

BEARING THE RIGHT FRUIT

Isaiah 5:1-7

INTRODUCTION:

You may have heard of the absurd newspaper item from Iowa City, Iowa, concerning a woman whose palms suddenly started bleeding. *A researcher who examined her said the wounds resembled the stigmata that often appears on very religious people.* Most of us have heard of the stigmata: *it refers to a condition of bleeding palms especially about the time of Good Friday, very much resembling the bleeding hands of Jesus on the cross.* Although this lady from Iowa City had the same kind of wounds **doctors soon discovered a different source:** SHE HAD RECEINTLY SPENT 26 HOURS PLAYING SPACE INVADERS ON HER COMPUTER. When she returned the borrowed game, the wounds disappeared! **THAT'S TOO MUCH a parable of modern life to let it pass! HOW MANY** who think they're *bearing the marks of the cross* have really only been playing video games?

Another news item was publication of a Gallup Poll that indicates that Americans are strong on religion but weak on morality! There's a lot of **CHEATING** going on these days in America! Cheating on taxes, cheating in marriages, cheating in school and on the job --- and the startling thing is, *according to the survey*, the conduct of church members (as a whole) is no better than the general population. **Strong on religion, says Gallup, but weak on morality!** And **scars in the hands** from playing Space Invaders! Gallup does go on to point out that about 12% of the population who are, in the words of Gallup, "a breed apart from the general populace". He said these are "more satisfied with their lot in life & far happier than others." He called them "the highly spiritually committed"!

Both of these news items relate to the lesson *Isaiah* is trying to get across to the people of Israel and Judah in the parable he tells in our text. *It's about a vineyard.* One carefully *planned*, and *planted*, and *cultivated*. Rocks removed, choicest vines selected, watchtower built, winepress cut into the rocks ... and now the waiting! Waiting with the highest of expectations! But when the grapes are harvested they're wild and sour -- not at all what was expected! The owner is stunned; he did all he could to produce sweet grapes, but they were all wild & sour! **THE CONCLUSION?:** he tears down the fences & lets it go to pasture, to be trampled by cattle & sheep. No more pruning, or tending & protecting, he lets it become overgrown with briars and thorns! **READ TEXT.**

Israel & Judah are God's vineyard in this text. And, like that vineyard, God expected of them justice, but found bloodshed instead; He expected righteousness, but the cries of deep oppression met His ears! **GOD EXPECTED, and Isaiah is speaking of the importance of, THE RIGHT KIND OF FRUIT BEING BORNE!**

I. "BEARING THE RIGHT KIND OF FRUIT" IS THE SAME IMPORTANT MESSAGE GOD HAS FOR US TODAY!"

- A. This was one of the most important themes in the teaching of Jesus!
1. Jesus had little patience with a person who was satisfied to be nice, respectable, decent, and harmless, **BUT WHO BORE NO FRUIT!** **Matt.7:16-17**-*"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit!"*
 - a) Remember Jesus cursing the fig tree? What was the big problem with that tree? It had no fruit on it! **Matt.21:19-22.**
 - b) I believe Jesus' attitude toward that tree is symbolic of His attitude toward those who are content to stand around [*or, sit around "looking pretty"*], and who are not bearing fruit --- or, even worse, are **bearing the wrong kinds of fruit!**

- c) TOO MANY church people in America -- **and even in the Lord's church** -- instead of "*Standing on the Promises*" seem to be just "**SITTING ON THE PREMISES**"!
- 2. We certainly all need to give attention to the importance of **bearing the right fruit!**
- B. Many American religionists, including some in the Lord's Church, are **facing crises of commitment right now.**
 - 1. In a midwestern university there was an interesting sociological experiment with the students concerning sharing and giving: Each student was asked to bring a dime.
 - a) First, there are people starving in India. They've had a plague and they really need help. If you feel you'd like to give to that, put the dime in an envelop & write on the outside of it "India".
 - b) But now, India is pretty far away. There are some people in a local ghetto, a family, that really needs groceries to live on right now! If you want to help these people, it will be given to them anonymously. Put your dime in an envelope & write "poor family" on it.
 - c) Now, of course, we don't have a photocopier in this classroom & we need to get one for those of you who need to copy papers & manuscripts -- that it might be easily accessible for you. If you want to help buy a copy machine, put ten cents in the envelope and write "Copier" on it.
 - d) Does it even SURPRISE you [much less shock you] that 80% of that money went into envelopes with "Copier" written on them!
 - 2. **Leo Buscaglia** tells that story and concludes by saying: "**WE HAVE QUIT CARING!**"
 - a) That's a terrible thing to say about *ANYBODY*, but, to a great extent he's right! We have quit caring!
 - b) That experiment was **done in a university**, but it could have as well been done in many churches of the Lord's people! *A lot of us seem to have really quit caring!*
 - c) There is a crisis of COMMITMENT and COMPASSION ... and that's really frightening!
- C. Fortunately, such a crisis as this can be **readily identified**, and the efforts to correct are so **plainly set forth!**
 - 1. **CHECK YOUR FRUITS!**
 - 2. **Get with the program!** *Jesus' program!* **START BEARING RIGHT FRUIT!**

