chooses to produce fruit in our lives. He knows the end from the beginning. We need to be patient and wait on the Lord to guide and direct us in our lives. One thing we must be sure about is that Jesus Christ is always the same. He never changes as we read in Hebrews 13:8.

So how can I live a life that is fruitful to God?

In our garden we have a Victoria Plum tree. Some years we have had an excellent crop of fruit and some years not so good. There seems to be no pattern to the amount of fruit we get. This year unfortunately has been a particularly bad year. I wondered what had gone so badly wrong. The tree is in the same place, there had been plenty of rain, the branches had been pruned, there were no weeds choking it. So what had gone wrong? In the spring this year, my wife asked me to cut back some trees and bushes that were overhanging the plum tree and stopping it getting the sunlight. I am not a very willing gardener and I am afraid I have to admit that I failed to do this simple task. When I eventually got round to it, it was too late. The tree had been in shade for too long. It had not had enough of the sun's light and heat. My wife believes that this was the underlying reason that there was hardly any fruit. So I must learn a lesson from this myself. I must learn to do what I have been asked to do and right away. We expected more fruit, but other factors affected the amount of fruit we could enjoy. It is not an excuse but I am told that even taking all these necessary steps there is not always a guaranteed amount of fruit each year.

There are lessons we can learn from this illustration to help us bear fruit in our lives. We need to be obedient to God's word. When we read the Bible, we must allow the light of God's word to penetrate our hearts. We have to be careful how we live our lives. Sometimes we need to take a step back and consider everything that we do and maybe stop doing certain things. Fruit is something that we can't control, but we can do everything possible so that there are no hindrances. The power of the Spirit is required to bring fruit for God from our lives. The best examples are always given by the Lord Jesus Himself. This will help us understand what is expected of us in relation to bearing fruit. We will also see later how the Lord conducted Himself on earth to glorify His Father.

The main verses I would like to read are in the New Testament, in John 15. In John 15, the Lord is on His way to the cross. He takes time to tell His disciples what is expected of them when He leaves them. He tells them of the resources they can draw upon. His disciples were about to suffer for His name's sake.

Let us read John 15:1-17 together: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all

things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another". (John 15:1-17)

The Lord explains quite clearly that He is the true vine and we are the branches and God the Father is the vinedresser. The Lord used pictures in many instances to explain deep teaching. The picture of the vineyard was used here because there were many vineyards in Israel and the disciples could relate to what He was telling them. Vines in the Holy Land were strong, and it was almost impossible for someone to break off a mature branch without doing damage to the vine itself. This picture would speak of how we are connected to Christ. We have a living relationship with Christ and belong to Him. The branch would depend on the vine for its sustenance and strength. We have to depend on the Lord Jesus and rely totally on Him.

There seems to be some conditions that we need to meet for fruit bearing lives. I have three headings to help us remember:

1. Cleansing;
2. Abiding;
3. Obedience.

Cleansing

The vinedresser is in charge of caring for the vines. He prunes the branches in two ways: he cuts away the dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and he cuts away living parts so the quality of the crop will be better. He also purges or scrubs the vines clean. This cleans all the fungus and any impurities that would hold back growth or defile the fruit. This is the work of God our Father. True believers are clean because our sins have been washed by the blood of Jesus. But God needs to continually cut away the dead wood in our lives that may cause trouble. Sometimes it may be through bitter experiences or circumstances in life. It is not always bad things that may be cut away but maybe things that are perfectly good but He has something better for us. We may be producing fruit but He may want to produce more fruit in us. It is important also for us to have clean lives, holy, righteous and without blame. Philippians 1:11 speaks of 'the fruits of righteousness'.

Abiding

Abiding would speak to us of nearness and dependence, of union and communion. We need to accept and be aware of our own weakness and confess to Him our need for His strength. The abiding relationship is natural to the vine and the branches, and so should our relationship be to Christ. Our hearts should be near His at all times. If we try and do things with our own strength we will fail. The Lord points out clearly: 'without Me we can do nothing'. (John 15:5) Abiding is natural to the vine but must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic; abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God's word, prayer, sacrifice and service. Abiding is mentioned eleven times in John 15 so it must be underlined as very important for fruitful lives. We are reminded that we abide in Him and He abides in us. We must not allow anything to separate us from this close relationship.

