

Luke 3:7-14

“You Must Bear Fruit”

April 21, 2024

1. Back when I was in high school... many, many ages ago... I remember being required in my Literature Class to read the sermon by Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”
 - a. Don’t get the wrong idea... the teacher didn’t have us read this sermon for any kind of redemptive reason
 - i. Instead, this sermon was supposed to be an example of the typical “fire and brimstone” messages that the Puritans were infamous for
 1. These Puritans, of whom Edwards was said to be the last of, have been portrayed as cold and heartless
 - a. In the words of one historian, they were the people were deeply concerned that someone, somewhere MIGHT be having fun
 - ii. I don’t remember much of the discussion that we had regarding Edwards’ sermon, but I do distinctly remember the TONE of the conversation
 1. Most everyone, myself included, laughed at the intensity of Edwards’ words, as he spoke of the wrath of God upon unconverted sinners, using such words as,
 - a. “If you continue in your unconverted state, the infinite might, and majesty, and terribleness of the omnipotent God shall be magnified upon you, in the ineffable strength of your torments... and there will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery... after you have wrestled with the Almighty’s merciless vengeance for ages upon ages, you will know that all of it is just a point compared to what remains!”
 - i. Fire and brimstone, indeed
 2. Sadly, what we missed, and what our teacher missed in that discussion was that, yes, Jonathan Edwards did indeed preach with MUCH zeal and fire and urgency
 - a. But he preached in such a way because he was deeply concerned for the souls of the congregation
 - b. He preached in such a way, because he was VERY aware of the sinfulness of man, and the holiness of God
 - i. Much like another well-known fire and brimstone preacher, the man who preached in the wilderness around the Jordan almost two thousand years ago, John the Baptist
2. Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 3:7-14
 - a. Luke 3:7-14
 - i. *⁷He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” ¹¹And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”*
 - b. You brood of vipers...

- i. That's quite a way to begin a sermon, isn't it?
 - c. This immediately leads us to one of the first questions that we have to ask regarding this passage, "Who are the CROWDS that came out to be baptized by John?"
 - i. John addresses these crowds pretty harshly, doesn't he?
 - 1. If someone came to our church, and eventually decided that they wanted to be baptized, I don't necessarily think that our first words to them should be to call them a "brood of vipers!"
 - a. But this was how John, God's appointed prophet, spoke to them
 - i. So WHO was he talking to?
 - ii. Many commentators seem to quickly point over to Matthew 3:7, which is Matthew's account of this scene
 - 1. In Matthew's account, he specifically says that John directed this comment to the Pharisees and the Sadducees who had come out to see what was going on
 - a. So these commentators would look at Luke's account and say, "Well, based off what Matthew said, it's LIKELY that John WAS mainly talking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, even though he doesn't directly mention them."
 - i. In theological terms, this would be referred to as HARMONIZING these two accounts
 - ii. This can be a helpful way for us to read the Gospels, since it does tend to fill in some gaps that one Gospel or another might have
 - 1. But we do want to be careful that we don't OVER-harmonize everything, and potentially lose the author's intent
 - b. Luke was a very careful historian
 - i. Again, his whole purpose in writing his Gospel was so that Theophilus might be CERTAIN about the things that he had been taught
 - ii. So details MATTERED to Luke!
 - c. Were there Pharisees and Sadducees here in this instance recorded by Luke?
 - i. MAYBE!
 - 2. But it seems clear that Luke is wanting John's words to be seen as directed toward ALL the people who had come out to be baptized by John
 - a. Luke simply refers to them as "the crowds" in verse 7, and then again as "the crowds" in verse 10
- d. So WHO did John refer to as a "brood of vipers?"
 - i. Well, according to Luke... EVERYONE!
 - 1. You have to wonder if Luke, who was a friend and regular traveling companion of the Apostle Paul's, was wanting to remind us that we are ALL Pharisees and Sadducees in our heart
 - a. And therefore, we are ALL a brood of vipers
 - ii. As Paul wrote in Romans 3:9-18
 - 1. *⁹What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that ALL, both Jews AND Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²ALL have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. ¹³Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. THE VENOM OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS. ¹⁴Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. ¹⁵Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷and the way of peace they have not known. ¹⁸There is no fear of God before their eyes."*
 - a. Did you hear it?
 - i. Verse 13 said that "the venom of asps is under their lips"

