

A Biblical Survey of Fruit

Gen. 1:11-13, John 15:1-4, Gal. 5:21-22, James 3:17, 18, Rev. 22:1-2

by Patty Friesen (Aug.25/19)

After our inspiring week of Vacation Bible School on the Fruit of the Spirit for our children, we hope to reiterate what we have learned with adults because these are the virtues we want the Holy Spirit to grow in us, whatever our age. We begin our biblical survey of fruit today with the creation of fruit on the third day and the seed within the fruit for its' ongoing life. Fruit was the foundation of the food chain = created before any creatures in order to feed them. Unlike trees with needles or leaves, the fruit tree is a tree of food - and not just food, for a tree stores water in its fruit. Water, the primal fluid of growth is soaked up by the roots and water arrives in the fruit and plumps it out into a beautiful thing. Because of this, the fruit is infused with a life force that develops from water, air, earth, and seed.

Because fruit holds seed: life within life, (p.415 Women Who Run with Wolves) fruit took on a spiritual symbolism from the very beginning. Along with the fruit trees created for physical need, God placed two spiritual trees of the special

knowledge of good and evil and eternal life in the Garden of Eden as well but humanity was restricted from these special gifts that would make them godlike.

In Genesis 3, disloyalty entered the garden in the guise of the serpent to tempt Eve with the irresistible fruit of knowledge of good and evil and she and Adam ate it and there was a loss of innocence and trusting relationship with their Creator. God feared they would also start chomping on the tree of life and banned them from the garden and Creator set an angel to guard the way to the tree of life as Genesis 3 concludes. God alone will hold the way to the Tree of Life who will be revealed as Jesus Christ, the apple tree as the hymn proclaims. All creation will be redeemed through this Tree of Life, culminating in a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation 22 with the Tree of Life reappearing with its' twelve kinds of life-giving fruit.

From the beginning of the creation God called humanity to be fruitful and multiply. The most ancient global stories talk about the fruit of the womb. Luke's Gospel begins with the hailing of Mary by her cousin Elizabeth: "Blessed be the fruit of thy womb". This womb blessing is probably a remnant of the ancient

understanding among women that they were like fruit trees, bearing the ongoing life of humanity. The fertility of trees, fields, flocks and humanity were essential to the ongoing survival on earth and were considered a blessing from God. (p. 416 Pinkola-Estes)

But God not only desired fruitfulness in a physical sense but also in a spiritual sense of right relationships and attitudes towards others and devotion to God. The first sibling rivalry occurs over Cain's jealousy of Abel's sacrifices of fruit, which pleased God, when Cain's sacrifice of animals did not. The point of the story isn't the physical sacrifice fruit vs. animal but the heart space in which it is offered. Cain's jealousy leads him to kill Abel and humanity careens downhill like rotten fruit throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, God looks for fruitfulness and faithfulness in God's people. In Exodus 23:16 we see God initiating a thanksgiving sacrifice of the first fruits of the harvest, with the words, "the first fruit of your labour - bring before God in thankfulness". Growing up we heard about this first fruit thanksgiving sacrifice and our parents taught us that the first cheque they wrote

after their pay cheque was their thanksgiving cheque for God's work at church. Now with Patrick and my direct deposit giving - we are somewhat removed from that tangible act of thankful cheque writing but direct deposit and the bank helps us be thankful to God even when we forget to be!

Fruit became the symbol of celebration and thankfulness and a sign of food security - as long as there was fruit - animals and humans would live. When the children of Israel occupied the Promised Land in the book of Joshua - their spies brought back large clumps of grapes, too heavy to carry. But again, God was looking for fruitfulness in loyalty as well and when Israel couldn't be fruitful in this way, they became like an abandoned vineyard in exile. Prophet Jeremiah 17:10 refers three times to the rotten fruit of their actions. And Hosea 10:13 speaks of the fruit of their lips being lies. While the prophets condemn the rotten fruit of words and actions, the prophets also hold out hope for the ripe fruit of peace Isaiah 27:6 and righteousness Zechariah 8:12 and fruit of healing for all nations Ezekial 47:12.

Psalms describe the fruitful life as those whose delight is in the way of the Lord. Psalm 1:3 they are like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit

in its season and their leaves do not wither. Those who follow a ripe life of meditation and action on God's way produce fruit even in old age, Psalm 92:14 declares. Following in this right path of meditation and action on God's way, seem to produce the fruit of wisdom in Proverbs 8:19 and fruit of right actions in 11:30 and fruit of right words in 13:2.

After the exile to Babylon, 2 Kings 19:30 is a beautiful promise of restoration to a physical and spiritual home: The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. These themes of taking root downward and bearing fruit upward flow seamlessly into Matthew's Gospel when the prophet John the Baptist talks about the fruit of repentance towards a right heart and right actions. John's Gospel, of course, speaks deeply to our relationship to the Vine, Jesus and this symbiotic relationship that produces fruitful behaviour and fruitful living.

Paul writing the Epistles fleshes out John's theme of fruitful life and speaks about the Holy Spirit plumping out the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These nine fruit – we remember

them by their three beginning with a single syllable – love, joy, peace, and then three two syllable fruit – patience, kindness, goodness, and then three with three syllables – faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Revelation 22 says there are twelve kinds of fruit but doesn't say what the three extra fruit may be so we may have to come up with three more – with five syllables – generosity, hospitality and creativity.

Why savour the Fruit of the Spirit these next 6 Sundays until Thanksgiving? If we believe character formation of these virtues of love, joy, peace, patience and kindness are necessary for our children in Vacation Bible School, it is equally important for us as adults to be continually growing this fruit within us for the entirety of our life. Often it isn't until a funeral when family and friends review a life - do we hear how fruitful they have been.

The following eulogy of the white South African singer/songwriter Johnny Clegg, who died in July, describes the fruit of his life. During the decades of apartheid and the segregation of whites and blacks in South Africa, singer Johnny Clegg had a multiracial band that sang protest songs in English and Zulu. Yet it wasn't his protest lyrics that spoke loudest. It was how he lived by example. Up

through his Final Journey Tour, he exuded a grace and joy that reflected his love of people and faith in humanity. Mr. Clegg once told an interviewer that the long struggle to end apartheid taught him a lesson in patience. Change, as he noted, can take time. People waited for 30, 40 years, he said. It bore fruit. It taught me that the new South Africa can't be perfect. The new South Africa is going to take another 40 years to be truly flourishing and truly democratic and truly offer its citizenship a flowering future. Did you hear the following Fruit of the Spirit listed in the eulogy? Joy, love, faithfulness, patience.

James' epistle describes the Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruit, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be infused with this kind of divine wisdom? May the seed of Christ's word, planted and watered by the Holy Spirit, find root and bear fruit in our hearts this fall season. Amen.