

Message Five

Fruit-bearing: the Preaching of the Gospel on the Highest Plane

Scripture Reading: John 15:1-8, 16

I. Our preaching of the gospel must be on the highest level, which is to minister life, even Christ, to people—John 10:10b; 14:6; Hymns, #922:

- A. Fruit-bearing is the central thought of John 15:
 - 1. Many Christians consider that John 15:1-8 and 16 is a teaching concerning abiding in the Lord; this is right, but it is not completely right.
 - 2. If we read these verses carefully, we will see that the stress, the central thought, is not mainly on abiding but on fruit-bearing; abiding is secondary, while fruit-bearing is primary.
- B. Fruit in the gospel of John refers to new believers—v. 16:
 - 1. Galatians 5:22 speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, which is the expression of the life of Christ within us, a kind of living as the expression of the inner life.
 - 2. However, the fruit in John 15 refers to new believers, new converts:
 - a. This is proven by verse 16, which says that we should “go forth” and bear fruit.
 - b. In order to bear the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, there is no need to go, but to bear fruit as mentioned in John 15, there is the need to go.
 - 3. In John 15:8 we see that glorification is in fruit-bearing:
 - a. The branches of the vine bear fruit, and this fruit-bearing is the Father’s glorification; the more fruit we bear, the more God is glorified in our Christian work.
 - b. The Father does not want us just to do good things or just to express Him in Christian ethical duties; He wants us to express Him in bearing fruit for the vine tree’s increase and enlargement.
- C. Bearing fruit is not merely a matter of preaching or teaching; it is a matter of imparting life to others:
 - 1. There is a difference between going to preach the gospel and going to bear fruit:
 - a. At the end of the first three Gospels, there is a word concerning going to preach the gospel; to go to preach is a work—Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47.
 - b. However, there is no such word at the end of the Gospel of John; this is not because John did not have the concept of preaching the gospel, but because in John preaching is not merely a work but the outflow of life, the out-working of the inner life—John 15:1-8, 16; cf. 7:37-39; Hymns, #910.
 - 2. To have the proper genuine spreading of the gospel, we must have the overflow of the inner life—15:4-5; Hymns, #925.
 - 3. If we abide properly in the vine, then the life of the vine will fill us up; the life that has filled us up will overflow into others; this is fruit-bearing, and this is the genuine and proper preaching of the gospel—John 15:4-6:
 - a. To abide in the Lord means that there is no insulation or distance between us and Him; there is nothing between us and the Lord—vv. 4-5; Hymns, #372, #373. 29
 - b. It is possible to preach and still be insulated from Christ; but to have the overflow of the inner life, we must abide in the Lord; even a negative thought can insulate us from the flow of life.
 - c. As we contact people we must have the deep sense and the full realization that we are abiding in the Lord, and when we talk to people, we must talk to them by abiding in Him.
 - d. When we abide in the Lord, He speaks in our speaking and our speaking is His speaking; this is the imparting of life, the overflow of life from within.
 - e. We all must go to reach people; whether we have the overflow of life or not, we must still contact people; if we do not reach people, we will have no way of knowing where we are.

II. The most important thing we need concerning fruit-bearing is a change of concept; we need to change our concept from preaching to fruit-bearing—vv. 1-8, 16:

- A. We need to drop our old concept—to expect to have great power, a great movement, a great campaign, and a great speaker:
 - 1. The normal way is for a grain of wheat to fall into the ground to die and grow up to bear fruit and for branches to abide in the vine to produce fruit—12:24; 15:4-5.
 - 2. We should not be tempted by the old way; rather, we expect that everyone among us will be a fruit-bearing branch.
 - 3. We should not put our trust in the preaching work; rather, we must stress fruit bearing.
- B. Fruit-bearing is not a mushrooming development but the slow process of life:
 - 1. If we are not concerned about the preaching of the gospel, we simply do not care for it at all; but when we are stirred up and burning, we take the thought that after a short time we shall bring many to the Lord; if, after a period of time, we have not brought anyone to the Lord, then we are disappointed; however, fruit is not brought forth overnight; it takes time.
 - 2. Gospel preaching, which is fruit-bearing through the overflow of life, cannot be a mushrooming development; rather, it must be the result of the slow process of life.
 - 3. Most fruit-bearing trees bear fruit once a year according to the natural law; we all must make a deal with the Lord, saying, “Lord, I don’t want to dream any more. Grant me the overflow of life that I may bear fruit once a year.”

III. We need to live a fruitful life—John 15:1-2, 4-5:

- A. We may be “spiritual,” “holy,” and “victorious” and yet not be fruitful; there are problems with that kind of spirituality, holiness, and victory; according to the Bible, being spiritual is for the purpose of being fruitful—cf. Phil. 1:19-21a, 24-25.
- B. In the Gospel of John the Lord does not tell us to be spiritual, holy, and victorious; rather, He charges us to bear fruit, even to bear much fruit, abiding fruit; this is to live a ministering life—John 15:2, 4-5, 16.

IV. “In our service in the church, the main thing we should do is bear fruit. We are here simply for fruit-bearing; that is, we are here for the release of life, the outflow of the inner life, and the impartation of life into others. This is the purpose of the church’s existence on the earth”—The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1966, vol. 1, p. 263.