Obedience

Obedience is the third condition for a fruitful life. We are asked to keep the Lord's commandments even as He kept His Father's commandments. (John 15:10) There is nothing more pleasing naturally to a father than for his children to be obedient and to have a close relationship with him. The key is love and care for each other. Other people will see this quite clearly when they are together. How wonderful it is to read that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. (Ephesians 5:2) Why should we obey Him? Because we love Him. We must also love others. The Lord goes on to tell us that our joy will be full if we have these conditions in our lives. (John 15:11)

What is fruit?

We have looked at the conditions of a fruitful life, but what is fruit? Today we hear many Christian workers speaking about results. This is not a Bible concept. A machine produces results, but it takes a living organism to produce fruit. A good crop does not come overnight. We are not producing fruit to please ourselves, but to serve others. Fruit is something that is borne by us but seen and enjoyed by others.

- Several different kinds of spiritual fruit are named in the Bible.
- We bear fruit when we win others for Christ (Romans 1:13),
- We are part of the harvest (John 4:35-38).
- As we grow in holiness and obedience, we are bearing fruit (Romans 6:22).

- The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) is the kind of Christian character that glorifies God and makes Christ real to others.
- Even the words that would come from our lips are spoken of as fruit (Hebrews 13:15).

So there are many ways others can see fruit in our lives. A true branch, united with the vine, will always bear fruit. Not every branch will bear a bumper crop, but there is always fruit when there is life.

John 15 speaks of “no fruit” (John 15:2), “fruit” (John 15:2), “more fruit” (John 15:2) and “much fruit” (John 15:5, 8). No fruit would come from a broken branch. This would speak of someone who professes to be a Christian, but is not. There is no life in them and therefore no fruit. A true branch or believer always bears fruit. The Lord speaks of fruit as being precious in Deuteronomy 33:14; so it must be really important to God. In Matthew 7:20 tells us “that by their fruit you shall know them”. How wonderful if you are recognised openly in the world as belonging to Christ. An apple tree produces apples, a plum tree produces plums. A Christian produces Christ-like fruit. More fruit and much fruit would tell us that we must continually bear fruit every year. Fruit is produced through us by the Spirit for the glory of God the Father and will continually produce from one life to the other. John 15:16 speaks of us as being chosen, appointed to go out and produce fruit that it may be permanent. This is a great challenge to my heart. Think about it; in this world we may want to leave a financial legacy so our children have a secure future. We may desire to earn a place of high esteem in the business world. Or do some great feat that is recognised by others in history. These things may be important to you, but that is not what God is asking you to do. God wants us to leave a spiritual legacy. What will our children remember about us? What will others remember about us? Are the things of Christ that are permanent and remain our main desire in this world? Will we be remembered for our Christ-like character?

A few weeks ago while distributing Gospel tracts, I met a man who, after he had looked at the tract, asked if this was the mission that a man called King Thomson used to go to. I told him it was and he went on to tell me about how he knew him. It was interesting to me that he immediately connected this tract to King Thomson. He was a man of 71 years old and he told me of how King used to cut his hair. While he was having his hair cut King witnessed to him and asked him to come to the Gospel. He never took up this invitation until one Sunday evening King knocked on his door and invited him along. He could not make any excuse so he went down to the Gospel meeting. As far as I am aware this man is not a Christian. It struck me that, although King, who incidentally was my grandfather, has been with the Lord for over fifteen years, the witness in his life was still remembered - yes, 50 years later! God may still be pleased to see this dear man saved and come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. Please pray for this him. The work that was done for God fifty years ago may still bear fruit.

We don't know how God will use us. We may not be an evangelist who can speak to many people at once and see hundreds saved because of our preaching. We may feel that we have the simplest of tasks to do for God. Don't worry! God will produce fruit in your life whether you are aware of it or not. But we must have the conditions in our lives that are ready to produce a bumper crop if it pleases God. Let us be content in the circumstances God has placed us in and have a real desire to live a fruitful life for God.

May God bless and encourage you this morning.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.