1. The venom of snakes is under OUR lips
 2. For we are ALL a brood of vipers
- e. So John gives the people this warm and friendly welcome, and then he puts forward one of THE most important doctrines in all of the Scriptures... a doctrine that the church of our day seems to have forgotten
- i. Bear fruits in keeping with repentance
 1. Throughout God's Word, these two truths are absolutely inseparable
 - a. As the people of God, we MUST bear fruit
 - b. And these fruits MUST be in keeping with repentance
 - i. When John says to the crowds that they must bear fruits in keeping with repentance, the word that he uses for "in keeping with" is the Greek word, "axios"
 1. This word carries with it the idea of a set of scales that someone would use to weigh out grain
 - a. On one side of the scale is our fruit
 - b. On the other side of our scale is our repentance
 - i. And these two sides MUST be in balance!
 - ii. Let's think about what the results are when these two things are NOT in balance...
3. So first, let's look at the person who bears a lot of fruit, but is not repentant in their heart
- a. We see this type of person all around us
 - i. I've used the example before of George Kaiser, our own billionaire that lives right here in the Tulsa area
 1. Over the years, Kaiser has shown the incredible fruit of good works in our communities
 - a. He's listed as one of the top 50 philanthropists in America
 - i. He's poured countless MILLIONS of dollars into education efforts in Tulsa
 - ii. He was one of the main funders for the Gathering Place over off of Riverside
 - iii. He's invested MANY resources into North Tulsa to help rebuild this area that's become ravaged by poverty and racial problems
 1. The list goes on and on!
 - b. The world would look at a man like Geoge Kaiser and say, "THIS is an example of a GOOD man."
 - i. And I believe that we as Christians CAN affirm that statement to a certain extent
 1. For we would say that all of this good fruit that has come from George Kaiser ULTIMATELY comes from the COMMON GRACE that God gives to ALL men and women
 2. George Kaiser is a man who has borne MUCH good fruit
 2. But his fruit is NOT in keeping with repentance
 - a. If we were to look at the scales of his life, from a biblical perspective, we would very quickly see that the side with the fruit would be firmly at the bottom
 - i. But the side with repentance would be freely blowing about up in the air
 3. For in spite of his goodness, George Kaiser is NOT repentant
 - a. Interestingly, George Kaiser is Jewish

1. For we are ALL sinners who fall short of God's righteous commands
 - a. We are ALL a brood of vipers
 - i. So what is our response in light of God's unattainable holiness and our complete inability to live up to His standards
 1. We must REPENT
 - a. Not just once in order to get our ticket punched to get into heaven
 2. We are called to live THE REST OF OUR LIVES in repentance
 - a. For the reality is, we continue to give in to the sin of our flesh, don't we?
 - b. Sometimes these are glaring sins that fly in direct, outward disobedience to God's Word
 - i. Sometimes these are small sins that we keep hidden and secret within the confines of our own minds
 - c. But God sees it ALL, doesn't He?
 - i. And therefore, we must CONTINUE to repent
 - ii. And in our repentance, we move closer and closer to HOLINESS
 - iv. My friends, our good works... our good fruit... will NEVER be enough to save us
 1. They MUST be balanced with REPENTANCE
 - a. And in our repentance, we will find forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross
 - i. Bear fruit IN KEEPING WITH repentance
4. But what about the one who is simply repentant?
 - a. What about the man or woman, or boy or girl, who professes with their mouth that they are a sinner and that Jesus is their Savior...
 - i. Yet they never show any evidence of fruit in keeping with their profession of repentance?
 1. Brothers and sisters, it is because of this question that I stated earlier that so much of the church has forgotten the foundational doctrines of our faith
 - a. We live in a church culture today... especially here in America... where the call to follow Christ has been reduced to just a one-time decision
 - i. We give someone a 60-second presentation of the Gospel, and then we encourage them to "accept Christ" into their hearts
 1. We give them little, if any, explanation of who God is, and why He is right to demand our full obedience to His commands
 2. We give them very little explanation of the sin that exists in their own heart...
 - a. How they are a slave to that sin...
 - b. How they are dead in their transgressions...
 - c. How this sin has made them an ENEMY of God, deserving of His wrath and condemnation
 3. We give them little explanation of the atonement of our sins, and how Christ had to be a perfect and spotless lamb, whose body had to be broken, and whose blood had to be poured out...
 - a. Because THAT was what our sin demanded
 4. We certainly don't give them any warning that there is a great cost to following Jesus

