

Reproduction Is Fruitfulness

by G.W. North

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fruit-bearing and fruitfulness in our lives, and how it is a result of our union with Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 1:28, Matthew 13:8, Luke 8:8, John 2:1-11, John 3:29, John 15:1-5, Acts 2:41, Romans 7:4, Galatians 5:22-24, Ephesians 5:31-32

Topics: "Fruitfulness", "Spiritual Reproduction"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the biblical principle of fruitfulness, illustrating how Jesus, as the Vine, desires His followers to bear fruit in abundance. He draws parallels between the teachings in John 15 and the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, highlighting God's expectation for His people to reproduce spiritually. North explains that true fruitfulness involves not only personal growth in virtues but also the multiplication of believers, as exemplified by the events of Pentecost. He underscores the significance of the relationship between Christ and the Church, portraying the Church as the Bride and Christ as the Bridegroom, culminating in the miraculous transformation at the wedding in Cana. Ultimately, North conveys that God's intention is for His children to flourish and multiply in faith, reflecting the divine life within them.

Transcript

Throughout the whole idea of fruit-bearing in the scriptures there runs a developing line of teaching. As we have seen, this is very plain in the Lord's words concerning Himself in and through the branches under the figure of the Vine. What is true in John 15 is also true within the whole realm of fruit-bearing, whether it be in one particular instance, or in any combination of them.

As an illustration of the threefold progression already quoted in connection with the Vine (a particular instance), we may notice the Lord's teaching concerning fruit in the parable of the Sower. As given in Matthew 13 it is thirty-, sixty- and a hundred-fold. In this there is an easily recognisable equation of ideas with the parabolic teaching already referred to in John 15: fruit, more fruit, much fruit. And when we consider that Luke in dealing with the same parable only speaks of a hundredfold, it is at once clear that the Lord, while stating God's knowledgeable expectation in Matthew 13, is nevertheless revealing His dearest wish in Luke 8. There are different grades of fruit-bearing in this case because of different degrees of acceptance of the seed, but the seed is the same in every case. Given a good and honest, true and patient heart, the seed will always produce a hundredfold ; that is what God really wants. His desire is that all the seed be allowed and given the correct conditions in which to grow and perfect and reproduce its

innate capacity to the uttermost.

This is especially true in the region of mixed or interrelated areas or departments of fruit-bearing. We will take the person of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ as an example of this, thus: the fruitfulness of the Vine is the fruit of the Spirit referred to in Galatians 5 : 22-24. In that chapter it is set forth in contrast to the works of the flesh, and is simply the reproduction of Christ by the Spirit in all His people as branch-members of the Vine. As already pointed out, these qualities of life were already in Jesus of Nazareth long before either His bodily baptism in Jordan or His spiritual baptism into death. But God wanted more, that is, other fruit than this. He desired fruit of a different order than that of the beautiful, righteous, holy manhood that was in His Son alone. He wanted more of that same type of man ; reproduction. Not only more fruit in the sense of greater love and joy and peace in Jesus' own personal life and habit, not just one better and greater Son, but many more sons. That is, 'more fruit' not only in the sense of improvement and enhancement of the personal perfections of His Son, but in the sense of multiplication and duplication of that original Son.

It is said of the Lord Jesus that He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. From this we conclude that His long-suffering and patience, indeed every virtue, must have been immeasurably enhanced in Him as He lay perspiring in Gethsemane and hung later, bleeding, from the cross. These last and greatest of the many atrocities that had been heaped upon Him during all His public life were turned by Him into channels of blessing for others, and means of personal growth. Thus those qualities inborn in the babe of Bethlehem and in which He grew all His youthful days up to manhood found increasing opportunity and occasion for development. All these virtues achieved their fullest and most beautiful expression in the trials and persecutions He encountered without intermission from Jordan to Calvary, where, under extreme pressure. they finally shone forth unto complete perfection. Parallel with this development of all the personal perfections of His life runs the great, though seldom referred to desire to bring forth children, that other fruit of His union with the Father -- ' the men Thou hast given Me,' as He expressed it. Finally and unashamedly He calls these His brethren.

So we find in the life of Him in whom We expect to see all righteous and eternal things perfectly expressed, the vital and precious example of the truth of interrelated fruit-bearing. This is a great and important principle of divine life, and therefore of all life. The fruit of the Spirit in our lives is the basic condition of holiness from which all reproductive living flows. God is expecting from the same union that gives rise to this personal life, that His children should come forth in abundance and multiplication.

