

**THE BENEFITS TO YOUR CHURCH OF YOUR SPIRITUAL FITNESS**  
**Psalm 1:3 (especially 3a)**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Our text for this morning comes from Psalm 1. Actually, our text for this morning, for last Sunday morning and for the Sunday morning before that all are from this first psalm. In fact, the text for each of those sermons has come from the same verse in Psalm 1: verse 3. Just to refresh your memory, please indulge me as I read Psalm 1:1-3 again.

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.*  
<sup>2</sup> *But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*  
<sup>3</sup> *He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.*

Would it surprise you to know that 209 different times, the Bible talks about bearing fruit and being fruitful? In the first chapter in Genesis, we read that on the third day of creation,

*God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." (Genesis 1:11)*

And on the fifth day of creation, when God made fish and birds, immediately:

*God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." (Genesis 1:22)*

Then, on the sixth day of creation, when God had made man, He commanded:

*"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28)*

Obviously fruitfulness was part of God's design for His creation. And then, in Revelation 22, the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, the aged disciple, John, is granted a glimpse of the glories of heaven and he writes:

<sup>1</sup> *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of*

*life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)*

Fruitfulness was part of God's plan from the beginning and it is part of His design for eternity. Fruitfulness is woven into the very fiber of God's creation.

Fruitfulness was also central to much of the teaching of Jesus. Take, for example, the record of Luke 13:6-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'*

<sup>8</sup> *"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"* (Luke 13:6-9)

All of this leads me to a pretty obvious conclusion: where God is concerned, fruitfulness is expected.

## I. **FRUIT IS EXPECTED**

In that parable from Luke 13:6-9, the landowner was ready to cut down the fig tree that was three years old and had never bourn any fruit. Obviously, the owner expected fruit.

But this isn't a farm report from the fig orchard of a Jewish landowner. This is a parable. Parables are parallels. They are stories with familiar elements that are told so we can grasp and apply some lesson to our lives.

This parable is about the people of God. The fig tree represents God's people and He intends for us to bear fruit. He expects that from us.

In Psalm 1, the tree that the poet describes is "*planted by streams of water*". It didn't just grow up "volunteer" and find itself by the stream accidentally. Someone put it there. The same is true for the fig tree in the parable in Luke 13. "*A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he went to look for fruit on it...*"

The parallel in the parable and in the psalm is that God chose His people. In the time of the first covenant, He chose Abraham and his descendents to be in a special relationship with Him. That choosing brought with it both privileges and responsibilities. If the people God chose wanted to enjoy the privileges of being God's own planting, they needed to fulfill their responsibilities.

In the New Covenant, God's chosen people are any who are willing to enter into a relationship with Him where He is acknowledged as lord and master. But it is still true that if we want to enjoy the privileges of being God's own planting, we must fulfill our responsibilities. And one of those responsibilities is to bear fruit.

In the case of the tree in Psalm 1, it is planted by a reliable source of fresh water. In the case of the fig tree in Luke 13, the man who took care of the fig tree said he would dig around the tree. That would loosen the soil and perhaps create a basin that would catch and hold water to nourish and refresh the tree.

Fruitfulness requires water. In John's gospel, in chapter 4, Jesus encountered a woman at a well side in Samaria. She was there to draw water from the well and Jesus offered her Living Water, which, if she drank it, would satisfy her forever. When the woman asked about that water, Jesus said, *"<sup>13</sup> Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

Jesus is the source of water, which God supplies so we will be fruitful. Fruit is expected. In Matthew 3, Matthew 7, Luke 3 and Luke 13, repeatedly Jesus says that fruitless trees will be cut down and destroyed. In John 15, Jesus says that unproductive branches will be cut off. Fruitfulness is expected and if we are not productive for the master, we will be destroyed.

By now, you are surely asking yourself, "What is this fruit that the Master expects from me?" Let's look at that question.

## II. FRUIT IS PROJECTED

Very often, in a church setting, when we talk about the Christian bearing good fruit, we are apt to think of the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The apostle Paul lists these in Galatians chapter 5. The life of a Christian is to be characterized by these virtues. The Holy Spirit living in us ought to produce these virtues in us as we are abiding in Jesus.

