

TEXT SERMON - Discipleship Series

Message #5

“THE ESSENTIALS OF DISCIPLESHIP #3”

John 15:8

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples.”

Discipleship is following in the footsteps of our Savior. Visualize the scene that Max Lucado describes in his introduction to I Timothy in The Inspirational Study Bible: “Watch a small boy follow his dad through the snow. He stretches to step where his dad stepped. Not an easy task. His small legs extend as far as they can so his feet can fall in his father's prints. The Father, seeing what the son is doing, smiles and begins taking shorter steps, so the son can follow.”

That's a picture of discipleship. Stepping in Jesus' footprints will stretch us but will lead us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake, see us safely through the valleys of life and right into the Father's House!

This is the third message on Essentials Of Discipleship. In the first message we concentrated on essential number one: “A Learner Who Is Receptive”. Message number two was about “A Love That Is Reflective”. **This message is about The Essential of Discipleship number three:**

A LIFE THAT IS REPRODUCTIVE

John 15:8

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

In John 15 Jesus used a horticultural analogy to convey to us the “how to” of living a life that is reproductive. He said, “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.” (vs.1-5)

He talks about how a vine produces fruit and from this analogy we learn how to live a life that is spiritually reproductive. Jesus used the term “fruit” to convey the truth that He expects to see in our lives evidence that we are His followers. He said, “you should go and bear fruit.” (John 15:16) It is quite obvious that if we are a branch in the True Vine we will produce fruit. How then, can I live the life that is reproductive, the life that reproduces the life of my Master, the life that will impact others positively and the life with which our Lord will be pleased?

Let us begin with the most basic and vital question before we proceed: Are you a branch in the true vine? Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” A disciple of Jesus is a branch in Jesus, the Vine. Branches produce fruit. A fruitless disciple is a contradiction in terms. If there is no real fruit in our lives, we cannot claim to be true disciples.

Why is the reproduction of Christ's life so important to discipleship? For three reasons:

I. REPRODUCTION REVEALS ONE'S LIFE SOURCE.

"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." (John 15:1-2) "I am the vine, you are the branches." (v.5)

Who is your life-source? There are two types of vines: the True Vine, the Lord Jesus, and the false vine, the devil.

A. The True Vine – The Source Of Eternal Life.

Jesus declared, "I am the true vine." (John 15:1) Why did He use the word "true"? Obviously because there is a false vine or vines. The True Vine, who is Jesus, supplies life in heaven; the false vines issue life in hell.

Jesus Christ is the source of life both physical and spiritual. Some of Jesus' "life" statements are:

"I am the bread of life" – John 6:35

"I am come that they might have life" – John 10:10

"I am the resurrection and the life" – John 11:25

"I am the life" – John 14:6

These "life" statements are made more vivid by His use of the analogy of the vine and the branches. The branch has no life of its own but must draw its life from The Vine, the source of God-promised eternal life.

B. The False Vine – The Source Of An Evil Life.

Moses said of an evil crowd: "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of cobras." (Deut.32:32,33) That's a bad vine!

On one occasion Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44) A bad vine has bad branches producing bad fruit!

In John 15:1 Jesus said, "I am the true vine" – He is the "vine of heaven." The devil's followers are of the "vine of the earth." (Rev. 14:18-20) The branch imitates its life source. Jesus said "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt.7:16) and "every tree is known by its own fruit." (Luke 6:43)

Who is your life source? David had discovered the source of real life and said, "For with you is the fountain of life." (Psalm 36:9) Is the Lord God your life source? The fountain from which we draw our life will be reflected in the fruit we bear. It will be either the fruit of eternal life energized by Christ or the fruit of an evil life energized by the devil.

II. **REPRODUCTION EXHIBITS ONE'S LIFE FORCE.**

“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.*” (Jn.15:4,5)

The force that produces the style of life that we live is the result of one of two powers: the power of Self or the power of the Spirit. Scripture tells of two kinds of fruit: Self-produced fruit, the product of fleshly failings, and Spirit-produced fruit, the product of the Holy Spirit's inflow, overflow and outflow in our lives.