The happenings on the day of Pentecost leave us in no doubt of this. God showed His heart to us most clearly then. Not content with baptising in the Spirit the one hundred and twenty disciples from His past period of Earth life, the Lord that day also baptised another three thousand in the same Spirit into His spiritual Body. Fruitfulness, multiplication -- the first two words of the blessing originally pronounced in Genesis 1 find absolutely accurate fulfilment here, as in the same Spirit of creation He commences the creation/ genesis of the New Testament. The Lord Jesus had originally chosen twelve disciples. but by the commencement of the day of Pentecost there were one hundred and twenty, a multiplication of that number by ten. This was the result of over three years' work, but by the end of that same day there was a further multiplication of both the original number and also of the one hundred and twenty. For by then the original twelve had multiplied itself two hundred and fifty times, and the one hundred and twenty had multiplied twenty-five times. In such powerful, characteristic and unmistakable manner God made His intention quite plain. This demonstration remains for ever before our eyes in sacred writ.

We are to be married unto Him who is raised from the dead that we should bring forth this kind of fruit unto God. Our God has not changed one little bit since that day when at first in Genesis He plainly stated His purpose for instituting marriage. Later when He poured forth His Spirit at the beginning of this era of grace, He did it to carry out and perfect this word in the relationship between Christ and the Church. It was for this great spiritual fulfilment that all was instituted and ordained; 'Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things.'

It is significant that of the four Gospels it is the Gospel that speaks of being 'born again' that also speaks most of love and of eternal life, as well as of the Vine. It is in this background also that the glorious theme of Bride and Bridegroom is introduced. In fact, it is interesting to note in reading John's gospel that we find all the teaching therein is entirely based on and derived from relationships: the Word and God, the Bride and Bridegroom, Disciples and Lord, Branch and Vine, Sheep and Shepherd, and so on.

In the first verse and chorus of a lovely hymn Joy Palmer wrote many years ago, she expressed beautifully the Bride and Bridegroom relationship between the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ in these words:

Thou dost seek a bride all pure and holy,
Those who now belong to Thee alone,
Those who give Thee all their heart's affections,
Of Thyself a part, bone of Thy bone.

Chorus:

Lord we answer to Thy heart's deep longing,
'Even so come quickly, Lord,' we say;
In our hearts we have Thy blessed answer,
'Rise my love, my fair one, come away.'

Pursuing this theme, so sweetly captured for us in these lines, it is not surprising that as we read John's selective account of the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ, we come first upon a wedding. We also notice, perhaps with less surprise, that it is here the Lord severs Himself from His mother. Already He has commenced to gather the nucleus of the company that should form His Bride, so a wedding was a singularly appropriate place for that which He knew He had to do. For there, in elaborate ceremony before their eyes, a man and a woman had enacted one of the dearest, deepest, sweetest spiritual secrets of His heart. The Bridegroom had taken a Bride. He had left all for her and she had left all for him. So, with the beginnings of all His ideals emerging into reality around Him and being dimly pictured before Him, the Lord makes plain His mission of love among men. Turning to Mary, He says, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' He leaves her for His Bride.

Amid the pleasantries of this marriage He performs His first miracle sign. At first sight it seems so insignificant: if it was a sign, what was it a sign of? Was it done just out of neighbourly love? -- for surely enough He loved His neighbour as Himself. Or was it done out of sheer good nature? Why did He perform such a miracle, and why record such a seemingly unimportant thing? There are, no doubt, more answers than one to our questions, but the one great overwhelming reason which may not at first be apparent is

simply this: love: pure, eternal love. Complete Self-giving unto utter fulfilment, by living in another as the beloved treasure and only one of the heart. But this can only be seen as the miracle is understood in its scriptural setting. Although it is set right at the beginning of the Gospel, it nevertheless tells its deepest, truest message as though coming at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. For in spiritual meaning and experience that is where it truly belongs.

In writing his Gospel of the Son of God, John sets out with the heart of a lover, under the hand of the Spirit, to select those incidents that best set forth the story of the real romance of Heaven. Rather than give us a full account of His many miracles and journeys and encounters with friends and enemies as he could have done, and as others did, John presents us with a picture of Heaven's great Lover coming down to seek a lover from Earth.

In common with the other Gospels, this Gospel introduces us almost immediately to the Lord's baptism in Jordan. John Baptist was 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness' so he said, and people went out to listen to him. 'What is he really saying?' they inquired of one another. They were musing in their hearts whether or not he was trying to tell them he was the Christ. Certainly he was a great prophet and a burning, shining light; what he said and did was new: was he really the Messiah? But John was not doing or saying any such thing as they thought: he was just a voice, that was all.