II. WHILE IT MAY NOT SEEM SO "PONDEROUS", A REGRETTABLE FACT IS THAT THE *CRISIS* FOR MANY WHO AREN'T BEARING THE RIGHT FRUIT IS NOT IN THE "HEAD", BUT IN THE "HEART"!

- A. In our HEADS [our intellect], we KNOW what the Lord expects of us in attitudes and actions and concerns! *IT IS EASY* to read **John 15:1-8** and understand the necessity of righteous activity!
 - 1. **BUT EVEN SO** there are many conscientious athiests who are *as concerned for* the plight of their fellow man as many **so-called** Christians are!
 - 2. There are many dedicated denominationalists who are *more service-oriented* than many **so-called** Christians are.
 - 3. Please don't **confuse** the point here: while these charges may not be applicable in this particular local congregation, **and I don't believe they are**, we must be aware that with only a **little** "loosening up", just a **little** "change of heart" **THEY VERY WELL COULD BE!**
- B. But it is in our HEARTS, the seat of our COMPASSION, where we most often find the dereliction of responsibility that impedes our production for the cause of Christ!

1. **BEARING RIGHT FRUIT** is a natural consequence of **allegiance to Christ**, and **THAT** is a *mind-set of devotion and consideration that is manifested in our works!*
 - a) **BEARING RIGHT FRUIT MEANS** that we must *bear our own Cross*. **Lk.14:27**.
 - b) **BEARING RIGHT FRUIT MEANS** we must *bear the image of the heavenly* (**1 Cor.15:49**) which Peter says is *partaking of the Divine nature* - **2 Pet.1:4**.
 - c) **BEARING RIGHT FRUIT MEANS** we must *bear each other's burdens*, as well as *bearing our own burdens* - **Gal.6:2, 5**.
 - d) **BEARING RIGHT FRUIT MEANS** *laboring to produce it*, which sometimes necessitates *bearing in our bodies the marks of Jesus Christ!* **Gal.6:17**; **Phil.1:21-22**-*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me!*"
 2. That old cliché is TRUE, and fits perfectly in this setting: ***"PEOPLE DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW, UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE!"***
- C. Even if we haven't been as fruitful, or bearing the **right kinds of fruit**, it is possible to make a dramatic change: **it involves a simple alteration of our priorities!**
1. This is illustrated in the beautiful story of Joshua leading the Israelites thru the Jordan into the Promised Land! There was just a simple alteration of priorities in their procedures:
 - a) Before, the ark had been in the midst of the Israelites; now it was at their head!
 - b) The ark had always gone with the people; now the people were to go with the ark!
 - c) God commanded them not to move until they saw the Ark. As it came into view they were to follow it; it was to be kept in view all the time.
 - d) When the priests, carrying the Ark, stepped into the swollen river, the waters halted and rose in a heap. And while the priests, still carrying the Ark, stood in the middle, the entire nation walked across on dry land. **Joshua 3:5-17**.
 - e) Commenting on this, a rel. writer [Ronald Dunn] says, "The OT ark was a picture of our LJC. He is our Ark of the New Covenant. We have possessed Him since the day of our salvation!"
 2. But friends, it isn't just **POSSESSION** of Christ, but the **POSITION OF CHRIST IN OUR LIVES** that really counts! ***Our productivity in bearing right fruits for the Lord could very well depend on just a simple alteration of our priorities!***

CONCLUSION:

Not JUST the POSSESSION of Christ but the **POSITION OF CHRIST!** Is Christ FIRST in your life? That old **80%--20% rule of business**, unfortunately, ***is also true in the church!*** Four out of five church members are not bearing much fruit. How about US? We can easily be a part of that 12 percent that George Gallup calls the "highly spiritually committed"! It can happen! All we have to do is make sure that our Master is Jesus Christ, and that He has FIRST PLACE in our life!