- a. That Christ demands our WHOLE heart
 - b. That we must die to our self-centered wants and desires
 - c. That the world will HATE us for our pursuit of Christlikeness in our lives
 - d. And that we must endure TO THE END as the evidence that we have TRULY been saved
 - b. No, instead we tell them that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their life
 - i. And if they would just come forward, or raise their hand and accept Christ into their hearts, then they are instantly and eternally made right with God
 - 1. And we disconnect their decision, their profession of repentance, from ANY call to bear fruit for the rest of their life
- b. My friends, this is why I believe that SO MANY in our communities may call themselves Christians, but they have no idea what it means to be forgiven
 - i. They have a profession of repentance, but their life shows no FRUIT
 - 1. Again, back to the scales...
 - a. Repentance might look like it's down here... at least from the outside
 - b. But when you look on the other side of the scale, there's nothing
 - ii. And Jesus himself would say, where there is no fruit, there are no disciples
 - 1. Turn in your Bibles to John 15
 - a. We heard earlier in our Scripture reading verses 5-8, but I want us to look more in depth at Jesus' words here

c. John 15

- i. *¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

- 1. Commentators are fairly well agreed that what Jesus is talking about in this passage is the VISIBLE church

- a. If you're not familiar with this language, when people refer to the VISIBLE church, they're talking about all those people within a local church who would profess to be Christians
- b. This is in contrast to the INVISIBLE church, which is made up only of all who are TRULY united to Christ
 - i. It's invisible because WE cannot see it
 - ii. Only God knows every member of the INVISIBLE church
 - 1. For only He knows what is in EVERY person's heart
- c. But all WE can see is what is VISIBLE
 - i. And in the VISIBLE church, there are fruit-bearing branches, and non-fruit-bearing branches
- ii. For the fruit-bearing branches, the Father will lovingly and tenderly prune and tend to them
 - 1. Taking care of them as only He can in order that they might bear more fruit
 - a. Jesus says that this is the evidence that they are TRULY abiding in him
 - b. In verse 8, he says that this is the evidence that they are TRULY his disciples
- iii. But for those branches that do not bear fruit, those branches are cut off... they are gathered up... and they are thrown into the fire
- iv. Friends, this is a picture of the end of this age
 - 1. It's the same kind of imagery that Jesus in Matthew 13, in the Parable of the Weeds
 - a. As Christ has planted his seeds in his Kingdom, the church, so also has Satan planted his weeds
 - i. And Jesus says that these both must grow together until the harvest
 - ii. They both must be in the VISIBLE church
 - b. But at harvest time, Jesus says in verse 30, *"I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"*
 - c. Jesus explains this parable to his disciples in verses 37-43, when he says,
 - i. *³⁷The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴²and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*
 - 1. Good seed bears fruit
 - 2. For good seed ABIDES in Christ!
- v. But even now, as John says back in Luke 3:9, the axe is laid to the root of the trees
 - 1. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire
- d. Friends, it is not enough to bear a bunch of fruit, apart from repentance
 - i. For fruit without repentance is simply filthy rags
- e. But neither is it enough to say that you are repentant, and yet not bear any fruit
 - i. For those who bear not just fruit, but MUCH fruit, are the ones whom Jesus would call his disciples
 - 1. You must bear fruit in keeping with repentance