Then one day when all men were gathered round him, the Voice spoke the Word everyone was listening for. John looked up and saw Jesus coming to him and immediately he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' This is He... this is the son of God... He will baptise you with the Holy Ghost and fire. So it was that with many other similar and additional phrases John spoke forth that Word which was in the beginning with God, and was God, and was manifest in the flesh for all to know Him. On that day the Word went to the Voice and he baptised Him in Jordan.

The Voice had to speak the word of God properly, according to the eternal plan of heaven and the deepest desires of His heart. So pictorially, before the eyes of all, Heaven's Lover, God's great love-gift to men, went down into death and rose again from the waters to show He was the Resurrection and the Life.

Now it is of particular importance that we note here the time factor given for the wedding in Cana of Galilee -- the third day. The day of Resurrection, the number of the Trinity. In a flash our minds move back to the statement in Genesis 1, and then forward to the Easter day as yet lying historically ahead; and to God; the third day is Resurrection. Here then we have the setting for the miracle.

Jesus went to the wedding that day with one real purpose underlying all others. He would show forth His glory in the proper setting. It is as though freshly risen from the death wherein He had made His Bride's death His, and His death hers, He went to Cana seeking a Bride, there to reveal as He could something of His heart's great love as He sought her.

Much of the detail passes unnoted by the writer until an emergency brings Him into the scene. Mary comes to Him saying, 'They have no wine,' and the moment has arrived. In His heart He knew what He would do, but He could not do it at her suggestion. Had not the scripture said upon one occasion, 'Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood'? But He would not allow it to be so now with Him. He had told her eighteen years earlier that He must be about His Father's business, not hers; He had also come to this marriage and this moment to do God's will, not Mary's. Though the occasion was vital and a minor crisis had arisen for that festal company, and though also He knew what He would do, He dared not act at Mary's word; she could be no vine in His blood from whence the act that would supply wine for the

wedding should flow. So He cut her off. He had nothing to do with her; He was not her child, but God's. By flesh He was Mary's; but by life, will, nature, character, mind, soul and total embodiment He was His Father's.

She had known this right from the beginning, of course. When she consented to the word of the angel at the first she was plainly told by him that 'the holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' She had agreed that He should not be called the son of Mary; Jesus was only carrying the original word through to its logical conclusion and applying it at this vital moment. He knew He had nothing to do with Mary in this, and she also knew she could have nothing to do with Him. His hour had not yet come; He could show forth His glory at Cana, but not yet His love fully as He wanted; that must await Calvary and Pentecost. But He could make His glory serve His love for this occasion. He could make the miracle speak of things greater than the witnesses or beneficiaries then knew. So, as though His life had been lived, and the grapes of His abundance grown and plucked and pressed, and the wine caught and stored and matured and outpoured, He presents the best wine to the governor of the feast.

He watches as the Bridegroom is congratulated and drinks wine with His Bride, and He is satisfied. That He was not praised and thanked did not in the least matter to Him. The proper use of gifts and powers should always apply the death of the cross to the user, and the blessings of it to those upon whom the benefits are bestowed. The Bridegroom was thanked and praised; that was the whole point. His turn would come. It was fixed in Heaven. Three years would soon pass. It would seem like three days so great was His love for His Bride. Was it not the third day for which He looked?

For those who have eyes to see what He did at Cana, all is a parable, an allegory. He has set forth the best wine He could possibly give to His beloved Bride, He has given her His own life. It was the truest anticipation of the great Pentecostal festivity when His Bride would drink the real wine new with Him in His Kingdom of love. How truly He made that marriage feast serve His purposes. The setting was perfect, the occasion unique, the vital elements absolutely correct. The water signified the Spirit; the wine His life by the Spirit, His Soul. The Spirit and His Life. His Life was God the Spirit; the Spirit in human being, by a body, living out all possible virtue in perfect love under the most extreme conditions a human soul could endure.

So it was on the day of Pentecost; He poured out the pure water of the Holy Spirit; they drank it, and lo, it was the wine of His Life, best new wine. More, they were also baptised in it and became bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, His very body. Twain had become one; Bridegroom and Bride were Lamb and Wife in Spirit. It was done.

Thus He accomplished His purpose at Cana. The first great physical miracle of the Gospels had been performed. The inaugural sign of the New Covenant had been given and the whole new order had been anticipated and figuratively established.

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