But that is not the only fruit that a Christian should produce. In a sense, the fruit of a fig tree is another fig tree. In the spring, a blossom appears on the branch. As the days wear on, the petals fall off of the blossom and a seed begins to grow on the branch. That seed will be surrounded by the fruit of the fig. Left to its own natural course, the fig will ripen then fall to the ground and the fruit will decay and decompose making a rich and fertile area for the seed within to germinate, take root and begin to

grow...until another fig tree stands beside the first. So, as I said, in a sense, the fruit of a fig tree is another fig tree. The life-cycle of the fruit is not complete until the seed produces another tree.

In a similar vein, Christians are to reproduce after their own kind. The Fruit of the Spirit is the rich and fertile medium that surrounds the Word of God that is in us. It is the presence of the Fruit of the Spirit that makes our witness credible and convincing when we try to sow the Word of God in the hearts of others. But just because we have become loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled does not mean we are fully productive for the Master. That just helps the seed of the Word take root in the lives of those around us.

Now, imagine what Clay City Christian Church would be like if every person who is a part of the church were fruitful. Imagine each one of us demonstrating the Fruit of the Spirit in our everyday lives. Wouldn't this be a pleasant place to be? Don't you think others would be drawn to a church like that?

Then imagine each one of us seizing every opportunity to plant the seed of God's Word in the lives of the people around us. With our charming and winsome lives providing the context for the powerful seed of God's Word, people would find Christ irresistible...and the Body of Christ would be irresistible, too.

Well, that is the way God planned it. Among God's people, fruitfulness is expected and it is projected. And the fruit is protected.

### **III. FRUIT IS PROTECTED**

As a young boy, I remember staying at grandpa's farm where he had a small fenced orchard. While Denny and I enjoyed a lot of freedom on Grandpa's farm, there were a lot of rules relating to that fruit orchard.

My older brother and I could play near the orchard but not in it. We were not permitted to climb on the small fruit trees for fear we would break the tender branches. We could not play under the trees for fear we might brush against the blossoms and knock them off and prevent fruit from developing. We were forbidden to pick the fruit and eat it for fear we might eat it before it was ripe and ready. A lot of effort went into making sure that the trees in the orchard were protected so they would be productive.

Just as my grandpa protected his orchard from anything or anyone that might damage it, the LORD protects His own that they may bear fruit for Him.

In 1970 the United States government established the "Federal Witness Protection Program". The witness protection program is administered by the United States Department of Justice and operated by the United States Marshals Service and it is designed to protect threatened witnesses before, during, and after a trial.

According to the Federal Witness Protection Agency, "No program participant following security guidelines has ever been harmed while under the active protection of the Marshal's Service", nearly all of the witnesses who were harmed had failed to fully comply, oftentimes contacting old acquaintances.

In the Witness Protection Program, participants are given a new name, a new identity and a new location.

God has a witness protection program for those who testify about Jesus. Participants receive a new name: Christian. They receive a new identity because the former things are wiped away and it is as if they are born again. And they receive a new location: they are "in Christ".

God protects His witnesses: those who testify about who Jesus is. Just as those who enter into the Federal Witness Protection Program must leave their old lives, the old associations and their old ways behind, so must those who enter God's divine witness protection program. And God does not guarantee that no harm will come to His witnesses in this life. But He does promise to protect us into and throughout eternity.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

So how about it? The invitation is open to you to become His witness. Our church will greatly benefit when we all bear fruit by planting the seed of God's Word in the hearts of others. And God will protect, preserve and save those who bear fruit for Him.

A vivid painting of Christ, wearing His crown of thorns as He stands before Pilate and the mob, is displayed in the art museum of Dusseldorf, Germany. Under the painting by Sternberg are the words, "This have I done for thee; what hast thou done for Me?" When Frances Havergal viewed the painting during a visit to Germany, she was deeply moved. As she gazed at it in tears, she scribbled down a few lines of verse on a scrap of paper. After returning to her home in England, she felt the poetry was so poor that she tossed the lines into a stove. Amazingly, the scorched scrap of paper floated out of the flames and landed on the floor where it was found by Frances' father, Rev. William Havergal, an Anglican minister, a noted poet, and a church musician. He encouraged her to preserve the poem. I'm so glad William Havergal encouraged Frances to preserve the poem because we are going to sing it today as our hymn of

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decision. "Hymn of Decision"? What decision do you have to make today?

**INVITATION:** #675 – *"I Gave My Life For Thee"*