- a. The one who desires to be a follower of Christ MUST have these two things
BALANCED
- f. So we talked about repentance looks like, and how it is tied to our view of God's holiness, and our sinfulness, and Christ's righteousness
 - i. But what does "bearing good fruit" look like?
 - 1. Well, what John shows us in Luke 3:10-14 is that bearing fruit is actually pretty unremarkably practical!
 - a. Look at verse 10...
 - ii. The crowds, after hearing John's warning to them, ask him point blank, "OK, so what then shall we do???"
 - 1. Notice John DOESN'T say, "Sell everything and go be a missionary in China for the rest of your lives"
 - 2. He DOESN'T say, "Give up all your earthly comforts and possessions and become a monk in a monastery in a far-off desert"
 - 3. He DOESN'T say, "Follow my example as I get ready to go call out Herod for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife"
 - iii. Instead, John simply says,
 - 1. If you have two tunics, or some extra food, share with those who are in need...
 - 2. If you are a tax collector, be an HONEST tax collector...
 - 3. If you're a soldier, don't be a jerk just because you don't get paid well... instead BE CONTENT with what you've been given...
 - a. That's not really what we would've expected John to say, is it?
 - i. Is THAT all, John???
 - ii. THAT's what it means to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance," to simply be a good person to others?
 - 1. SURELY there is something else to it, right?
- g. And I think John's response to those questions might be something along the lines of, "Do you really think that 'simply being a good person to others' is that easy???"
 - i. Just take a moment and think about what REALLY goes on in your heart on a day-to-day basis
 - 1. What goes through your head when you turn on the news and hear about the latest dumb thing one of our leaders has done or said?
 - a. In those moments, is our mind full of compassion and grace and mercy towards that person, as we pray for them that they would turn from their ignorance and surrender their lives to Christ?
 - i. Or do we get angry with them, maybe even verbally insulting them or calling them fools?
 - 1. Well Jesus would say that if we react in THAT way, then its as if we have murdered them in our hearts, and we ourselves are now liable to judgment!
 - 2. Or, what goes through your thoughts when you see an attractive person of the opposite sex... maybe running down Riverside without a whole lot of clothing on... or maybe coming across the screen of your phone or TV?
 - a. In those moments, do we turn our gaze away from temptation, and instead focus on the loveliness and the excellence and the beauty of Christ?
 - i. Or do we instead indulge in those lingering glances, giving in to the desires within our flesh?
 - 1. Jesus would say that if we choose the second option, then it is as if we have committed adultery with that person in our heart

- a. And that it would be better for us to gouge out our eyes than to give in to such thoughts
 - 3. Or, what about when someone mocks you, or laughs at you, or even rejects you because of your faith in Christ?
 - a. In those moments, do you strive to love that person who wants to be your enemy?
 - b. Do you pray for their salvation?
 - c. Does your heart break for the way that the god of this age has blinded their eyes?
 - i. Or, do you instead say, “Fine... if that’s the way you’re going to treat me, then forget about you. I’m DONE dealing with you...”?
 - 1. Jesus would say that if THAT is what is in your heart, then you’re no better than the non-believer, for that is the same way they treat each other
 - 2. And, like the Father’s command that we heard earlier of “Be holy, for I am holy,”
 - a. Jesus would say to us all, “Be PERFECT, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- h. It turns out that “just being a good person” really isn’t that easy after all, is it?
 - i. For on any given day, according to Jesus’ standards, we are guilty of murder...
 - 1. We are guilty of adultery...
 - 2. We are guilty of acting just like the world...
 - ii. For again... we are just like the Pharisees
 - 1. We might do a decent job of keeping the outside of our bodies clean
 - a. But on the inside, so often we are like a bunch of whitewashed tombs
 - b. Jesus is after OUR HEARTS
 - i. And our hearts must match the outward expressions of our good fruits
- i. So WHY must the standards be so high?
 - i. Why is “bearing fruit in keeping with repentance” so NECESSARY for those who would desire to be one of Christ’s disciples?
 - 1. Back to John 15:8...
 - a. Jesus says we MUST bear MUCH fruit, as we prove to be his disciples...
 - i. Because BY THIS the Father is glorified!!
 - 1. God gets no glory in this world by a bunch of people who profess to be followers of his Son, but who do not bear fruit
 - 2. He gets the glory that He deserves when Christians let their light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give GLORY to our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16)
 - ii. Brothers and sisters, this isn’t just why we have been saved... this is why we have been CREATED!
 - 1. Ephesians 2:8-10 says,
 - a. *⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*
 - 2. You have been created, in Christ Jesus, for good works
 - 3. You have been created to bear much fruit
 - a. And in your fruit-bearing, you will bring GLORY to your Father in Heaven

- j. Do you see, friends?
 - i. We live a life of repentance, because our God is HOLY, and we are not
 - ii. And we strive to bear the fruit that He has created us for, because He is worthy of the GLORY that comes from our obedience
 - 1. We are not the point in this story
 - a. We have been made vessels of GOD's mercy, to display GOD's holiness, all for GOD's glory
- k. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, Christians
 - i. Abide in Christ
 - 1. Stay rooted in his love
 - 2. Stay rooted in his Word
 - 3. Keep his commandments
 - a. Prove that you are truly his disciple
 - ii. For even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees
 - 1. And every tree that does not bear good fruit... is cut down and thrown into the fire!
 - 2. To GOD be the glory!!