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A M E T H O D I S T C H U R C H

*Easter
2011*

TREEOLOGY

{Fig, Broom, Palm, Dogwood, The Cross}

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Monday 4 April 2011

Plumage versus produce

Scripture readings: 150

Mark 11 vs 12-26

John 15 vs 8

James 2 vs 14-26

This Easter as we journey towards the cross, we will be examining the stories trees in Scripture tell. We start out this week with the fig tree that came to a sorry end after Jesus looked for fruit on it, found none and cursed it to be barren and fruitless forever.

The account of Jesus' actions in Mark 11 is difficult to understand, but when we look at the heart of what Jesus was really saying, we see that His message was all about fruitfulness. Although it was not really fig-season yet, this tree had leaves on it and figs ripen before leaves appear on fig trees, indicating that this tree should have been bearing fruit. It is also significant that just after Jesus cursed the tree, He cleared out the temple of those trying to exploit the poor in the name of "religion" and "righteousness". Although there were outward signs of worship in Jerusalem, Jesus found little true faith... little fruitfulness.

Could the same be said of our lives? Do we have great big metaphorical leaves of religiosity but no substance? Do we have all the outward appearance of a Christ-follower, but none of the fruit? God earnestly desires for us to be fruitful. He wants our love for Him to be so deeply rooted within us that it spills out into every aspect of our lives. He wants our faith to be translated into the way we live and love and serve. Let your life bear fruit so that God may be glorified in you.

Tuesday 5 April 2011

The fruit of the Spirit

Scripture reading:

Galatians 5 vs 19-26

What does a fruitful life look like? What is true spiritual fruit? In Galatians 5 Paul draws a clear parallel between the things our lives produce when we take in and are rooted in the things of the world or our own desires and the things our lives produce when we are being transformed by the indwelling Spirit of God. What your life is manifesting and producing outwardly is a clear indication of the state of your heart and your inward journey.

The fruit of the Spirit is manifested in us when we choose to set our eyes on God and become established and rooted in Him. Our lives bear His fruit when the Spirit changes us from the inside out and we become more like Jesus, manifesting His attributes to the world. Although it requires a conscious decision and a concerted effort of our will to remain in Him and to allow God to change us, without the Spirit dwelling within us, it is impossible to be fruitful.

May we be challenged today to examine the fruit of our lives and to see whether the Spirit is producing Christlikeness in us. May we be courageous and vulnerable in allowing Him to work within us, knowing that He alone can make us truly fruitful.

"A church in the land without the Spirit is rather a curse than a blessing. If you have not the Spirit of God, Christian worker, remember that you stand in somebody else's way; you are a fruitless tree standing where a fruitful tree might grow." – Charles H. Spurgeon

Wednesday 6 April 2011

Becoming more fruitful: Abiding

Scripture readings:

John 15 vs 1-16

2 Kings 19 vs 30

There is a great deal of teaching in the Word about fruitfulness and how it is that we can go about bearing fruit; and fruit that will last. It is God's earnest desire that our lives should manifest works, actions, attitudes and lifestyles that bring Him glory, that draw other to Him and that will matter for eternity. For the next few days we will be examining what Scripture tells us about how we can become more fruitful.

The first way to ensure that your life is fruitful is to abide in Christ. In John 15 Jesus speaks about Himself as the Vine and His followers as the branches who can only bear fruit if they remain connected in vital union with Him. Abiding is a decision and requires an act of will, but it is also about simply loving God and being loved by Him... it is about being in relationship with Him. We need to choose to abide and to do things that will ensure that we remain connected to God rather than disconnected from Him. We need to continually choose, moment by moment, to let the Spirit live, work and move in us, and then we will bear much fruit that brings God glory.

2 Kings 19 vs 30 is a beautiful image of abiding. God says of the people that they will take root in Him... they will let their roots grow down deep into the soil of His love, mercy and goodness and the result will be upward growth and fruitfulness. Will you do the same today?

Thursday 7 April 2011

Becoming more fruitful: Choosing Righteousness

Scripture readings:

Psalm 1

Psalm 92 vs 12-15

John 4 vs 10

James 3 vs 18

The second way we can become more fruitful is by choosing righteousness. This means that we need to deal decisively with sin and unrighteousness in our lives. The Scriptures reveal that those who choose to follow God's law and way, and who actively pursue His righteousness – which literally means, right standing with Him – will be like fruitful trees that flourish and blossom. They will be like trees that are planted right next to streams of Living Water that continually provides the nourishment and refreshing they need.

When we choose to live outside of God's will, we cut ourselves off from His life-giving Spirit and it becomes impossible for us to bear fruit. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that there is always restoration and grace for those who have wandered off – in little and big ways – and want to come back to the source of true life and abundance in Christ.

The Living Water of God is freely available to you. Will you choose to drink it in? Will you choose right standing with God? When you do, God will produce fruit in you that you could never have imagined.

Friday 8 April 2011

Becoming more fruitful: Faith

Scripture readings:

Jeremiah 17 vs 7-8

Philippians 4 vs 1-13

James 3 vs 18

When we develop true faith our fruit-bearing is not conditional. It does not depend on the season or external factors like drought, rain, heat or cold. When we are so firmly rooted in God that we trust Him completely, our faith catapults us into perpetual fruitfulness that does not fail.

Paul writes in Philippians 4:11 that he has learnt to be content in all circumstances. He writes this from a prison cell, testifying to the truth of this statement. He may have been imprisoned, but he did not let it prevent him from ministering to people or seeing his captivity as an opportunity to reach people he would not otherwise have reached. He did not let his circumstances curb his fruitfulness, but trusted instead that “God works all things to the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes” (Romans 8:28). He chose to bear fruit where he was planted, rather than wishing and waiting for a better, more suitable orchard.

Perhaps you find yourself in a difficult situation today and you are not really fruitful because you are waiting for different circumstances, less difficult people or greater spiritual maturity. Don't wait anymore. Choose to bloom and bear fruit where you are planted right now, trusting that God has a perfect plan.

Saturday 9 April 2011

Becoming more fruitful: Pruning and dying

Scripture readings:

John 15 vs 1-2

John 12 vs 24

Hebrews 12 vs 5-6

The final ways to become more fruitful are not all that pleasant. In fact, they can be very painful. Jesus, in His image of the vine and branches in John 15 is clear that those who are fruitful are pruned by God so that they will become more fruitful. The excess leaves that block out the sunlight and prevent it from getting to the fruit-bearing part of the vine need to be cut away so that the plant can produce a more abundant harvest. Old branches need to be pruned so that new growth can spring forth. In our journey with God, there will come times in which He disciplines us and cuts away parts of us that are obstructing our fruit bearing. He needs to cut away our pretences, our self-reliance, our sin and our own effort so that we can continually become more and more fruitful for Him. These experiences are often painful, but unless we allow God to do a pruning work in us we will become less and less fruitful, instead of more fruitful, as time goes by.

In John 12:24 Jesus takes the pruning experience to a whole other level when He says that in order for us to become truly fruitful, we do not just need parts of us cut away and removed, but in fact, we need to come to a place of dying to ourselves. When we are truly surrendered to Him in complete denial of self, we can produce the most abundant harvest.

Will you allow God to prune and discipline you in love today and will you surrender all you are to Him? The pain you may experience when you do will bring forth new joy, life and purpose that leads you to a place of true abundance and significance.