Self is referred to as the “sinful nature” and the “Spirit” is the “new nature” we receive at the time of the New Birth. Now, with that in mind read the following from Galatians chapter five: “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” (vs.16,17)

The point that I wish to make by using the above passage is this: there are two forces or powers that are vying for ascendancy in the Christian's life and the one that we choose to utilize will be exhibited in the fruit that that energizing force produces. Notice the following exhibitions of fruit that each produces:

A. **Self-Produced Fruit.**

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:19-21 niv)

The persons who exhibit the above traits are advertising that Self is in control of their lives. This is not the manner of life that exhibits discipleship. Then there is:

B. **Spirit-Produced Fruit.**

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal.5:22,23)

What a difference between Self-produced fruit, the result of human effort without God, and Spirit-produced fruit, that is, God working in and through His disciples! Truly, reproduction exhibits one's life force. Scripture knows nothing of a disciple who claims to model the Master and then lives their life in their own strength, acting as he or she jolly well pleases. That is not a disciple, that is a disaster!

It is not a question of our talents, of our knowledge, of our environment; it is not whether we are a small branch or a large branch; it is not about whether we are a branch high up on the vine or a lower branch. It is a question of this one thing: are we receiving that fulness of the Spirit which at all times flows from the Vine into the branches?

A disciple draws strength from the one whom he follows. Who is the source of your strength? Many years ago, as a young man, I chose Philippians 4:13 as the verse that

reminds me of the source of my spiritual strength. It says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Not only does reproduction reveal our life source and exhibit our life force, but thirdly,

III. REPRODUCTION INDICATES ONE’S LIFE COURSE.

Some are on a downward course – some are on an upward course. The direction in which we are going is evidenced by the product of our lives. It is a rather common saying that “what one goes after here, indicates to a great degree, where one goes hereafter!”

Jesus said, “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.” And, He added, “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.” (John 15:6-8 & 16)

These verses tell us that branches are good for two things: fruit or fuel. There are those who are bearing fruit and there are those who are barren of fruit. Again, reproduction or the lack of it, is an indicator of the course of one’s life. Fruit is evidence of life; no fruit may indicate that there is no life. If life, a blessed future; no life, a bleak future. Some may say, “That is a harsh assessment!” Not so, when the words of Jesus are considered.

Jesus talked about that subject in Matthew chapter seven: “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” (vs.16-20)

Here Jesus changes the analogy from a vine to a tree and He speaks about people-trees; He talks about a good tree and a bad tree and how to detect the difference. He is not encouraging us to judge; He is saying that it is glaringly apparent who is a “good tree” and who is a “bad tree” and consequently we can come to the logical conclusion about the direction of their lives. The Christless crowd is headed in one direction and Christ’s crowd is headed in another direction – this is indicated by their fruit, the product of their lives. Each tree produces what it is its nature to produce.

Jesus said that it is apparent which tree is good and which is bad by the fruit each produces – not where it grows, not the height of the tree, not its circumference, not its beauty, not its foliage, but its fruit! The fruit each produces is indicative of the course of that life – where they are headed.

SUMMATION

So, one essential to being a true disciple of Jesus is a life that is reproductive – a life in which the life of the disciple’s Teacher is reproduced in the disciple. This life will:

- Reveal one's life Source;
- Exhibit one's life Force;
- Indicate one's life Course.

CONCLUSION

Christian discipleship is life with purpose.

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:8) There is no higher purpose for human life than to bring glory to God! That is a staggering and humbling thought that I, a saved-by-grace-sinner, can enhance the glory of our Father in Heaven! How can my little candle augment the brilliance of the sun? Yet, God says it brings Him glory when we are faithful, fruit-bearing disciples.

Christian discipleship is a life of partnership.

Jesus said, “Without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) But with Him “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil.4:13) This is the divine-human cooperative: He leads, I follow.

“I can do nothing without Thee,
My strength is wholly Thine;
Withered and barren would I be,
If severed from the Vine.”

Christian discipleship is a patterned life.

The entire purpose of becoming a disciple of another is to pattern one's life after the Model whom we follow. The duplicated characteristics of the One we follow are authentic marks of genuine discipleship.

Christian discipleship is a productive life.

Jesus said, “I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” (John 15:16) Many are just interested in escaping Hell and reaching Heaven. God, however, has a higher purpose in mind for His followers. He wants us to go on to discipleship, to service, to “much fruit” bearing.

Christian discipleship is a progressive life.

The call of The Christ is, “Follow me.” He is ever leading His followers onward and upward. What an adventure it is to walk into the future hand in hand with God. So, put your best foot forward, step out in faith and go with God. Those who walk with God always get to their destination!

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